



**‘All in the same boat:
Heterotopian Transformations
and
Metamodern Reverberations
In Antipodean Fictions of
Travel’**

&

***‘The Heartbeats
Echo’
(a novel)***

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*Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

May 2021

Acknowledgements

As a grateful recipient of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship, it has been a privilege to study for my Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Dr Amy Matthews, Dr Patrick Allington, and Dr Dymphna Lonergan. I thank Dr Matthews for coming on board (pardon the pun) towards the end of my candidature, but like all things directly related to this project, it was a matter of the right place at the right time, or in this case, the right person at the right time, and I thank her for bringing fresh eyes and a fresh perspective to my project, as well as the all-important getting me over that finish line. I'd also like to thank Dr Allington for taking me through the difficult first years of my candidature and for his unwavering confidence and professionalism that allowed me to never question my ability to write a novel and to submit an exegesis that did justice to it. I'd also like to thank Dr Lonergan, the first reader of *The Heartbeats Echo*, who as a colleague, a friend, and a supervisor, has shown me nothing but support and encouragement, and is a valued member of my supervisory panel, and my sounding board, both personally and professionally.

Special thanks go to Dr Threasa Meads for highlighting the transformative potential of heterotopias, and Dr Lisa Bennett who initially suggested and identified the echoing qualities of my project. Once again, thanks to Dr Allington, who gave me an insight into what men really think, but most of all for his kindly comparing my prose to a Stevie Nicks song which was great praise indeed. Many thanks also to Dr Melinda Graefe, and Dr Laura Deane, other early readers of my novel, who offered valuable insights and encouragement.

Finally, I'd like to thank my friends and family for their love and support, and for putting up with my, at times, unfocused presence.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

Amanda Louise Williams

Abstract

Using metamodernism as a methodology of simultaneously looking back, being in the present, and looking forward, and heterotopic thinking as a methodology that enables this temporal travel, my exegesis: 'All in the same boat: heterotopian transformations and metamodern reverberations in Antipodean fictions of travel' focuses on re-readings of particular Antipodean women's fictions of travel through a modern, postmodern, and metamodern lens and endeavours to track how these paradigms illuminate specific structures of feeling and how they are reflected in literary practice and performance. My research question asks how do heterotopias and heterotopic cognition allow for geographical, physical, and metaphysical transformation? I argue that a twenty-first century structure of feeling encompasses a response to an intensifying singularity of 'otherness' where subjectivity atomises into smaller and smaller units of difference. This experience of intensifying difference requires a type of decentred thinking which can, paradoxically, open up the possibility for subjective transformation. A metamodern subjective transformation sees modernist questions of *being* emanate from a closed individualism and postmodernist questions of an always *becoming* evolve into metamodern questions of *belonging*, which reflect and require a paradoxical both open and closed sensibility. Through my exegesis and through the creative project, a contemporary novel entitled *The Heartbeats Echo*, I endeavour to reflect a temporal and spatial echoing and reverberation between my writing and research and Christina Stead's *For Love Alone*, and Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* and *The Life To Come*. Through this temporal and spatial echoing and reverberation, I track the ways in which heterotopias and heterotopic thinking allow for authentic subjective transformation through the paradigm of metamodernism.

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Preface

‘Hecate you look angerly’, says one of the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. It is also the title of a short story by Janet Frame which has nothing to do with mythology, and yet everything to do with it. That is the story of my dissertation: finding the connections between the disparate and the scattered. I set out to write a novel about travel and choices, about fate and future, about home and the longing to find one, about love: letting it go and letting it in, and about the reverberations of time and space.

Why? I read Christina Stead’s *For Love Alone* in my 20s (the Virago Modern Classic edition first published in 1981). It was the early 80s and I longed to follow Stead’s character, Teresa Hawkins, on her voyage to London, which I did: leaving in 1985 and returning in 1987. I read Michelle De Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* in 2013 and learned of her character, Laura Fraser, also reading *For Love Alone* and travelling to London in the 1980s at 25, which echoed my own experiences of travel at the same age. However, through these rudimentary connections a larger and more significant pattern emerged with regards to reverberating notions of literary representations of travel as being in themselves reflections of structures of feeling that reflect ‘a formative process, within a specific present’¹, but also echo and reverberate across time to remind, recommend, and remonstrate. This thesis considers these structures of feeling which are reflected in Stead’s and de Kretser’s modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist fictional representations to ultimately argue that we are in a new epoch of simultaneity and intensive alterity which can be defined as metamodern.

Thanks to the World Wide Web, we can move between sites (those anchored in the ‘real world’, reflective of the ‘real world’ and those that aren’t) in a virtual Grand Tour.

¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1977, p 129.

Simultaneously, from a spatial perspective, we are grounded in continuously oscillating subjective localities. The areas of research that inform this exegesis and creative project include theories surrounding heterotopia, a term coined by Michel Foucault to describe spaces of difference, and metamodernism, one of a number of theories emerging to describe the current epoch of post postmodernism which reflects the oscillating intensity of modern life where we exist in the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ simultaneously. Metamodernism, as a manifestation of experience, and in its representations in literature, represents a re-emergence of a desire for meaning and authenticity and reflects an epochal structure of feeling of the twenty-first century which both deconstructs and desires authenticity. While the terms ‘authentic’ and ‘authenticity’ are contentious concepts, it is because of their debatability, their ambivalence, their ‘both/and’ sensibility, that sees these expressions both celebrated and criticised depending on one’s predilection and purpose. For example, in their Oxford Languages Dictionary definitions, ‘authentic’ can suggest a certain commodificational element such as the authentication of a painting as being ‘of undisputed origin and not a copy’, while ‘authenticity’, also possessing a certain transactionality, can also be viewed as having/experiencing/offering ‘a quality of genuineness’.² Within a metamodern paradigm and its ‘both/and’ sensibility which encompasses both modernist and postmodernist ideas with regards to subjectivity, a twenty-first century structure of feeling, embodied in the paradoxical simultaneity, the open and closed principles of heterotopias, reverberates with both a modernist yearning for authenticity and a postmodern suspicion of this yearning, manifesting as ‘a passionate reaction to years of postmodern deconstruction, ironic distance and cynicism.’³ Whenever the term ‘authentic’, or ‘authenticity’ is used in the following exegesis, the connotation is always coloured by its paradoxical sensibility of both an

² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, OED.com, viewed 17/3/2021.

³ Timotheus Vermeulen, in Cher Potter (Interviewer), ‘Timotheus Vermeulen on Metamodernism’, *Tank Magazine*, May 2012, www.lonelyfingers.com/timotheus-vermeulen/ (viewed 5/3/2021).

impossibility and an equally possible desire for a ‘quality of genuineness’ more so than its requirement of ‘undisputed origin’.

The key words in play with regards to my thesis are ‘saturation’, ‘authenticity’, ‘crisis’, ‘naivety’, ‘intensity’, ‘affect’ ‘paradox’, ‘alterity’, ‘difference’, ‘simultaneity’, ‘materialism’, ‘convergence’, and ‘embodiment’. These key words reflect the ongoing cultural, economic, climactic, and biological intensifications the world has been experiencing, specifically in 2020, but which have been becoming increasingly apparent since I started my PhD journey in 2016, and the subsequent political, cultural, and economic responses to them. This ‘intensification’ or ‘saturation’ only continues as we stumble from one ‘crisis’ to another. This idea of crisis and transformation is reflected in the title of my PhD project: ‘All in the same boat: heterotopian transformations and metamodern reverberations in Antipodean fictions of travel.’

In the title of my thesis I use the cliché ‘all in the same boat’ to ironically suggest an equality of experience which paradoxically is both an accuracy and an anomaly depending on one’s location and political persuasion/persecution. While neither utopian nor dystopian, as they are real sites, heterotopias are both paradoxical and liminal, open and closed, place and no place, everywhere and nowhere, ordinary and extraordinary, possible and impossible, and come in many forms such as hotels, cemeteries, prisons, airports, gardens, hospitals, fair grounds and tourist destinations, with the boat (or ship) being Foucault’s ‘heterotopia par excellence.’⁴ All these spaces usually compress time or extend it in some way, just as space itself can be compressed. Think of a child’s makeshift cubby – blankets draped over chairs, with pillows and cushions to lie on, and maybe even a lamp. When space and time are compressed, reality becomes hyper-real, urgent, immediate – the hierarchy of value changes,

⁴ Michel Foucault, (Trans) Jay Miskowiec, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, *Architecture/Movement/Continuite*, 1984, p 9.

or settles differently. Like elements tossed into the air, they fly and land in different ways. These heterotopias are simultaneously unique to the individual (or region, state or nation) but are also universal spaces that echo like myths, a shared experience. I use the idea of heterotopias as real but in-between spaces (for example in *The Heartbeats Echo* I employ hotels, a caravan and a houseboat, planes, airports, and holiday destinations) to suggest these spaces are simultaneously universal, collective and timeless, but also spaces of individual marginality, resistance, and personal transformation.

I am specifically interested in the local, global and political connotations of these ideas with regards to travel and how they connect to de Kretser's *The Questions of Travel* and her references to Christina Stead's *For Love Alone* (as well as Patrick White's *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story*), which also contain heterotopical experiences of travel. The question in the title of de Kretser's book reflects her contemporary exploration of why we travel: what we want from it; the difference between choosing and being forced to travel; the difference between a tourist and a traveller; and what home is and what it means to us. In Stead's *For Love Alone*, echoes of Teresa's voyage can be found in the travels of de Kretser's Laura (*Questions of Travel*), and it is this echoing that I endeavour to represent in my own creative piece, while still reflecting the uniqueness of Stead's and de Kretser's texts as representative of modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist structures of feeling. This echoing emerged as an ongoing conversation within my thesis as de Kretser's second Miles Franklin winner, *The Life To Come* was published in 2017, a novel that continues her explorations into representations of twenty-first century transcultural Antipodean subjectivities who 'negotiate between different cultural identities.'⁵

The premise for my creative work, *The Heartbeats Echo*, has two characters (one

⁵ Ariana Dagnino, 'Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature in the Age of Global Modernity', *Transnational Literature*, Vol 4 No 2, 2012, p 6, <http://hdl.handle.net/2328/25881>, (viewed 19/3/2018).

male, a musician; and one female, a writer), born on opposite sides of the world (England/Australia). They both travel (he to Australia; she to England) and both end up living in Goolwa and Port Eliot (he in a houseboat; she in a caravan); these towns are coastal 'sea change' destinations in South Australia. Both characters struggle with relationships and have hurts that have defined them. They are both outsiders and loners and neither feel, because of these past hurts and failed relationships, that they fit into what others believe are the traditional roles expected of them. He emigrates to Australia with an Australian-born wife and finds himself stuck there because of his son, unable to return home, but not really seeing Australia as home either. She is always looking ahead, to a horizon that is forever out of reach; she can never settle. She travels to London where she finds herself 'at home' but has to leave because of immigration laws. She never quite feels content back in Australia. Through this mirroring of their journeys, I endeavour to reflect not only the reverberating and echoing energy of space and time, but also the characters' individual experiences of place, which have formed and informed their personalities, predilections, and politics.

The question I originally posed for my characters was whether they could transform, and would they choose to, or not? In a metamodern sense, both my central characters are searching, unwittingly, for their 'authentic' selves, and are already on a journey of transformation through the decisions and choices they've made throughout their lives. These choices required their imagination: to imagine how they saw their lives unfolding, while paradoxically there is also a fatedness to their choices which, to me, reflects a metamodern notion of something beyond immanent existence. My characters ultimately intuit that transformation actually means dropping their masks and accepting their own, and in turn others, singularity, which encompasses recognition of their own, and others, privileges, predilections. This unmasking is also representative of a type of heterotopic transformation which reflects the ability of heterotopic spaces and heterotopic thinking to enable difference

to emerge through acceptance and coexistence.

As an example of an approach in practice research which ‘allows [practitioners] to obey the imperatives to make creative practice *and* to produce research, keeping those sometimes contradictory impulses in balance’⁶, and embodied through a metamodern paradigm of simultaneity, reverberation, and convergence, my exegesis is both a personal reflection of form and process mirrored in chapter headings which reflect a journey from mountain top, open ocean to receding horizon, and simultaneously an investigation into historical and contemporary epochal structures of feeling. Of the two methods of practice research outlined by Webb, my method encompasses ‘reflective practice [which] allows us to combine tacit and conscious, knowing and doing, the logic and the non-logical’⁷ which in my thesis is embodied through metamodern simultaneity, reverberation, and convergence. This embodiment of reverberation is not only materially experienced, but also ‘can be understood as processes of intention, attention, and expression’ which suggests the ‘theoretical and methodological potential for textual ... reverberations as tools for conceptualising and enunciating ways of ... being knowing doing ...’⁸ This theoretical and methodological reverberation is reflected in an ongoing tension between writing creatively and exegetically, as Webb suggests above, while the place-but-no-place topology and ontology of the heterotopia reflects, not only its materiality, but also the converging experience of writing and the ‘as if’ of imagination itself, where, as Webb identifies ‘embodied and material thinking must be “translated” ... to be useful within the more silent, less tangibly gestural practice of writing.’⁹ My exegesis is an example of this translation, where the exegetical component reflects my

⁶ Jen Webb, ‘Writing as Research’, *Researching Creative Writing*, Suffolk, England: Creative Writing Studies, 2015, p 109.

⁷ Jen Webb, ‘Writing as Research’, *Researching Creative Writing*, p 121.

⁸ Walter S. Gershon, ‘Reverberations and Reverb: Sound Possibilities for Narrative, Creativity, and Critique’, *Qualitative Enquiry*, November 2018, DOI: 10.1177/1077800418807254.

⁹ Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien, ‘Addressing the “Ancient Quarrel”’: Creative Writing as Research’, in Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (Eds), *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2010, p 193.

exploration of artist practice as well as the research that informs the practice, while my novel emerges as an example of the reverberation between my research and creative practice, and also reflects a dialogic response to my chosen texts where my novel becomes part of a call and response conversation.

While my initial intention was to incorporate a greater number of primary texts, upon reflection and the evolving nature of this project, my focus has narrowed to an exploration of the spatial and temporal connections and reverberations between two specific Australian writers, their fictions of travel, and myself and my own novel, which ultimately resulted in the organic emergence of this call and response conversation as noted above and explicated in the beginning of this preface. It is to be a reverberative conversation between Stead, de Kretser, and myself through our creative texts as examples of modernist (Stead), postmodernist (de Kretser) and metamodernist (my novel) structures of feeling, and the temporal and spatial reverberations which connect them. De Kretser's second Miles Franklin award winner, *The Life to Come*, published mid-way through my candidature, appears to continue this conversation and has become the ultimate conduit that links the now four, including my own novel, primary texts. In keeping with the above explication of methodology and practice, my novel and thesis aim to contribute to the reading and writing of an Australian literature that reflects the current epoch of metamodernism through a methodology and practice of simultaneity, reverberation, and convergence.

Introduction

Oscillating Wildly

‘The boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place ... The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up ...’⁵

‘The metamodern space may be represented as a set of maps under continuous revision ... [or] may be that of a boat being built or repaired as it sails ...’⁶

‘The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future.’⁷

I love synchronicities. Forty years separates the first two quotes above: Foucault’s from 1967 and the metamodernist scholar’s, Alexandra Dumitrescu, from 2007. The third one, from Emmanuel Levinas, comes from a series of lectures he originally gave in 1947, and his suggestion that ‘the other is the future’ is fortuitous. It anticipates Foucault’s suggestion that his epoch (the postmodern) was ‘the epoch of space’⁸, and in particular, heterotopias or ‘other spaces’. This in turn reverberates with Dumitrescu’s notion of metamodern space which reflects a more relational alterity where these ‘other spaces’ represent a simultaneous and oscillating ‘openness towards mutual respect ... set against a move towards terrorism, retaliation, and encroachment upon freedoms.’⁹

I came across the term post postmodernism early in my research and it intrigued me, as it reflected a ‘feeling’ I was experiencing, but couldn’t put a name to, a feeling of

⁵ Michel Foucault, (Trans) Jay Miskowiec, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, *Architecture/Movement/Continuite*, 1984, p 9.

⁶ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space’, *On Space*, Issue 7, 2007, p 5, <http://www.doubledialogues.com/> (viewed 12/12/2016).

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987, p 79.

⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 1.

⁹ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother? Meditations on Metamodernism as a Period Term and as a Mode’ in ‘What in the World Was Postmodernism Special Issue, *Electronic Book Review*, December 2016, p 3, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/whybother/> (viewed 12/12/2016).

oscillation between an optimistic hope for the future and no hope for the future, between the acceptance of my own mortality and the shock of that acceptance, between artistic hierarchies of form and content, and a closet desire for more authentic happy endings. When I first mentioned this idea of post postmodernism as a search for authenticity to a colleague, the response was ‘finally’. When I mentioned to another colleague that I wanted to write a love story, but was worried it wasn’t postmodern enough, the response was ‘there can’t ever be too many love stories.’ I discovered I was not alone in my desire for authenticity and love stories, and as my research progressed into ideas surrounding the post postmodern, I indeed discovered, theoretically, I was not alone either.

Initial research into the idea of being in a post postmodern world uncovered the idea of metamodernism which literally means ‘beyond’, ‘after’, or ‘along with’, modernism (in its translation from the Greek *meta*) and reflects a connotation of simultaneity. Contextually, modernism is a periodising term that covers the decades between 1890 and 1940.

Aesthetically, form took precedence over content, experimentation over simple verisimilitude, and there was a rejection of eighteenth-century realism and a distrust of the burgeoning Industrial Revolution and the bourgeois society it spawned. The Second World War is either the beginning of postmodernism or a period of late modernism, but by the 1960s modernism was certainly ‘post’. In postmodernism, theory took precedence over high-brow aesthetics, and the grand narratives were rejected and deconstructed. Scepticism and suspicion, along with a distanced irony and a rise of popular culture replaced modernism’s sentimental nostalgia and highbrow aesthetics. It could be said that metamodernism reflects the mood of the prevailing *zeitgeist* of our epoch which is ‘poly’ everything at best, and at worst, confusing and overwhelming; however, metamodernism is not a remedy for this malady, but simply a reflection of it. The metamodern world could be said to oscillate

between modernism's anxious search for meaning and wholeness and postmodernism's suggestion that everything is meaningless.

The title of this introduction, 'Oscillating Wildly' is an accurate description of my PhD experience finding myself incessantly going round in circles, noticing connections, reverberations, and theories, moving closer together and pulling away. After many months of reading and researching, going down veritable rabbit holes, but often finding hidden passage ways that connect many of these differing rabbit holes, I discovered the concept of metamodernism, as explained in the preface of this exegesis, is an apt reflection of the methodology that underpins my PhD project. Metamodernism can be defined as:

[oscillating] between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern.¹⁰

Also, through my rabbit hole research, I discovered the term, the 'as if' of imagination, coming up repeatedly in narrative, spatial, philosophical, and cultural theories, whether it be imagining what the 'other' thinks, imagining what 'other' places and spaces are, imagining a different way of 'being', or imagining what lies beyond a horizon. I am deliberately taking a broad approach, both in my fiction and exegesis, as a kind of looking down, looking back, looking within and looking forward. This simultaneity reflects a metamodern sensibility which attempts to understand where we have come from, how we are being affected *now*, and most importantly where we are going, or more specifically, where we want to go. Of course, another question arises: who is this 'we'?

In 2010, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, young European cultural theorists, appropriated the term 'metamodernism' explaining that for them: 'The notion of

¹⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, Vol 2, 2010, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677, pp 5-6.

metamodernism ... is not a system of thought, nor is it a movement or a trope. For [them], it is a *structure of feeling* ... used ... to periodise the contemporary and think the present historically.’¹¹ The term *structure of feeling* was coined by Marxist literary theorist, Raymond Williams, in his 1977 publication *Marxism and Literature*. He describes this *structure of feeling* as ‘... the hypothesis of a mode of social formation explicit and recognisable ... which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by its articulation of presence.’¹² Metamodernism is one of a number of competing descriptions of the postmodern world. Others are *remodernism*, *altermodernism*, and *digimodernism*.¹³ The prefixes describe their suggested paradigms: re (repetition, or again); alter (alternative); and digi (modernism in the digital age), but for me, the meta is the more accurate description of the present structure of feeling where modernism and postmodernism, far from being ‘post’, are in fact intensifying. Alison Gibbons, a contemporary of Vermeulen and van den Akker, defines ‘the prevalence of metamodernism as a term to denote the cultural *Jetztzeit* of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century ...’¹⁴

Peter Zima, in his 2010 publication, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature*, delineates the contrast he sees between modernism and postmodernism as the distinction between ambivalence and indifference.¹⁵ In keeping with this train of thought, one could posit that metamodernism reflects a twenty-first century wherein a modernist ambivalence coexists alongside a postmodern indifference, but is mediated by an ambiguous metamodern alterity of other faces, of other places and of other spaces. In line with

¹¹ Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker, ‘Misunderstandings and Clarifications’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/06/03/misunderstandings-and-clarifications/> (viewed 16/3/2017).

¹² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp 129-135.

¹³ David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris (Eds), *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early twenty-first century*, London UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

¹⁴ Alison Gibbons, ‘“Take that you intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2015, p 1, <https://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/07/take-that-you-intellectuals-and-kapow/> (viewed 15/3/2017).

¹⁵ Peter V Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature*, London UK: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, pp149-150.

Vermeulen and van den Akker's idea of metamodern simultaneity, this alterity reflects multiple authenticities both in its negative and positive connotations by which I mean, for example, negatively in the case of unexamined privilege and positively in the case of empathetic understanding. Taking Plato's idea of metaxy which describes 'the condition of in-betweenness that is a structural characteristic of the human condition ... suspended on a web of polarities – the one and the many, eternity and time, freedom and fate, instinct and intellect, risk and safety, love and hate ...'¹⁶, these negative and positive connotations continually oscillate in us all.

The notion of metamodern alterity, in contrast to Jean Baudrillard's *radical alterity* where the other is an always unknown 'as a provocation (outside reason)'¹⁷, is more informed by Levinas' idea of alterity as an ethics of responsibility in which there is 'an obligation to respond built into the very situation of the face to face encounter'.¹⁸ Metamodern alterity is reflected in the assumption that everybody has a subject position, acknowledged by the simple fact of existence, but at the same time, everybody is an unknowable (other) to another, and therefore this subject position, however unknowable, must be accepted as a reality. Levinas' ethics of responsibility to the other via our face to face meetings becomes transformed in the twenty-first century world of Facebook, Twitter and blogs, where ideas of alterity become more fluid with an overwhelming array of differing subject positions all vying and jostling for acknowledgement. In fact, our 'otherness', our alterity, has become one of the most marketable and profitable products on the planet as seen, for example, by the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018.

¹⁶ Jack Whelan, 'Metaxis', *After the Future*,

<http://afterthefuture.typepad.com/afterthefuture/2008/12/metaxis.html>, 2008, viewed 28/4/2017.

¹⁷ Marc Guillame, 'Cool Thinking', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol 6, No 2, 2009.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1998, p 34.

In spatial discourse, historically the modernist place represented the ‘reality, rootedness and materiality of fixed positions’, and space was seen as ‘abstract and fictional with a sense of distance and nostalgia and was characterised by movement. At the height of postmodernism, space, and in particular ‘other spaces’ were seen as sites of resistance.’¹⁹ In the twenty-first century it seems that place is making a come-back, perhaps reflected negatively in the neoliberalist closed borders and nation states of the current era, but also positively in the idea of the ‘local’ as a way to subvert multinational hegemony. With the rise of the internet and the ‘glocal’, the problematics and the benefits with regards to subjectivity and alterity, of distance and proximity, of borders and horizons, of expansion and contraction, are in continuous oscillation in a metamodern world. Metamodern scholar, Seth Abramson, identifies a collapse of distance as a purely metamodern occurrence brought about by ‘the internet ... [which] is a strange mix of distance and closeness, detachment and immediacy ...’²⁰

Returning to those ‘other spaces’ and their capacity as mediators for alteric authenticities brings me back to the synchronicity I noticed between quotes in my epigraphs. Much has been written about Foucault’s idea of heterotopia, which he defines in his ‘Of Other Spaces’ as ‘being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect.’²¹ This suspecting, neutralising or inverting contains connotations of transformation, whether it be in one’s journeying from life to death, from birth to life, from home to away, and indeed from away to home. It is a cliché to say that it is the journey that counts, but my love of synchronicities only pales in comparison to my love of clichés as examples of the

¹⁹ Valerie Baisnee, *Through the Long Corridor of Distance: Space and Self in Contemporary New Zealand Women’s Autobiographies*, Cross Cultures 175, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014, p xi - xxi.

²⁰ Seth Abramson, ‘Metamodernism: The Basics’, *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-abramson/metamodernism-the-basics_b_5973184, 2014, p 1, (viewed 2/3/2017).

²¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 3.

reverberating power of the repetition and congruency of the collective unconscious. Foucault's suggestion that 'the ship is the heterotopia par excellence'²² and Dumitrescu's description of 'metamodern space ... as that of a boat being built or repaired as it sails,'²³ suggests that the transformative potential of heterotopian spaces provides an apt example of the metamodern epoch of a desire for a returning authenticity in which transformation materialises, not as something new, but as something (or someone, or some place or space) becoming a more 'authentic' version of itself (or themselves), just needing to be re-constructed, re-paired, or re-connected 'by renegotiating the relations and hierarchies between ... individual elements.'²⁴ Vermeulen and van den Akker would not entirely agree with this statement, for reasons mentioned above, where they see the epoch of metamodernism as 'one of irreconcilability; of the awareness that one position is irreconcilable with another in spite of one's need to occupy them both at once,'²⁵ and certainly not a 'prescription' for a better way of living, but simply a 'description' of the prevailing mood.²⁶

In keeping with Vermeulen and van den Akker's assertion, the Foucauldian scholar, Peter Johnson, explains that Foucault's heterotopias 'offer no resolution or consolation, but disrupt and test our customary notions of ourselves. These different spaces, which contest forms of anticipatory utopianism, hold no promise or space of liberation',²⁷ but, he concedes they '[illuminate] a passage for our imagination.'²⁸ It is this concession to the 'as if' of imagination that Dumitrescu (and others) have identified in their investigations into the metamodern whereby literature, as it is wont to do (some say *should* do), illuminates a shift in

²² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p 9.

²³ Alexandra Dumitrescu, 'Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space', p 5.

²⁴ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, London UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, p 5.

²⁵ Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker, 'Misunderstandings and Clarifications', p 6.

²⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker, 'Misunderstandings and Clarifications', p 4.

²⁷ Peter Johnson, 'Unravelling Foucault's "different spaces"', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol 19, No 4, 2006, p 87.

²⁸ Peter Johnson, 'Unravelling Foucault's "different spaces"', p 87.

how writers (and artists) are perceiving the twenty-first century and how they are representing this shift in their creative artefacts, and how theorists in a cross-disciplinary context 'are trying to collapse distance using a cultural philosophy, literary theory and artistic practice broadly identifiable as "metamodern"'.²⁹

The above discussion brings me back to my opening statements and to the title of this introduction, 'Oscillating Wildly', which reflects my own experience and general predilection for identifying connections, reverberations and distances between cultural philosophy, literary theory and artistic practice. The ideas of subjectivity, alterity, heterotopia, and metamodernism collide through the oscillating thoughts and experiences of one's place in the world in relation to others, where it could be said we are all 'other' in the eyes of an(other), but where the metamodern collapsing of distance either adds to this feeling of alienation or transforms it. Or, more specifically, we experience the sense of alienation and transformation simultaneously. In fact, one could say that in this metamodern world, the internet or cyberspace has superseded Foucault's ship as the heterotopia par excellence and that in civilisations without the internet, dreams dry up. Going beyond the idea of heterotopias 'as a kind of postmodern reframing of space embracing generic notions of 'other'³⁰, heterotopias in the metamodern sense offer 'a way of examining social spaces, they give rise to new discourses about what these spaces are, how they arise and what they may mean ... which are ultimately reflected in the constitution of our human relationships.'³¹

The 'as if' of imagination comprises oscillating metamodernist connotations of a simultaneous imagining of something better, while understanding that this something better is an impossibility. The first, the *desire* for something better, is modernist and utopic, while the

²⁹ Seth Abramson, 'Metamodernism: The Basics', p 2.

³⁰ Sherman Young, 'Of Cyber Spaces: The Internet and Heterotopias' *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture*, Vol 1, No 4, <http://www.uq.edu.au/mc/9811/hetero.php>, 1998, (viewed 4/5/2017), p 2.

³¹ Sherman Young, 'Of Cyber Spaces: The Internet and Heterotopias' p 2.

second connotation, the acceptance of impossibility, is a form of postmodern dystopia. In a metamodernist sense, in the present epoch, we are oscillating between, beyond, and along with, both utopian desire and dystopian resignation. Having said that, and as explained above, this oscillation is reflected in differing ideas about the experience, and the representation of this experience, in metamodern theorising. Vermeulen and van den Akker posit that the ‘as if’ is an example of metamodern epistemology, while ‘between’ is an example of its ontology ... they are each at once modern and postmodern and neither of them.’³² Using narrative theory as an umbrella to discuss and delineate these ideas, they equate the modern with utopic syntaxis, the postmodern with dystopic parataxis and suggest the metamodern ‘exposes itself’ through a-topic metaxis where ‘atopos is, impossibly, at once a place and not a place, a territory without boundaries, a position without parameters ... [reflecting a] metaxis as being simultaneously here, there, and nowhere.’³³ This description could be applied to Foucault’s heterotopias, which he sees as ‘simultaneously mythic and real contestations of space ...’³⁴ However, Dumitrescu believes ‘the metamodern searches for a middle ground between the *spirit* of modernity and the reality of technology, a place where the self feels centred, at home, engaged [and] proceeds pivotally, looking for the roads that could lead to the roots ...’³⁵ She identifies metamodern texts as ‘open towards the heroism of ordinary lives’ and asserts that metamodern writers ‘leave the artists’ mythical ivory tower of isolation ... and engage in fighting to make life more liveable.’³⁶

In both this exegesis and my novel, Vermeulen and van den Akker’s ‘descriptive’ position of metamodernism as simply a reflection of a structure of feeling of our current epoch, and Dumitrescu’s more ‘prescriptive’ position, in itself also representative of a current

³² Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 6.

³³ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 12.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces, p 4.

³⁵ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 1-2.

³⁶ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 4.

structure of feeling, which reflects a collective desire for a more meaningful existence, are reflected through my suggestion of heterotopian spaces as spaces for imagination and transformation through a recognition of authentic alterity. This authentic alterity combines notions of a ‘descriptive’ postmodern fractured subject which recognises the culturally constructed elements of identity, and a more ‘prescriptive’ modernist desire for subjective integration and wholeness. My suggestion is that through a heterotopic decentring of subjectivity, which enables ‘new relations between selves and others, margins and centres, fragments and wholes’³⁷ an ‘authentic’ transformation can manifest, paradoxically, in a simultaneous acceptance of both the singularity of existence *and* a desire for connection.

This desire for connection is exemplified in Michelle De Kretser’s novel, *Questions of Travel*, which won the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2013, and critics such as Nicolette Stasko³⁸ and Evelyn Juers³⁹ have identified its wide ranging themes of travel and exile, of love and loss, of friendship and family, and its observations of the neoliberal world we live in.⁴⁰ I am interested in how *Questions of Travel* connects and reverberates with modernist, postmodernist and metamodernist representations of subjectivity, alterity, and heterotopias. Nicoline Timmer in her 2010 publication, *Do You Feel It Too: The Post-postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium*, explores the themes of metamodern emotion, and affect in contemporary literature, and suggests ‘the post postmodern novel signals “a turn to the human” with its focus on “what it means to be human today”, on empathy and human interaction, on existentialistic human concerns because of its

³⁷ Ihab Hassan, ‘Beyond Postmodernism: Toward and Aesthetic of Trust’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Vol 8, No 1, 2003, p 6.

³⁸ Nicolette Stasko, Michelle de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel*, ‘The Political Imagination’, *Southerly*, Vol 73.1, 2013, <https://southerlyjournal.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/long-paddock-73-1.pdf>, pp 43-48, (viewed 7/4/2016).

³⁹ Evelyn Juers, ‘Tripped Up, Tripped Out’ *Sydney Review of Books*, <http://www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/tripped-up-tripped-out/> 2013, (viewed 7/4/2016).

⁴⁰ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012.

“heterophenomenological” approach to experience worlds.’⁴¹ She identifies post postmodern characters as dealing with a perceived lack of decision-making tools, and having difficulty locating and appropriating emotions; however, they experience an overwhelming need for connection and society. As opposed to the postmodern character stereotyped as nihilistic, apathetic, and with a detached but knowing sense of irony, the post postmodern character may indeed still display all these traits but suffer extreme anxiety because of them.

Timmer’s title *Do You Feel It Too?* is actually asking ‘what does it feel like to not feel anything?’⁴² Through an emotional analysis, defined by Nicholas Birns as analysis which ‘... stands in a sort of middle distance between text and context ...’⁴³, and is in itself an example of metamodern simultaneity, de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* reflects the metamodern concern with simultaneity as the randomness of existence sits alongside a notion of fate and connection.

This idea of emotional analysis that [straddles] ‘the line between [the] individual and [the] collective’⁴⁴ informs my exegesis in which I use a modern, postmodern, and metamodern lens to compare and contrast de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel*, and her subsequent second Miles Franklin winning novel in 2018, *The Life To Come*⁴⁵, to another Antipodean fiction of travel: Christina Stead’s *For Love Alone*.⁴⁶ By comparing these texts through an emotional analysis, I argue that de Kretser’s texts emphasises a metamodern sensibility where subjectivity, beyond (or along with) modernist ambivalence, postmodernist erasure, and postcolonial othering, is authentically embodied through metamodern oscillation

⁴¹ Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium*, Appendix, *Postmodern Studies* 44, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010, p. 361.

⁴² Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* Chapter 2 ‘being human in fiction: a narrative psychological approach’, pp 51-99.

⁴³ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015, p. 90.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2017.

⁴⁶ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, London UK: Virago Press, 1981.

where, as Dumitrescu suggests, ‘care for the self and for the *other* are simultaneously possible.’⁴⁷ A comparative methodology that employs emotional analysis and metamodern recontextualisation is, as Susan Stanford Friedman notes, ‘juxtapositional, contrapuntal, and reciprocal ... [where] the distinctiveness of each is maintained, while the dialogue of voices that ensures brings commonalities into focus.’⁴⁸ Comparison, like contextualisation, ‘[forces] us to acknowledge affinity and proximity alongside difference, to grapple with the coevalness and connectedness of past and present.’⁴⁹

Taking inspiration from Peter Turchi’s *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*⁵⁰, I have deliberately chosen geographical chapter titles in my exegesis to reflect the themes of place and space, affect, and alterity in my creative project, and also to reflect the journey I have undertaken in writing my novel. Chapter One, entitled ‘The Mountain’ has obvious connotations of an obstacle to be overcome, or something that initially seems impossible to surmount, but also connotes a place of isolation and contemplation. The mountain represents the isolated subjectivity of the ‘I’, and is my starting point, both exegetically and creatively. In this opening chapter I discuss ideas of place and space, perspective and agency, and narratology and focalisation from modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist perspectives to chart how these ideas reverberate across Stead and de Kretser’s fictions of travel as well as my own creative project. This first chapter ultimately focuses on each text’s opening incipits which act as heterotopic thresholds, both real and conceptual, into my own and my chosen writers’ fictional worlds.

Mythologically and metaphorically, ‘The Ocean’, the title of Chapter Two, has connotations of emotion, and of depth. This chapter discusses how these themes are reflected

⁴⁷ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 9.

⁴⁸ Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Why Not Compare’, *PMLA*, Vol 126, No 3, New York, 2011, p 758.

⁴⁹ Rita Felski, ‘Context Stinks!’, *New Literary History*, Vol 42, No 4 ‘Context?’ (Autumn) 2011, p 579.

⁵⁰ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 2004.

in my chosen Antipodean fictions of travel. What do examples of modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist representations of emotion and depth look like? How do Stead and de Kretser reflect their characters' moods and motivations, and what do these representations suggest about an emerging and evolving twenty-first century turn towards affect? Focusing on uses of colour to examine affect in Stead's, de Kretser's, and my own writing, this chapter explores the similarities and differences in representations of emotion and affect through a discussion of depth and surface, lightness and darkness, awareness and intuition.

The title of Chapter Three, 'The Horizon', has many obvious connotations, both geographically and metaphorically. It suggests time passing, but also its infinite nature. The horizon is not a place, but a space, and an idea forever out of reach, yet it is the paradox of the impossibility of reaching it that can drive human momentum forwards in search of the unknown. This again recalls the place-but-no-place characteristic of heterotopia. I think it also reflects the impossibility of ever knowing 'the other', who is also forever out of reach, forming the basis of alteric desire. Using theories of alterity to discuss the contrasts between otherness and difference with regards to geography and subjectivity, and employing a modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist lens, this chapter examines the oscillating and reverberating notions of alterity that feature in subjective and geographic journeys into the unknown by characters in Stead's, de Kretser's, and my own writing. Through a focus on problematic prepositions and pronouns, and the politics of irony and naivety in Stead's and de Kretser's fiction, this chapter ultimately seeks to answer my research question: how does the transformative potential of spatial and temporal heterotopias reflect an intensifying metamodern experience of saturated otherness? It is important to note here that paradoxically, this saturated and intensifying experience of difference requires an acceptance of alterity which in turn, but also paradoxically, allows for an authentic transformation through singular belonging and coexistence.

While it may seem simplistic to suggest that acceptance of one's own uniqueness, and in turn, acceptance of others' uniqueness is a rudimentary experience we learn in childhood and carry into adulthood, the complexity of this acceptance of difference occurs through a process by which childhood hurts and humiliations colour and cloud the ability to live our own authentic lives and to let others live theirs. A metamodern 'informed naivety'⁵¹ suggests a return to innocence, one which eschews connotations of a negating responsibility, but instead requires a more sophisticated recognition of political positionings and posturings which emerges, paradoxically, through exposure to one's own and others' alterity and vulnerability.

As explained in my Preface, these chapters and their structuring principle of Mountain, Ocean, and Horizon reflect both the form and process of my research and practice from a metamodern 'both/and' perspective. Thus, each chapter begins from a wide-angle lens, and gradually zooms in to a close reading of my chosen texts, including my own novel. This approach mirrors the process of my research and writing journey. While each chapter stands alone offering its own discussion and reflection of perspective, affect, and alterity, just as the mountain, ocean, and horizon, exist simultaneously, so too do these separate discussions form a whole through the connections I identify in Stead's, de Kretser's, and my own fiction. The 'tension' between part and whole, and the notion of 'both/and' are also representations of the metamodern at play, so that oscillation and reverberation reflect my experience of the simultaneity of practice-led research and research-led practice. This is reflected in my exegesis, which is informed by 'a figurative style of thinking, occasionally autobiographical, which may at times strike the reader as an epistemological stream of consciousness.'⁵² Metamodernist critic and poet, Seth Abramson, suggests this figurative,

⁵¹ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 5.

⁵² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p 1.

autobiographical, and epistemological style of writing is ‘in the nature of metamodernism ... to simultaneously manifest in discrete compositional techniques and attendant literary-critical topoi that inform such techniques and the concepts behind them.’⁵³

⁵³ Seth Abramson, ‘The Metamodern Manifesto: After Postmodernism Part III’, *The Huffington Post*, 2014, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-abramson/the-metamodernist-manifesto-part-iii>, (viewed 19/1/2019).

Chapter One: The Mountain

‘Grandeur progresses in the world in proportion to the deepening of intimacy.’⁵⁴

‘Place is to space ... what ... form [is] to process ...’⁵⁵

‘My fingers hover over the page and I begin. I write ... the next day I do it again. I keep going.’⁵⁶

It’s hard to believe, but in the seventeenth century, as described by Marjorie Hope Nicolson in her 1959 text *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*⁵⁷, mountains were once described as ‘warts, wens, blisters ... upon the otherwise fair face of Nature.’⁵⁸ As Nicolson suggests, it was not until the eighteenth century that Byron described them as the more familiar ‘temples of nature built by the almighty.’⁵⁹ The idea of mountains as anything other than grand and magnificent piqued my interest when I stumbled upon Nicolson’s piece of literary criticism and its reconsideration in the twenty-first century ‘as a classic text in ecocriticism.’⁶⁰ This connection struck me as an example of the oscillating nature of metamodern interpretation which sees modernist and postmodernist hermeneutics in simultaneity produce new ways of seeing which foreground a metamodern sensibility of contextual affect and oscillating hierarchal values. Vermeulen and Van den Akker equate this metamodern sensibility of contextual affect to the current art movement of neoromanticism as the ‘re-signification of the commonplace with significance, the ordinary

⁵⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (1964), New York: Penguin Books, 2014, p 212.

⁵⁵ Andrew Merrifield, in Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Space is the Place’ *Frieze*, 2015, p 6, <https://frieze.com/article/space-place>, (viewed 16/3/2017).

⁵⁶ Kristina Olsson, ‘Radical Freedom: writing, walking – and exploring the wilderness within’, *The Guardian*, 26 December 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/dec/26/radical-freedom-writing-walking-and-exploring-the-wilderness-within?CMP=share_btn_link (viewed 2/01/2018).

⁵⁷ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959.

⁵⁸ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p 2.

⁵⁹ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p 2.

⁶⁰ Janice Hewlett Koelb, ‘This Most Beautiful and Adorn’d World: Nicholson’s *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* Reconsidered’, *ISLE*, <https://academic.oup.com/isle/article/16/3/443/730252>, (viewed 10/7/2018).

with mystery, the familiar with the seamliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite.⁶¹ Bachelard's paradoxical 'intimate immensity'⁶² as a poetics of space from 1959 as seen in the epigraph above reflects the metamodern sensibility of an oscillating tension, and his own neoromantic leanings. This suggests to me these sensibilities are timeless. It is only their relative value, both monetarily and culturally, that ebb and flow over time, whether it be the oscillating 'value' of investment markets, landscapes, subjectivities, or literary (and artistic) form and content, and criticism. The title of this first chapter, 'The Mountain' offers multiple connotations with regards to questions of emplacement, perspective and agency. Looking up at or on to a mountain creates differing feelings and impressions to looking down from or out on to a horizon. This chapter will explore the idea of differing perspectives both in an experiential and phenomenological mode, with regards to place and space, and also in a narratological mode with regards to focalisation and narration.

When asked why he wanted to climb Mt Everest, George Mallory famously quipped, possibly in exasperation: because it's there. But of course he meant much more than that. When asked by a family member why I was going to write a novel, I quipped, also possibly in exasperation: because I can. But of course I also meant much more than that. In contrast to Mallory, anyone who knows me would tell you that I don't go looking for mountains; however, they just seem to loom on my horizon. The cliché of the mountain that initially inspired this chapter title at first materialised as a distant and unthreatening idea. I was still safely ensconced in the preparatory stages of my journey, and the mountain in the distance, with its tridactic base (on which I was to initially camp to read and research), its narrowing girth, and marshmallow-topped Tobleronesque peak, like a Japanese watercolour

⁶¹ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 12.

⁶² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p 200.

inspired an as yet anxiety free ‘reverent contemplation.’⁶³ Always ahead of myself, I imagined the view from the metaphorical summit: a complete novel with beginning, middle, and end, with characters of depth and complexity, illustrating the human condition in all its perfect imperfection. Sure the view was miniscule in scale, but I could see ‘for miles and miles’⁶⁴ as the song goes. This all-encompassing view reflects the perspective that many post-graduate students experience with regards to the immensity of the project at hand which in my case, as a creative writing candidate, was the challenge of writing a long piece of fiction, but also an active choice on my part with regards to narration and focalisation. From my metaphorical summit I imagined, not only a fully formed novel, but also, and in keeping with my romantic leanings where ‘from mountains, the mind and soul of man [sic] rises again, through Space, to Eternity, with awe and reverence’⁶⁵, a benevolent narrator who can see all, but chooses to follow two characters, living in separate hemispheres: their comings and goings, their toings and froings, as they graze and glance off each other, and simultaneously, like Google maps, zooms into their secret thoughts, so secret they are unknown to themselves. Uncannily, I discovered this simultaneity of focalisation reflected the ‘both/and’ metamodern sensibility I was going to discover through my ongoing research.

⁶³ John Ruskin in Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p 5.

⁶⁴ Pete Townsend, ‘I Can See for Miles and Miles’ *The Who Sell Out*, Track Records; London UK, 1967.

⁶⁵ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p 393.

‘One of the oldest stories we tell is the story about leaving home.’⁶⁶

‘Legwork is the main means by which a journey is accomplished.’⁶⁷

‘In the cities the Theory Wars were raging, writers and academics were slugging it out.’⁶⁸

I always over-pack when I’m getting ready for a journey. I like to cover all bases, and while not being allowed to join the Girl Guides as a child, for fear on my parents’ part of inappropriate supervision, I do like to be prepared. I was soon to discover that the planning, preparation, and plotting which formed the contents I had meticulously chosen and crammed into my metaphorical suitcase, required some unpacking.

Keeping in mind Rita Felski’s dismissal of the ‘present-day vogue for cartographic metaphors [and its allusion] to the paradox of representation [where] the writer who strives to capture everything will end up conveying nothing,’⁶⁹ still, I adhere to Peter Turchi’s statement that ‘to ask for a map is to say, “tell me a story”’.⁷⁰ I also concur with Frederick Jameson’s ‘cognitive mapping’ that to Jeff Malpas, according to Eric Prieto, ‘is more than a metaphor’,⁷¹ what Jameson himself describes as ‘not just something you do when you need a map. It’s a way of forcing you to grasp representation as a problem, as a dilemma.’⁷² In a way, this describes the simultaneity of the initial inspiration for writing both my novel and the theories of narrative and subjective geographies that would underpin and inform it. Questions of travel, exile, home, and alterity were constantly on my mind. Both figuratively and experientially, I was asking these questions of myself and of the twenty-first century

⁶⁶ David Malouf, *A First Place*, Sydney: Vintage Books, 2015, p 1.

⁶⁷ Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p 276.

⁶⁸ Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen All The Way)*, South Fremantle WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997, p 24.

⁶⁹ Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2009, p 79.

⁷⁰ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, p 11.

⁷¹ Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p 30.

⁷² Frederic Jameson, in Eric Bulson, ‘This is a headline’, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/this-is-a-headline/>, (viewed 9/1/2019).

world in which I lived, where borders and boundaries were closing, both geographically and subjectively, and I myself was both nostalgically looking back at where I had been, and wondering where to go next, and if I had any control over my destination. It was ‘as if’ I was being compelled and propelled towards these subjects through my favourite novels and through my academic journey. Michelle de Kretser’s 2012 novel *Questions of Travel* and its referencing of the Australian modernist writers, Christina Stead and Patrick White, along with its twenty-first century representations of emplacement and displacement, alterity and community, and its omniscient narrator, became a key inspiration for my own creative endeavours. It also reflected connections that I was already seeing with regards to possible research avenues when a serendipitous conference experience opened my eyes to Foucault’s heterotopias and the world of subjective, performative, and embodied geographies, including the oscillating reverence accorded to ‘place’ and ‘space’.

Just as we don’t usually say ‘let’s meet at your *space*’ (the more common phrase is ‘let’s meet at your *place*’) so too, when invited to describe an imagined conglomeration of events, the usual request is framed as ‘*tell* me a story’. Certainly not are we asked to ‘*show* me a story’ by any wide-eyed toddler or eight-year old who wants to know what’s going to happen to Harry (Potter) next. Having said that, the toddler may indeed want to be ‘*shown*’ the accompanying illustrations to see the caterpillar become the butterfly, just as the eight year old wants to experience Harry’s visions, and hence, as part of the job of ‘*telling*’, the reciter will indeed ‘*show*’ the reader/listener, through word choice and focalisation, what their characters think, feel, and experience. This reciter is otherwise known as the narrator. What I am interested in in this chapter is the ‘where’ with regards to who is speaking and who is seeing. Where is this voice (or voices) speaking from, and what is informing their perspective? What are they seeing and where are they placed? My intuition, and my intention, is to argue that beyond both binaries of place and space, and show and tell, there exists a

metamodern simultaneity which collapses distances of modernist and postmodernist hierarchy and value that allows for infinite difference through heterotopian phenomenology.

Thanks to poststructuralism, deconstructing binaries is not new. However, recognising binaric ways of thinking doesn't mean that binaries have disappeared. For a binary to exist it needs an 'other', in a value sense, to act as the negative to the positive. In conflating the feminine over the masculine, black over white, the country over the city, sincerity over irony, place over space, context over text, nonhuman over human, or telling over showing, simply explains the persistence of binaries to hold their place which could be seen as a reflection of a metamodern simultaneity or synthesis of the postmodern thesis/antithesis where in the twenty-first century 'the other' is simultaneously celebrated and feared. Metamodernist Seth Abramson explains this paradox:

[Although] poststructuralism deserves credit for doing a great deal to make individual persons and small groups of ... like-minded persons feel empowered ... postmodernism has done more than any other cultural philosophy before or since to segregate individuals from their potential political allies by way of "deconstructing" each person's political and psychosocial perspective into such small parcels it's impossible to find points of agreement ... it's out of this joint feeling of empowerment and isolation – a paradoxical feeling the Internet both embodies and broadens daily – that the present period of metamodernism was first born.⁷³

The paradox of metamodernism then is that through oscillation the binary and hierarchal 'either/or' and a more non-hierarchal dualistic 'both/neither' (Vermeulen and Van den Akker)⁷⁴ and 'both/and' (Abramson⁷⁵ and Dumitrescu⁷⁶) exist in simultaneous tension. As a reflection of Abramson's explanation of our atomised present quoted above, oscillating,

⁷³ Seth Abramson, 'Metamodernism: The Basics II, The Blog, *The Huffington Post*, 2014, p 5, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-abramson/metamodernism-the-basics-b_598032, (viewed 2/3/2017).

⁷⁴ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', 2010.

⁷⁵ Seth Abramson, 'Metamodernism: The Basics', *The Huffington Post*, 2014.

⁷⁶ Alexandra Dumitrescu, 'What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?', 2016.

paradoxical, and hierarchal notions of place and space, and show and tell, will be further examined in the following discussions. In these discussions, modern and postmodern theories of narrative and focalisation collide with modern and postmodern theories of spatiality, temporality, ontology, and geography, to illustrate the notion that the question of where we come from and where are we going, can only ever be answered ‘by [the] articulation of *presence*.’⁷⁷

‘The distant past resounds with echoes ...’⁷⁸

‘Even to imagine another order/system is to extend our participation in the present one.’⁷⁹

‘... if the modern suggests a temporal ordering, and the postmodern implies a spatial disordering, then the metamodern should be understood as a spacetime that is both neither ordered and disordered.’⁸⁰

As Raymond Williams suggests in the quote ending the previous section and reiterated by Foucault above, whether we are looking back, around, or forward, our point of view can only ever be informed by our present, which includes temporal, spatial, and topological perspectives. Having said that, spaces and gaps, in time, in literature, and in our own ontology and topography, give us perspective to analyse and synthesise our experience of this present. These spaces and gaps also intensify meaning and interpretation, and paradoxically the all-encompassing perspective of a mountain top orders the vistas below into patterns, connections, and signposts. The following discussion is an account of what I see (and saw), the see-sawing so to speak, of the evolving, echoing, and reverberating nature of narratological and spatial critical theory as I embarked on my mountainous journey of writing

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p 135.

⁷⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p xii.

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, in Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p 198.

⁸⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 12.

a novel and responding exegetically to that novel. What vistas did I see, and what patterns did they form?

As mentioned in my introduction, and reiterated throughout this early first chapter, Foucault's notion of heterotopia was the initial inspiration for my creative expression and critical leanings. My initial understanding was that heterotopias were 'other' spaces and through this marginality, in keeping with any good postmodern feminist's deconstructive reading, the possibilities of subversion and transformation abounded. This coincided with the opportunity to review a book on women's autobiography which used debates around 'place' and 'space' to critique certain New Zealand women writers' autobiographies, where I was exposed to the theories of not only Michel Foucault, but also Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja, along with bell hooks, Gillian Rose, and Doreen Massey where I discovered that notions of 'place' and 'space' were gendered (hooks, Rose, Massey), and contested (Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja), not only along geographical lines, but theoretical lines as well.⁸¹ Further research with regards to heterotopias, and space, and place, led me to Peter Johnson, Kevin Hetherington, and David Shields (heterotopia); Meaghan Morris, Paul Carter, Stephen Muecke, Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Deleuze and Guattari, Caren Kaplan, and Rosi Braidotti, (space); and Jeff Malpas, and Edward Casey (place). Although not an exhaustive list, from my perspective, their lines of enquiry cross and deviate, both temporally and spatially. I discovered that there was a historical oscillating hierarchal value afforded to 'space' and 'place' (and time), and with notions of 'embodiment', 'situation', and 'location', in the new millennium, the pendulum seemed to be swinging back to 'place'. Both Casey and Malpas *feel* the embodiment of 'place', through phenomenology for Casey, and ontology for Malpas, as a philosophical topography where place is not simply 'space *plus* human value or

⁸¹ Valerie Baisnee, *Through the Long Corridor of Distance: Space and Self in Contemporary New Zealand Women's Autobiographies*, Cross Cultures 175, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014.

meaning'⁸², or 'a mere modification of space',⁸³ but 'that in which being-in-the-world is grounded'⁸⁴ where each takes inspiration from the philosophy of Heidegger and both agree that 'much of what is traditionally discussed as "time" and "space" is to be understood ultimately in terms of place: time and space meet in place.'⁸⁵ Where Casey and Malpas differ, it seems, is in their notions of the permanence of place (Casey) and the fragility of place (Malpas). For Malpas, places change over time and experience, and hence the possibility of subjective transformation and transcendence. For Casey, the possibilities of subjective transformation lie in the very permanence of place, which is also temporal in concept. What is of special interest to this thesis in their comingling and diverging ideas on place is their interpretations with regards to the narratology of place. For Casey, narration is purely temporal: 'a recounting of happenings ... but [place] is "in itself" ... more like matter than time ...'⁸⁶ Whereas for Malpas, 'place and narrative are bound intimately together ... through both simultaneous juxtaposition and temporal displacement ... as such, every place can thereby also be understood in terms of narrative and story.'⁸⁷

Of course, from my mountain eyrie, I could see both the meeting places and the open spaces, that shape nations and narratives. Or was it simply my own desire, my own need, to give form to chaos? Paul Carter suggests 'the coloniser produces the country he will inhabit out of his [sic] own imagining. The coloniser is also a novelist, making the lie of the land an

⁸² Jeff Malpas, 'Thinking Topographically: Place, Space, and Geography', 2017, p 3, <http://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Thinking-Topographically-Place-Space-and-Geography.pdf> (viewed 19/11/2018).

⁸³ Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, p 10.

⁸⁴ Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p 15.

⁸⁵ Edward Casey, 'J.E. Malpas's Place and Experience: A philosophical Topography (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and diverging in/on place' *Philosophy & Geography*, Vol 4, No 2, p 226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10903770123141/> (viewed 20/11/2018).

⁸⁶ Edward Casey, 'J.E. Malpas's Place and Experience: A philosophical Topography, p 230.

⁸⁷ Jeff Malpas, 'Comparing topographies: Across paths/around place: A reply to Casey', *Philosophy & Geography*, Vol 4, No 2, p 237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10903770123850/> (viewed 20/11/2018).

index of his own fears and hopes.’⁸⁸ From my (ad) vantage point, Carter influences me to concede that I am indeed writing (and reading) from the perspective, and the place, of a female, privileged, white, middle class, would-be novelist and academic; an acknowledgement, I’ve noted, that has found, and is finding, its way more and more into contemporary and current critical discourse, thanks to Gayatri Spivak, Doreen Massey, and Adrienne Rich, who began to question and acknowledge a politics of location, and more recently Felski, and Nealon, who both acknowledge the burgeoning need and desire for the postmodern ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ where ‘texts are read against the grain and between the lines, cataloguing their omissions and laying bare their contradictions ...’⁸⁹, to be turned inwards. Felski explains this ‘turning inward’ of suspicion as a ‘willingness to acknowledge and more fully engage our attachments,’⁹⁰ and Nealon who sees this suspicious interpretation transforming to a “hermeneutics of situation” aimed at offering tools for thinking differently about the present, rather than primarily either exposing or undermining the supposed “truth” of this or that cultural position.’⁹¹

Taking into consideration Malpas’s and Casey’s spatial and temporal meeting places, and Felski’s and Nealon’s suggestion of acknowledging these cultural positions and attachments, the following discussion will consider how my perspective with regards to ‘heterotopia’ is theoretically informed by an intensified sensibility of metamodern synthesis where ‘space [is] an open process, and place [is] the moment we can intervene in its unfolding,’⁹² and where, as Carter and Malpas suggest, this site of intervention, this

⁸⁸ Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, London UK: Faber and Faber, 1996, p 10.

⁸⁹ Rita Felski, ‘Context Stinks!’, p 574.

⁹⁰ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, p 192.

⁹¹ Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Just-in-time Capitalism*, California: Stanford University Press, 2012, p 88.

⁹² Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Space is the Place’, *Frieze*, 2015, p 7, <https://frieze.com/article/space-place>, (viewed 16/3/2017).

‘heterotopic’ simultaneous place *and* non-place, is informed by narrative, both in its interpretation and its production, via oscillating temporal and spatial perspectives and values.

‘Foucault’s discussion takes place at the intersection of alterity and difference ...’⁹³

‘Will there not come a point (or perhaps there has already been such a point) when there are not only very different heterotopias but *no heterotopia at all* in a given society?’⁹⁴

‘Post-postmodernism marks an intensification and mutation within postmodernism’⁹⁵

Even as a staunch advocate for the re-evaluation of ‘place’ over the infinities of ‘space’, and hence not a fan of Foucault’s troublesome ambiguities, Edward Casey may be on to something when he suggests in the quote above that a point may have already been reached, through an intensification of difference and otherness, that heterotopias may actually cease to exist. In his statement, Casey is critiquing Foucault’s customary contradictory expression where, to Casey, his first and second principles of heterotopia lie in tension with each other. The first principle: ‘there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias’⁹⁶ and the second principle: ‘A society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion,’⁹⁷ to Casey, undermines Foucault’s claim of heterotopias as both historicist and universalist in nature,⁹⁸ and he identifies, rather prophetically as mentioned above, that they (heterotopias) will cease to exist as radically ‘other’ because of this proliferation. To me, Casey’s reading misses the point of Foucault’s heterotopias where meaning lies in fact in the tension, in the juxtaposition, and

⁹³ Michiel Dehaene & Lieven De Caeter (trans), ‘Of other spaces (1967) Michel Foucault, (Notes) *Heterotopia and the City: Public space in a postcivil society*, London UK: Routledge, 2008, p 23.

⁹⁴ Edward Casey, ‘Giving a Face to Place in the Present’ *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, p 301.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Just-in-time Capitalism*, p ix.

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault in Edward Casey, ‘Giving a Face to Place in the Present’ *The Fate of Place*, p 301.

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault in Edward Casey, ‘Giving a Face to Place in the Present’ *The Fate of Place*, p 301.

⁹⁸ Edward Casey, ‘Giving a Face to Place in the Present’ *The Fate of Place*, p 301.

indeed in the engagement with his ideas which create new ways of thinking, precisely as demonstrated above in Casey's revelatory critique as an example of Genocchio's concern:

The heterotopia is invariably reified as a handy marker for a variety of centreless structures on an elastic postmodern plurality. Not only do such appropriations avoid questions concerning the coherency of Foucault's argument, but in so doing, they lose the disruptive, transient, contradictory, and transformative implications of what remains a far more fluid idea.⁹⁹

In keeping with Genocchio's concern, I am interested in 'the disruptive, transient, contradictory, and transformative implications' of heterotopias and their relation to the intensification of difference and otherness in the twenty-first century. Foucault's prophetic notion of heterotopia 'comes to designate not so much an absolutely differentiated space as the site of that very limit, tension, impossibility,'¹⁰⁰ where times, places, spaces, subjects, and objects, converge. The tension between this 'impossibility of realisation' and their 'real contestation'¹⁰¹ echoes Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodernism, and hence my suggestion that heterotopias reflect, in their tension and intensity, in their simultaneity of place-but-no-place, of the real and the unreal, the contemporary *structure of feeling* that is metamodern. As mentioned earlier, Casey sees narrative as having a purely temporal function while Malpas sees narrative as relational to place (and space). Metamodernist heterotopian narratives at various junctures combine, juxtapose, and oscillate simultaneously between the temporal, platial, and spatial in an intensive 'locus of meaning, memory, and identity.'¹⁰²

Once again, in keeping with Genocchio's suggestion, Peter Johnson also identifies the ability of heterotopias to not simply point to 'an alternative realm of difference,' but also to in fact point to an intensification of 'multiple meanings around a set of spatio-temporal

⁹⁹ Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces, in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Eds), *Postmodern cities and spaces*, Cambridge USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p 42.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces, p 42.

¹⁰¹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p 4.

¹⁰² Jeff Malpas, 'Thinking Topographically: Place, Space, and Geography', p 4.

contradictions or ambiguities.’¹⁰³ These spatio-temporal contradictions or ambiguities, as outlined in the six principles that make up Foucault’s 1967 ‘Of Other Spaces’ lend themselves to narrative analysis.

As mentioned above, the first principle of heterotopia: ‘there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias’¹⁰⁴ suggests universality, as all cultures, just like stories, have heterotopias in some form. Foucault links these universal places-but-non-places to sites of ‘crises’ such as hospitals, and nursing homes where these sites of crises, as liminal spaces, also reflect some sort of ‘rite of passage’ which is also a recognisable narrative trope such as the bildungsroman.

Also noted above, the second principle: ‘a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion’¹⁰⁵, suggests that heterotopias function differently throughout history, just as narrative, in differing historical presences, also changes and evolves. Foucault uses the cemetery as an example of his second principle where prior to the nineteenth century, cemeteries were located within city limits and usually next to a church, but evolved from the nineteenth century onwards into sites placed outside of the city limits and away from the church as beliefs surrounding resurrection, immortality, and the soul changed.¹⁰⁶ The evolution of narrative is also evident in the changes over time, and value awarded, to differing types of narrative performances such as omniscient and limited omniscient, and points of view which will be given a more closer reading towards the end of this first chapter.

The third principle suggests heterotopia ‘is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place, several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.’¹⁰⁷ Foucault gives the

¹⁰³ Peter Johnson, ‘The Geographies of Heterotopia’, *Geography Compass*, Wiley Online Library, 2013, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gec3.12079>, (viewed 10/12/2018).

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 4.

¹⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 5.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 5.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 6.

examples of ‘the theatre [that] brings on to the stage ... a whole series of places that are foreign to one another ... [and the] cinema ... [where] on a two dimensional screen one sees the projection of a three dimensional space.’¹⁰⁸ Once again, Foucault uses storytelling devices to illustrate his ideas which allow for juxtapositional expression and interpretation through differing mediums.

Foucault’s fourth principle suggests ‘heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time ... accumulating time, for example museums and libraries ... linked to, on the contrary ... transitory time in the mode of the festival.’¹⁰⁹ Museums and libraries collect and display specific time periods as it were, while festivals come and go and are impermanent. This compression and extension of time is a necessary and at once identifiable narrative strategy where indeed the act of writing (and of reading) are in themselves heterotopic in the way time is compressed and/or extended. I can sit at my desk and take an afternoon to write a sentence, or within a paragraph, both as a writer and reader, I can travel through time periods, or spend an hour (or hours) in a single space.

The fifth principle suggests ‘heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable ... either the entry is compulsory ... or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications.’¹¹⁰ Foucault gives examples of these paradoxical spaces of isolation and penetration as prisons and hotels which require both permission and submission with regards to entering and leaving such as prison sentences and honeymoons, or illicit sex.¹¹¹ This principle can be seen as a ‘rite of passage’ in narratives of transition and transformation. Narrative, both in its consumption and its production, pushes us towards not merely identifying the spaces and places where this

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 6.

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 7.

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 7.

¹¹¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 7.

compulsory entering and leaving, transition and transformation occurs, but to also, more importantly, think about why and how these spaces and places are represented and experienced bodily. These rites of passage and their bildungsroman representations in my chosen Antipodean fictions of travel, including my own novel, will be given a close reading in the third chapter of this thesis with regards to alterity, otherness, and difference.

The sixth principle sees heterotopias as ‘functioning between two extreme poles ... either ... to create a space of illusion ... [or] of compensation.’¹¹² Both ‘illusion’ and ‘compensation’ are creations of narrative where, as readers and/or writers, we enter worlds to escape our own, and/or to experience our own world more intensely. Through the paradox of heterotopia one can, in the act of reading and/or writing, enter worlds which become both known and unknown, familiar and strange, where illusions and compensations act as both disease and antidote, both of which I’ve experienced through the mad compulsion, quiet despair, and silent satisfaction of writing my novel amid the ongoing crises of the last five years.

Although Foucault’s principles of heterotopia first appeared at the relative beginning of an age that was to become known as ‘postmodernism’ (1967), and van Gennep’s ‘Rites of Passage’ was first published at the beginning of an age that was to become known as ‘modernism’ (1909), their theories of simultaneous ‘boundedness’ and ‘openness’ reverberate with each other, and with contemporary theorists such as cultural geographer Doreen Massey and platial philosopher Jeff Malpas who both see place, space (and time) as connected and relational, albeit from differing inductive standpoints: Malpas as a philosopher of what is, and Massey as a feminist of what could (and should) be. Although Malpas critiques Massey’s position as lacking in a ‘consideration of concepts’¹¹³ where ‘place

¹¹² Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 8.

¹¹³ Jeff Malpas, ‘Thinking Topographically: Place, Space, and Geography’, p 3.

becomes simply a moment (a meeting point) in space ... in which boundaries ... take on a highly uncertain status ...¹¹⁴, Massey explains that ‘Instead ... of thinking of places as areas with boundaries ... they can be imagined as articulated moments ... not ... through simple counterposition to the outside ... [but] through the linkage *to* that outside.’¹¹⁵ Malpas concedes that ‘the nature of the relation is itself a form of boundary ... functions to differentiate at the same time as it connects,’¹¹⁶ but warns that ‘the use of the spatial and the topographic as the vehicles for the articulation of ... a set of social and political concerns ... space and place become functions of the social and the political *and nothing more*.’¹¹⁷ Massey suggests that ‘The ways in which people are placed ... are highly complicated and extremely varied [which] in turn ... raises questions of politics.’¹¹⁸ Reflecting the paradoxical simultaneity of metamodernism which, as a methodology, underpin this thesis, both the concepts of Malpas and the conditions of Massey are found in Genep’s ‘Rites of Passage’ and Foucault’s heterotopias, as discussed above, where movement, transition, and transformation are dependent on and affected by the specifics and the subjectivities of place, space, and time. So too, the metaphor of ‘the journey’ encompasses simultaneous notions of ‘place’, ‘space’, and ‘time’, but the relative simplicity of departure, travel, and arrival masks more complicated notions of positionality, subjectivity, and agency. The three positionings of departure, travel, and arrival and the metaphor of the journey are also reflected in the three chapters of this thesis in which Chapter Two focuses on movement, Chapter Three focuses on homecoming, while this first chapter has its focus on beginnings.

This discussion is an attempt to represent the 360 degree panorama of intensity that my mountain view afforded me, as I glanced, and gazed – two verbs ripe with theoretical

¹¹⁴ Jeff Malpas, ‘Putting space in place: philosophical topography and relational geography’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 30, 2012, p 229.

¹¹⁵ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, p 154-155.

¹¹⁶ Jeff Malpas, ‘Putting space in place: philosophical topography and relational geography’, p 239.

¹¹⁷ Jeff Malpas, ‘Thinking Topographically: Place, Space, and Geography’, p 7.

¹¹⁸ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, p 150.

intensity of their own – upon the plethora of positions, truly heterotopian in their similarities and differences with regards to the oscillating values afforded to place and space, and narrative that I was grappling with. Through my research and the day to day oscillating, and at times, simultaneous, grind and satisfaction (and back to grind) of writing a first draft of my novel, came the cry from my ego, ‘turn back’ or more aptly ‘turn away’. Although, as opposed to what others thought, I certainly wasn’t in the market for a challenge, and yet, I couldn’t ‘look away’. The prologue of my novel came to me in full one day as I remembered what I wanted to do. I wanted to tell a story.

I asked myself what it was I could see. It was ‘as if’ I was the benevolent morning and evening star simultaneously positioned ‘both/and’ in the Northern and Southern hemisphere, looking down on my two characters and their initial arrival into the world, with the distance affording not only spatial vastness, but also temporal fluidity. My characters’ births reflected their life directions; ‘Robbie’, born breach, always felt in the wrong place, and ‘Sophie’, born so quickly, was always running (out of time). It was to be a simple tale of place, space and time, in an endeavour to represent and combine, through a metamodern sensibility, ‘the historian’s concern with time and the geographer’s concern with space ... with the significance of place ... and the importance of a narrative understanding for capturing this significance.’¹¹⁹ As I said, a simple tale, but these tales we tell, to each other, to ourselves, of course, are never simple. The all-encompassing intensity of my bird’s-eye view paradoxically magnified the epiphanic moments in time, and the cairn-like places that formed my characters, while leaving the crevices, lees, lips, and passes, the spaces that connect time to place hidden in shadow. But as the saying goes, darkness is only the absence of light. These absences and darknesses will be looked at in more depth in the second chapter of this exegesis; however, in keeping with my metaphoric cartography, in this following section and

¹¹⁹ Nicholas J. Entrikin, *The Betweenness of place: towards a geography of modernity*, p 25.

discussion, I am changing my lens from wide angle to zoom where ‘every “view” [is] an entry into place.’¹²⁰

‘Omniscience ... is not a faculty possessed by certain class of narrators, but ... a quality of authorial imagination.’¹²¹

‘The post-postmodern novel hinges on creating empathy ... between narrators ... and the flesh and blood “real” reader’¹²²

‘All novels are about the intersection of characters with history’¹²³

This first chapter is about birth and beginnings, metaphorical and literal, about place and positionality, about echoes and reverberations, and about point of view. Through my metaphorical mountain top positioning, I’ve imagined and suggested what an omniscient view afforded me with regards to place and narration, where past, present, and future comeingle in a metamodern hermeneutics of simultaneity. Michelle de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* is an example of this metamodern narrative as a contemporary structure of feeling where multiple notions of home, subjectivity, otherness, positionality, and history collide, where her novel, as she states above, is about the intersection of characters with history.

Winner of the Miles Franklin Award in 2013, *Questions of Travel* examines notions of exile, migration and citizenship in the Asia Pacific region through the stories of its two main protagonists, Laura Fraser (Australian) and Ravi Mendez (Sri Lankan), both born in the late 60s – early 70s, and follows each through oscillating destinations and decades up until 2000 and then through the following years ending in 2004 with the Boxing Day Tsunami where each finds themselves in Sri Lanka: Ravi as a returned refugee, and Laura as a tourist.

¹²⁰ Jeff Malpas, in Jeff Malpas (Ed) *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014, p 7.

¹²¹ Richard Walsh in Paul Dawson, ‘The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction’, *Narrative*, Vol 17, No 2, May 2009, p 144.

¹²² Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* p 360-361.

¹²³ Michelle de Kretser, Author Talk, ‘Adelaide Writers’ Week, 2018.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, an oscillating hierarchy of value afforded to styles of narration would see, not that long ago, de Kretser's text critiqued by a reviewer for its 'lack of narrative risk-taking.'¹²⁴ This kind of critique sees omniscient narration as 'an archaism to be patronised when ... found in the works of the past and to be scorned ... in contemporary work.'¹²⁵ The value apportioned to revered experimental 'modernist and postmodernist fiction throughout the twentieth century can be characterised, in part, as a rejection of the moral and epistemological certainties of omniscient narration.'¹²⁶ However, it seems, along with place, 'omniscience is making a come-back.'¹²⁷ This apparent resurgence in narrative omniscience is, in part, representative of a contemporary metamodern structure of feeling where writers and readers are responding to the desires and depictions of an intensified world of hyper knowledge, hyper otherness, and neoliberalism through a desire for certainty and authority, both from a sense of modernist nostalgia, and as a reflection of an intensifying postmodernism where availability of knowledge through technology permeates fictional representation and consumption. This contemporary structure of feeling reflects a kind of narrative performance which suggests although 'characters may be uncertain ... [readers] sense the controlling force above them,'¹²⁸ and 'despite awareness of its artifice, *surrender* (my emphasis) to the story.'¹²⁹

Having said that, as a writer, de Kretser believes that 'writers are interested in different things from readers: for writers it's about how you tell the story that matters not the story itself'¹³⁰ which reflects de Kretser's modernist predilection for form. However, as a

¹²⁴ David Callahan, 'Review', *Questions of Travel* by Michelle de Kretser, *Transnational Literature*, Vol 6 No 1, November 2013, <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>, (viewed 12/1/2019).

¹²⁵ Eugene Goodheart in Paul Dawson, 'The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction', *Narrative*, Vol 17 No 2, May 2009, p 143.

¹²⁶ Paul Dawson, 'The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction', p 144.

¹²⁷ Elliot Holt, 'The Return of Omniscience', Book Review, *New York Times*, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/books/review/the-return-of-omniscience.html> (viewed 9/3/2018).

¹²⁸ Elliot Holt, 'The Return of Omniscience', Book Review, *New York Times*, 2016.

¹²⁹ Elliot Holt, 'The Return of Omniscience', Book Review, *New York Times*, 2016.

¹³⁰ Michelle de Kretser, in Caroline Baum interview, 'Michelle de Kretser: My new novel imagines how life could be different', Entertainment Books, *The Age*, 22/9/2017,

reader, I also *surrendered* to de Kretser's omniscient narrator, possibly due, in part, to my own nostalgic tendencies, while simultaneously aware through form and structure, of the 'art' and 'artifice' of her novel, where her 'omniscient narration ... is a trope, a figure of speech denoting a particular type of narratorial performance ... where the "narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly *says* more than any of the characters know".¹³¹ In my novel, I begin with an extraterrestrial point of view, but subsequently confine my 'narratorial performance' to the 'limited omniscience' of my two protagonists; this is designed as an example of the simultaneity, the 'both/and' of a metamodern style of narrative, but also suggestive of connotations with regards to alterity and epistemology which will be discussed in the third chapter of this exegesis.

'You don't need to sympathise with characters, but try to show compassion'¹³² says de Kretser and, indeed, her 'narrative performance' in *Questions of Travel* reveals an empathic narrator, like a firm but fair parent, who on the very first page, addresses the reader. This is the only time this happens, when she is introducing her character Laura's experience of attempted murder by drowning at the age of two by her older brothers: 'Look at it from the boys' point of view,'¹³³ de Kretser entreats. After this initial address, she presents, along with her two protagonists, a myriad of characters and their respective 'points of view' which indeed, like her own, and mine, are products of nature, nurture, culture, and history. This myriad of respective points of view suggests 'if postmodern thought holds that all truth is relative, metamodernism holds that absolute truth exists — but evolves differently for each person.'¹³⁴ Within this metamodern desire and search for authenticity, the re-emergence of modernist tropes combined with the intensification of postmodernist strategies suggests a

<https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/michelle-de-kretser-my-new-novel-imagines-how-life-could-be-different-20170921-gvlp2l.html>, (viewed 17/8/2020).

¹³¹ Paul Dawson, 'The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction', p 148.

¹³² Michelle de Kretser, Author Talk, 'Adelaide Writers' Week, 2018.

¹³³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 3.

¹³⁴ Seth Abramson, 'The Metamodern Manifesto: After Postmodernism Part III', p 2.

kind of literature that celebrates both form and content. In its content, De Kretser's myriad of characters reflect an intensive postmodernity where multiple subjectivities jostle and collide in simultaneous localised and globalised immanence. It also reflects, in its form, a modernist sensibility where the first and last pages connect into a whole as the attempt on Laura's life by drowning on the first page comes to fruition on the last as an example 'of the modernist paradigm ... [where] the confusions of the world are shaped into an equal poise of opposites ...'¹³⁵ These opposites in de Kretser's case are birth and death, the ultimate arrival and departure subjective positions. Simultaneously within these book ended subjective positions, her protagonists move about the globe via oscillating positionalities and localities in a metamodern comingling which suggests a reading (and writing) that considers (or represents) 'the places where texts, ideas, and identities converge ... [which] ... creates an entirely new 'whole' ...'¹³⁶

'Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?'¹³⁷

'Identities cling to us ... even produce us ...'¹³⁸

'That was what it meant to be Australian: you came to London for the first time and discovered what you already knew.'¹³⁹

The three quotes above all come from texts entitled 'Questions of Travel' and span nearly fifty years from modernist poet Elizabeth Bishop's 1965 poem, through Caren Kaplan's 1996 postmodern treatise on displacement, to Michelle de Kretser's 2012

¹³⁵ Alan Wilde, cited in Peter V. Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: society, philosophy, literature*, p 147.

¹³⁶ Seth Abramson, 'Metamodernism: The Basics II', p 3.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Bishop, 'Questions of Travel', <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/questions-of-travel/>, (viewed 4/12/2018).

¹³⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 7.

¹³⁹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 57.

metamodernist representation of travel, territorialisation, and terrorism. Each in their own way suggests that the questions of why we travel, and who gets to travel are complex and paradoxically entwined with questions of home and our sense of place; however, echoes and reverberations, similarities and contrasts, between these texts also suggest ‘an unfolding of a much larger pattern.’¹⁴⁰ In *Questions of Travel*, de Kretser reaches back to early and late modernism where her choice of epigraphs, quotes, character names and occupations, both real and inferred, such as E M Forster, Patrick White, Christina Stead, Elizabeth Bishop, and Kathleen Raine, reflect an extensive knowledge and love of modernist fiction and poetry which can be read as both a modernist ‘awareness of a crisis of individual and collective subjectivity’ and a postmodern ‘playful attitude towards subjectivity.’¹⁴¹ Through her choice of epigraphs from E M Forster’s *Howards End*, ‘Under cosmopolitanism, if it comes, we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle ...’¹⁴², and from Elizabeth Bishop’s poem, ‘Questions of Travel’, ‘But surely it would have been a pity not to have seen the trees along this road, really exaggerated in their beauty’¹⁴³, de Kretser ‘plays’ with the reader where the echoes and reverberations become a game of spot the connection. At the same time, her narrative performance acts as a ‘representation of the metamodern in contemporary literature ... [which] ... creates a paradoxical middle ground between modernism and postmodernism where ... [her] oscillating performance implies hierarchy and destabilisation (deconstruction) at the same time.’¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Patrick Evans, cited in Elizabeth McMahon, ‘Archipelagic space and the uncertain futures of national literatures’, *JASAL*, Vol 13, No 2, 2013, p 2, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/9860/9749>, (viewed 1/2/2019).

¹⁴¹ Peter V. Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: society, philosophy, literature*, p 150.

¹⁴² E M Forster, *Howards End* in Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Bishop, ‘Questions of Travel’ in Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*.

¹⁴⁴ Tawfiq Yousef, ‘Metamodernism Poetics and Its Manifestations in Billy Collins’s “My Hero”’, *International Journal of Language and Literature*, June 2018, Vol 6, No 1, p 59, <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v6n1a8>, (viewed 4/2/2019).

This metamodern oscillating performance also reflects de Kretser's position as a transcultural writer who feels 'at home in more than one country, in more than one place'¹⁴⁵ and is 'disposed to reclaim an inclusive vision of culture/s, one which stresses the power of confluences, overlappings, and interactions rather than of polarities.'¹⁴⁶ These confluences, overlappings, and interactions in turn reflect Abramson's metamodern aim of collapsing distance as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In keeping with Foucault's (and subsequently my own reading of) heterotopias as simultaneously specific and historic, not to mention transformative, Arianna Dagnino suggests that although 'transcultural writers are not new on the landscape ... it is only now that the pattern of modern (im)migrations and the phenomena of globalisation generate transcultural experiences and develop transcultural sensibilities.'¹⁴⁷ These experiences and sensibilities, paradoxically, reflect both the apparent inclusivity of multiculturalism for example, and simultaneously, its exclusivity through nationalistic underpinnings. This paradox reflects Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodern structure of feeling where both positive and negative connotations and experiences exist simultaneously.

The metaphor of the lens, like the mountain, repeats with regards to perspective. Put things in perspective we are told, but as the discussion above suggests, perspective is subjective, just as connotations of 'home' are subjective. The three texts quoted above (all named *Questions of Travel*) and the differing 'questions' they pose reflect their modern, postmodern, and, I suggest, metamodern perspectives: if Bishop asks her modernist 'why' do we travel, and Kaplan asks her postmodernist 'who' gets to travel, de Kretser, from an intensified metamodernist paradigm through her 'transcultural lens' asks why, who, and from

¹⁴⁵ Arianna Dagnino, 'Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature in the Age of Global Modernity', *Transnational Literature*, Vol 4, No 2, 2012, p 6.

¹⁴⁶ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, Purdue University Press: Indiana, 2015, p 1

¹⁴⁷ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 2.

where do we travel, in which her ‘travelling’ suggests the temporal and the theoretical as well as the geographical through her homage to Australian modernist expatriate writers, Christina Stead, and Patrick White. Borrowing Dagnino’s idea of the ‘transpatriate’ writer who through a ‘process of “transpatriation” that may be triggered by moving – physically, virtually, or imaginatively – outside one’s cultural and homeland or geographical borders’¹⁴⁸, I suggest both Stead and White can also be read in this new hermeneutic of transpatriation where a metamodern reading sees a simultaneous modernist ambivalence and a postmodern indifference culminate in a twenty-first century reading as subjective ambiguity where multiple interpretations hold equal value.

As mentioned in my preface to this exegesis, my initial inspiration for my novel came from the connections I saw between de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* and her reference to Christina Stead’s *For Love Alone*: both texts have a male and a female protagonist, in which each can be seen from multiple perspectives of gender, race, class, and geography where ‘local anecdotes engage with wider global and ethical perspectives,’¹⁴⁹ albeit the almost seventy years that separate their publication. These connections reflect, to me, a kind of call and response questioning and answering across the years, similar to Bishop’s, Caplan’s and de Kretser’s ‘questions of travel’ and in which, through my own novel, I endeavour to, not necessarily answer them, but participate in the conversation. As well as the epigraphs de Kretser includes in *Questions of Travel* as mentioned above that form an initial part of the ‘narrative performance’, the idea of the incipit – ‘the first textual unit ... a strategic place that will have some bearing on the remainder of the work’¹⁵⁰ is an idea that suggests the opening passage/s of a novel ‘maintains close relationships ... with the elements of the paratext that precedes it and with the text that follows.’¹⁵¹ This next section will look at the ‘incipits’ of

¹⁴⁸ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 2.

¹⁴⁹ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 203.

¹⁵⁰ Valerie Baisnee, *Through the Long Corridor of Distance*, p 10.

¹⁵¹ Valerie Baisnee, *Through the Long Corridor of Distance*, p 11.

Questions of Travel, For Love Alone, and my own novel, *The Heartbeats Echo* to explore the narrative performances they represent.

‘... the active struggle between earth and water ... people like to call these two elements mother and father ...’¹⁵²

‘The boundary marked by land and water ... is a shifting, fractal and paradoxical one.’¹⁵³

‘Our hypothetical metamodern sea captain can and does explore all the islands on her chart at once.’¹⁵⁴

Perspective is subjective, informed by temporal, geographical, and social experiences, and within literary production (and criticism) it is performed through an author’s choice of point of view via voice, narration and focalisation. In Chapter Two of this exegesis which I’ve entitled ‘The Ocean’ to keep with my cartographic/topographic metaphor and methodology, I will be diving deeper, so to speak, into themes and authorial performances of affect and emotion where ‘submersion’ and ‘depth’ will be the focus. However, while the three examples of incipits that I’ve chosen to explore in the following discussion all have watery themes, the focus is one of ‘gaze’ as opposed to ‘immersion’, once again reiterating that this ‘gaze’ is relational to the materiality of place experienced by both characters and their creators, as well as their readers. Once again, within the three-fold (or more) nature of my continuing discussion, the place-but-no-place phenomena of heterotopia reflects the experience of writer, reader, and character, who each embarks on a journey of discovery when they begin to tell, interpret, and act. These incipits ‘represent a threshold between the

¹⁵² Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2004, p 9.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth McMahon et al, ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, *Island Studies Journal*, Vol 6 No 2, 2011, p 115.

¹⁵⁴ Seth Abramson, ‘The Metamodernist Manifesto: The Rebirth of the Author’, *The Huffington Post*, 2014, p 3, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-abramson/the-metamodernist-manifesto_b_5641097.html, (viewed 19/1/2019).

world and the text, crossing that threshold means performing a rite of passage for both writer and reader,¹⁵⁵ and for my purposes, character also. This intermingling of production, reception, and action is in fact what I'm attempting to do in this exegesis which reflects a metamodern methodology as 'an ethical moment ... which entails "a claim made on the author writing the work, on the narrator telling the story ... on the characters in the story ... and on the reader, teacher, or critic responding to the work.'¹⁵⁶

It is a fruitful island of the sea-world, a great Ithaca, there parched and stony and here trodden by flocks and curly-headed bulls and heavy with thick-set grain. To this race can be put the famous question: "Oh Australian, have you just come from the harbour? Is your ship in the roadstead? Men of what nation put you down – for I am sure you did not get here on foot?"¹⁵⁷

Stead's prologue in *For Love Alone*, its concluding paragraph included above, has been read in numerous ways from 'literary name-dropping'¹⁵⁸ to being 'subtly mischievous'¹⁵⁹ to erasing 'Aboriginal culture'¹⁶⁰ to subverting 'traditionally masculine prerogatives as mobility' by claiming for her female protagonist 'the ability to travel or go into exile.'¹⁶¹ I would suggest it is all of these and more. Stead's 'panoramic view'¹⁶², combined with her '(post)colonial ambivalence'¹⁶³ reflects a more metamodern 'ambiguity' of the transcultural author writing from multiple subjective positions which include 'colonial, Australian, avant-garde, woman, writer, and left-wing political satirist on the move in

¹⁵⁵ Valerie Baisnee, *Through the Long Corridor of Distance*, p 11.

¹⁵⁶ J. Hillis Miller, in Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, London UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, p 105.

¹⁵⁷ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 2.

¹⁵⁸ Jennifer Strauss, 'An unsentimental romance: Christina Stead's for love alone', *Kunapipi*, Vol 4 Iss 2, 1982, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol4/iss2/12>, p 85, (viewed 11/2/2019).

¹⁵⁹ Lucinda O'Brien, 'Satirising white Australia in Christina Stead's *For love alone*, *JASAL*, Vol 12 No 1, 2012, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10192>, p 6, (viewed 11/2/2109)

¹⁶⁰ Louise Yelin, 'Buffoon Odyssey? Christina Stead's *For Love Alone* and the Writing of Exile', *Yale French Studies*, Vol 1 No 82 'Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms', 1993, p188.

¹⁶¹ Louise Yelin, 'Buffoon Odyssey?' p191.

¹⁶² Louise Yelin, 'Buffoon Odyssey?' p188.

¹⁶³ Antoinette Martin, '(Post)Colonial Ambivalences: Christina Stead and Janet Frame', (PhD Thesis), Deakin University, 2005, p 178.

between the global north and south in the early middle and later parts of the twentieth century'.¹⁶⁴ A semi-autobiographical account of her preparation for and initial arrival in London in 1928 in her early twenties, *For Love Alone* was written in New York in the early 1940s. From her perspective as an already itinerant traveller, published author, committed Marxist, and sexually experienced woman, Stead is gazing back, geographically as well as temporally, to her childhood home of Sydney where 'skies are sub-tropical, crusted with suns and spirals',¹⁶⁵ part of an 'island continent [which] lies in the water hemisphere.'¹⁶⁶ She is also gazing backwards to a more idealistic and virginal self, who believed in the ecstasy of 'love alone', not in any subservient way, but as an equal partnership between like-minded souls. The slightly naïve and autodidactic utopianism found in her prologue, surely mocked and satirised by the older and wiser Stead as Lucinda O'Brien has noted above, reflects also, I think, her dual position of author looking back. The implied author is her younger self, masquerading as her character Teresa, who narrates the prologue, and thinks and feels in grandiose terms, reflected in the prologue's 'famous question: "Oh Australian, have you just come from the harbour? Is your ship in the roadstead? Men of what nation put you down – for I am sure you did not get here on foot?"'¹⁶⁷ O'Brien suggests that 'the prologue never identifies the questioner and the question remains unanswered',¹⁶⁸ which suggests a 'romanticised account of first contact between Australia's Indigenous people and its European settlers [and] by reciting the question, Teresa demonstrates her complicity with this denial.'¹⁶⁹ This could be intentional on Stead's part as author, but one wonders if Teresa, and by implication, an older Stead, was simply satirising herself and her own pretentiousness.

¹⁶⁴ Fiona Morrison, 'A Vermeer in the Hayloft: Christina Stead, Unjust Neglect and Transnational Improprieties of Place and Kind', *Australian Literary Studies*, 2016, <https://www.australianliterarystudies.com.au/articles/a-vermeer-in-the-hayloft-christina-stead-unjust-neglect-and-transnational-improprieties-of-place-and-kind>, p 12, (viewed 1/2/2019).

¹⁶⁵ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 2.

¹⁶⁶ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 1.

¹⁶⁷ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 2.

¹⁶⁸ Lucinda O'Brien, 'Satirising white Australia in Christina Stead's *For love alone*, p 7.

¹⁶⁹ Lucinda O'Brien, 'Satirising white Australia in Christina Stead's *For love alone*, p 7.

This discussion reflects an ambiguous reading where multiple interpretations and perspectives sit alongside each other, and in which Stead's 'modernist strategy of the indirect introduction of ideas through image, symbol and setting'¹⁷⁰ combine with a kind of postmodern 'irony often associated with a self-reflexive identification with character or situation'¹⁷¹ which can be read as an example of the metamodern where 'examples of "the old and new, familiar and strange" ... "locate our ghostly forebears and discern in them the skeleton of a method that might visit us again."' ¹⁷²

Once or twice a year, as long as she lived, Laura Fraser had the water dream. There was silky blue all around her, pale blue overhead; she glided through silence blotched with gold. Separate things ran together and were one thing. She was held and set free. It was the most wonderful dream. But on waking, Laura was always a little sad too, prey to the sense of something ending before its time.¹⁷³

Stead's *For Love Alone* is specifically referenced by Michelle de Kretser in *Questions of Travel* when Laura leaves a second hand bookshop clutching a copy, and through de Kretser's ironic homage to Stead's novel, Laura is slightly apprehensive about its ability to really capture her familiar Sydney.¹⁷⁴ This referencing is an example of what Wolfgang Funk in his *Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* describes as a type of 'metareference' which 'denote[s] instances where the metareferential element ... gives rise to a metalevel inside a source text [which] consists of a reference, implicit or explicit, to another distinct text or body of texts.'¹⁷⁵ The incipit from *Questions of Travel* quoted above forms part of de Kretser's opening where she introduces her character Laura Fraser. Laura's blue water world is haunted, not only by Stead's Sydney in its jewelled

¹⁷⁰ Michael Wilding, in Carole Ferrier, 'Christina Stead's Poor Women of Sydney, Travelling into Our Times', *JASAL*, Vol 15 No 3, 2015, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10574>, p 13, (viewed 12/2/2019).

¹⁷¹ Carole Ferrier, 'Christina Stead's Poor Women of Sydney, Travelling into Our Times', p 15.

¹⁷² Carole Ferrier, 'Christina Stead's Poor Women of Sydney, Travelling into Our Times', p 15.

¹⁷³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 3.

¹⁷⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 33.

¹⁷⁵ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 103.

colours of blue and gold, described by Meaghan Morris as ‘a place apart, cast out from the communion of real Australians and ordinary people’¹⁷⁶, but also Stead herself. This haunting includes the implied author Stead represented in the epilogue of *For Love Alone*, and also representative of one of Meaghan Morris’s ‘Sydney writers ... [who] have aroused doubts ... about the “Australianness” of any imagination that wanders too far in culturally improper directions, or dwells too long in alien worlds’¹⁷⁷, and also the historical Stead of Watson’s Bay, Sydney, daughter of David, the scientist, and sister to, among others, Frederick, who died in a motorbike accident when he was 27, just as Laura Fraser’s brother, Hamish, also meets his fate.

De Kretser’s incipit of Laura’s attempted drowning book ends the final page climax of the story, and in another excerpt from the opening incipit above, foreshadows this through a poetic rendering of a recurring dream in which Laura is both happy and sad in her watery world: ‘Separate things ran together and were one thing. She was held and set free.’¹⁷⁸ At the same time she ‘was prey to the sense of something ending before its time.’¹⁷⁹ This simultaneity reflects the ‘both/and’ metamodern sensibility that underpins my creative project and exegesis which allows for multiple ‘impressions’ rather than interpretations. These impressions illustrate a form of Nicholas Birns’ ‘emotional analysis’ as discussed in my introduction as a type of reading which lies between the text and the context, and where the words themselves, and the rhythms they create suggest simultaneously the amniotic space of birth and Laura’s (and Christina’s) beloved blue water Sydney. Laura, Teresa-like, dreams, and more importantly takes note of these dreams. She’s open to other-worldly experiences; however, in her dream Laura ‘senses’ her own demise, which echoes her name sake, Laura

¹⁷⁶ Meaghan Morris, ‘The Man from Hong Kong in Sydney, 1975’, in Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Eds), *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004, p 235.

¹⁷⁷ Meaghan Morris, ‘The Man from Hong Kong in Sydney, 1975’, p 236.

¹⁷⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 3.

¹⁷⁹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 3.

Trevelyan's portentous 'mental travelling'¹⁸⁰ in Patrick White's *Voss*, which is also echoed throughout de Kretser's novel. Mirrors and echoes, dreams and portents abound in *Questions of Travel* and the incipit discussed above acts as a foreshadowing of what is to come.

In the Southern Hemisphere, the benevolent morning star lit the way in the near dawn, as a man in a great coat rode shot gun in a borrowed car through the empty streets of Port Adelaide, screaming *hold on, hold on*, to his pregnant wife in the back seat. They made it to the hospital just as the baby, a girl, nosedived into the Antipodean sphere, swallowing the life-giving amniotic waters of her first home as she arrived, coughing and spluttering, into a world that was never ready for her.¹⁸¹

The excerpt above is the opening paragraph of the prologue to my own novel *The Heartbeats Echo* which emerged into my consciousness as I imagined two characters and their heterotopic arrivals from the extra-terrestrial perspective of Venus, simultaneously both the morning and evening star, mirroring and foreshadowing, through the Southern and Northern hemispheres of their births, their similarities and differences, their closeness and distance, which is the theme of my creative project. The inspiration for this view came from a Janet Frame quote which I use as an epigraph to the final section of my novel, entitled 'Harbour', which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three with regards to alterity and horizons: 'We need only to remember that we are human, to forget our preoccupation with distances between continent and continent, the measurement of physical miles, and remember the unbearable closeness of one human being to his neighbour.'¹⁸² Critics have read Frame as both a modernist and postmodernist through her multiple colonial and postcolonial positions, and like Stead, and de Kretser, I see Frame as epitomising a metamodern sensibility of a 'transcultural writer' who believes narratives of the journey from country to country 'are

¹⁸⁰ Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space*, p 68.

¹⁸¹ Amanda Williams, 'The Heartbeats Echo', (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 144.

¹⁸² Janet Frame, 'This Desirable Property', (1964), in Denis Harold and Pamela Gordon (Eds), *Janet Frame in Her Own Words*, Penguin Books: Rosedale, New Zealand, 2011, p 39.

being replaced by descriptions of the more sophisticated universal journeys between self and self, person and person.’¹⁸³ So, while initially not overtly haunted by Stead or Sydney, as originally I was thinking more along the lines of Melies’ *A Trip to the Moon* and The Smashing Pumpkins’ film clip for ‘Tonight Tonight’, covertly, I realised, taking into consideration Frame’s insightful phenomenology, de Kretser’s and Stead’s novels haunted my own subconscious and suggested connections and reverberations with regards to gender, geography, and genealogy which reflected my own struggles with feelings of alienation from societal, familial, and national expectations and assumptions.

What links all three incipits are the female characters they embody and the foreshadowing of their desires, dreams, and destinies by an omniscient narrator, who knows more than they are letting on whether through, in the case of Stead, the possible ‘ironic satire’ of a younger self (both real and imagined), or de Kretser’s premonitions that echo other lives, once again, both real and imagined, or my own ‘extra-terrestrial’ perspective suggesting a benevolent and empathetic narratorial performance which attempts to, in fact, encompass Stead’s ‘ironic satire’, and de Kretser’s ‘echoing’ into this performance. What also links these three incipits and their narrative foreshadowing is their ‘planetary perspective ... cut ... with the localities of emplotment in particular spaces and times ...’¹⁸⁴ where the idea of emplotment and its ‘narrative perspective – the past-ness of events for the narrator’¹⁸⁵ converge in heterotopically charged narrative performances of travel. This echoes van Genneep’s rites of passage through authentic subjective transformations: that of our first home, and our last, the metaphorical ultimate travel space of departure and destination, and our own closeness and connectedness that Janet Frame so eloquently entreated we remember,

¹⁸³ Janet Frame, ‘This Desirable Property’, p 37.

¹⁸⁴ Vilashini Cooppan, ‘The Corpus of the Continent: Embodiments of Australia in World Literature’, *JASAL*, Vol 15 No 3, 2015, p 17.

¹⁸⁵ Tara Collington, ‘Space, Time and Narrative: Bakhtin and Ricoeur’, *Space and Culture*, 2001, p 230, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/120633120000300502>, (viewed 8/3/2019).

and to which, I suggest, Stead, de Kretser, and in turn, I, in my own way, have endeavoured to do.

Simone Fullagar echoes the time, space, and place convergence of heterotopia, chronotope, and rites of passage found in the above incipits, and suggests ‘travel is a specific kind of heterotopia ... characterised by certain temporal rituals of leaving, moving and returning’ and that although ‘there is a danger ... in simply adopting a post-modern conception of identity premised on the movement of endless becoming ... the writing-travelling self ... is, in a sense ... refigured consciously as well as unconsciously, via our cultural imagination.’¹⁸⁶ Although coming from chronotopically different cultures, and histories, through what Rita Felski denotes as a type of ‘affective hermeneutics ... [in which by comparing] character and episode, style and world view; the affective and analytical aspects of meaning are closely intertwined’¹⁸⁷, Stead and de Kretser, along with their characters, Laura and Teresa, suggest a more ‘post postmodern sameness (instead of the fetishism with “difference” in postmodern texts and theories)’¹⁸⁸ which is echoed in Frame’s ‘unbearable closeness’.

¹⁸⁶ Simone Fullagar, ‘Narratives of travel: desire and the movement of feminine subjectivity’, *Leisure Studies*, 21:1, 2002, p 59-60, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02614360110119546>, (viewed 22/3/2019).

¹⁸⁷ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 178.

¹⁸⁸ Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel it Too?* p. 359.

‘A good keen mountain wind is more articulate than a good keen man – or used to be’¹⁸⁹

‘... it is form and contour ... that matters, not the detail. Or even the narrating voice. Not only.’¹⁹⁰

‘Our vision is limited and yet we want to see it all.’¹⁹¹

This chapter has been one of perspective: of position, and of performance, of time, space, and place, of simultaneity and oscillation, of high and low, of brow and brink, and of value and scale. The paradox of Peter Turchi’s suggestion in the final epigraph above reflects my own mountain top imaginings where not satisfied with what I could see, I wondered what I was missing, and what others were seeing on their different mountain tops and my depth of field increased, but scale is always subjective. While Nicholas Birns asks is Australian literature global enough and answers that it is as global as anywhere else,¹⁹² Elizabeth McMahon suggests with regards to scales of literature that even global or world literatures can be diminished where ‘within deep time and space ... the global does not contain but is contained within a much larger whole’¹⁹³ and reflects Robert Dixon’s ‘call for a “scale-sensitive” analysis in which all scales are in play’¹⁹⁴ which in turn echoes Franco Moretti’s suggestion that ‘the justification for the study of world literature [is] to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures – especially local literature,’¹⁹⁵ which is in deep contrast to Gail Jones’ suggestion that ‘the small and the local [are] freighted

¹⁸⁹ Janet Frame, ‘This Desirable Property’, p 41.

¹⁹⁰ Drusilla Modjeska, *The Mountain*, cited in Robyn Annear, ‘The Mountain’ by Drusilla Modjeska’, *The Monthly*, May 2012, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/may/1336010032/robyn-annear/mountain-drusilla-modjeska>, (viewed 21/1/2019).

¹⁹¹ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, p 130.

¹⁹² Nicholas Birns, ‘Is Australian Literature Global Enough?’ *JASAL*, Vol 15, No 3, 2015, p 4, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10578>, (viewed 8/3/2019).

¹⁹³ Elizabeth McMahon, ‘Archipelagic space and the uncertain future of national literatures’, p 12.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Dixon, ‘National Literatures, Scale and the Problem of the World’, *JASAL*, Vol 15, No 3, 2015, p 8, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10577>, (viewed 8/3/2019).

¹⁹⁵ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures of World Literature’, *New Left Review* 1, February 2000, p 68, <https://newleftreview.org/II/1/franco-moretti-conjectures-on-world-literature>, (viewed 8/3/2019).

with more general social relevance and ethical gravity.’¹⁹⁶ I include this discussion to illustrate the overwhelming view I was metaphorically experiencing from my snow covered peak, but I’ll suffice with Paul Carter’s observation: ‘to solve the problem of scale. To be with a group of trees is to experience in real life, as it were, the meaninglessness of the “lifesize”’.¹⁹⁷ I see Carter’s meaningless lifesize reflected in the paradox of Bachelard’s intimate immensity, which suggests to me that ‘to see the vast expanse of the world that is not you’¹⁹⁸, can actually allow for real life transformation through openness and vulnerability.

So, I’ve taken the great leap into the unknown; or was I pushed? On a good day I’m hovering in the jet stream like a hang glider, letting the inspiration wash over me. On a bad day I feel like a vulture circling, waiting for the inevitable demise of my lifeless narrative. But, with Peter Turchi’s advice that ‘the blank page is only “a” beginning and not “the” beginning’¹⁹⁹ I eschewed my vulture like disguise for that of a more majestic sea eagle. If truth be told, I felt more like Baudelaire’s exiled albatross than predatory raptor, more like de Kretser’s magpie than Frame’s migratory bird, but still with my bird’s eye view firmly trained on the deep blue below, it was time to dive down into the depths to see what lay below the surface, of myself, as a writer, and of my characters, and of those other beings, my companions on this journey: Laura and Teresa, and the equally muddled, mournful, and melancholic men they encounter. Brian Castro explains ‘whenever there was the scent of a life – yes, lives smelt fishy, full of that breathless chaos of oceans rather than of the rarefied

¹⁹⁶ Gail Jones, ‘A Dreaming, A Sauntering: Re-imagining Critical Paradigms’, *JASAL*, Vol 5, 2006, p 15, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10181>, (viewed 12/3/2019).

¹⁹⁷ Paul Carter, *Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2013, p 50.

¹⁹⁸ Rebecca Solnit, in Marina Warner, ‘The Faraway Nearby by Rebecca Solnit - Review’, *The Guardian*, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/07/faraway-nearby-rebecca-solnit-review>, (viewed 1/11/2020).

¹⁹⁹ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, p 29.

air of mountain tops ... there was usually great excitement.²⁰⁰ Janet Frame sees the excitement of writing more as a calling:

It's our own blood, not the sea's, which is warm,
our own lips, not the snow,
that, numb, will thaw to let words flow
while the mountain wind beyond intelligence and growth
dumb, alone, is no longer called upon to explain
the terms of the inheritance of this desirable property.²⁰¹

Janet Frame, master of the metaphor, and honorary (in my opinion) metamodernist, suggests that within ordinary embodiment, and our own and others' phenomenology of being, lies the 'desirable property' that writers inherit (or borrow, or steal) to interrogate 'the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself'.²⁰² The 'old verities – love and honour ... pity and pride ... compassion and sacrifice'²⁰³ certainly, and rightly so, through postmodern deconstruction, have been exposed and questioned with regards to alterity, subject position, and territorialisation where none of these 'affects' are neutrally or omnisciently experienced, and are indeed influenced by cultural, political, geographical, and increasingly, environmental concerns. Since the late nineties, a growing number of theorists such as Sianne Ngai, Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, and Sara Ahmed have been interrogating and embracing the 'affective turn' and are endeavouring to analyse, critique, and represent, perspectives ranging from the perceived postmodern lack of affect or 'depthlessness' as

²⁰⁰ Brian Castro, 'Heterotopias: Writing and Location', *Australian Literary Studies Journal*, Vol 17, No 2, 1995, p 181, <https://www.australianliterarystudies.com.au/articles/heterotopias-writing-and-location>, (viewed 8/3/2019).

²⁰¹ Janet Frame, 'This Desirable Property', p 41.

²⁰² William Faulkner, 'Nobel Prize in Literature Speech', 1950, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/>, (viewed 15/3/2019).

²⁰³ William Faulkner, 'Nobel Prize in Literature Speech'.

coined by Frederic Jameson, to a 'surfeit of affect' as noted by Brian Massumi.²⁰⁴ These positions reflect, to me, a twenty-first century structure of feeling as a turn to affect described by Alison Gibbons as 'meaningful emotional reactions or cognitive responses to today's social situation.'²⁰⁵ It is to 'affect' that I also now turn.

²⁰⁴ Alison Gibbons, 'Metamodern Affect', Introduction to 'Section II Affect' in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, London UK: Roman & Littlefield International, 2017, p 83-84.

²⁰⁵ Alison Gibbons, 'Metamodern Affect', p 85.

Chapter Two: The Ocean

‘The irruption of affect registers the “history of the present”’²⁰⁶

‘The main interest in life and work is to become something else that you were not in the beginning.’²⁰⁷

‘It’s possible that reading too much about affect leads to hypochondria.’²⁰⁸

When I imagined the form my exegesis would take I was fully immersed in theoretical discussions surrounding place and space, and geographical metaphors abounded. I could both visualise and almost experience the perspective of the mountain as omniscient and vast, and, as discussed in the closing of Chapter One, I felt the mixed sensation of fear and of freedom as I contemplated diving deep into the ocean of my own, my characters, and others’ characters’ emotions. What affects would this diving uncover with regards to modern, postmodern, and metamodern theories of narratology, characterisation and hermeneutics?

The methodology of both my creative work and its exegetical underpinnings is one of connections and reverberations which again, I find, is reflected in the geographical, epistemological, and phenomenological evolving nature of this project, where I’m discovering theories of affect, and of feeling, and how they echo through time and space. Like Bachelard’s intimate immensity, van Gennep’s rites of passage, Bakhtin’s chronotope

²⁰⁶ Kevis Goodman in Mary Favret, ‘The Study of Affect and Romanticism’, 2009, p 1165, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2009.00666.x> (viewed 11/4/2019).

²⁰⁷ Michel Foucault in, Daniel E. Palmer, ‘On Refusing Who We Are: Foucault’s critique of the epistemic subject’, *Philosophy Today*, Vol 42, No 4, Winter 1998, p 402.

²⁰⁸ Elspeth Probyn, ‘Writing Shame’, *Blush: Faces of shame*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p 130.

and Foucault's heterotopia, Raymond Williams' structure of feeling is reflected in romantic, modernist, postmodernist and metamodernist paradigms which, in the twenty-first century, open and close, form and fragment, into a mood of paradox and simultaneity, of contradiction and contingency, and of crisis and intensity. Once again, while heeding another of Rita Felski's warnings, this time with regards to an academic engagement with affect which cautions against 'lapsing into subjective effusion or an idiosyncratic flurry of private associations,'²⁰⁹ I also heed Elspeth Probyn's suggestion that 'affect ... [is] ... a way of doing research that demands the abstract and concrete be brought to bear on each other ... [and] reminds us of our humanity ... and the ... effort it entails to implement it in our work.'²¹⁰ The following is an attempt to do both.

So, what came first: the mountain or the ocean? What comes first: the affect or the emotion? After some rudimentary research in an endeavour to answer my first question, I discovered that indeed the planet was covered in water long before tectonic plates collided to create the mountains which rose up out of the sea. From a metamodern methodology of both/and, I could argue that the mountains already existed under the oceans, just waiting for the right conditions to emerge. In keeping with this hypothesis I could suggest that the mountain was an affect in a sea of emotion, and the collision of the tectonic plates was the crisis that provoked it. In a way, it felt as if my creative project was always there too, waiting to indeed rise up out of my subconscious, like a mountain of affect, out of an ocean of confusing emotions, and provoked by a decision to embark on a creative writing PhD. From the clear perspective of my omniscient eyrie, like a fledgling, I felt safe and confident. I'd done my research – I thought I knew what I was talking about – and although, if you read the closing of the preceding chapter again, it seems as if I am rapturous, if not raptorous, in my

²⁰⁹ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 178.

²¹⁰ Elspeth Probyn, 'A-ffect Let Her RIP', *M/C Journal*, Vol 8 No 6, 2005, Note 17, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/13-probyn.php>, (viewed 9/4/2019).

desire to plumb the depths, the reality I've discovered, and possibly knew all along, is that oceans, like emotions and their representations, and affect theory too it would seem, are somewhat fathomless and contradictory, which perfectly reflects, I think, the paradoxical nature of our shared present. Of course, we are at but a point on the turning wheel, a stage on the swinging pendulum, where only a degree of separation divides Wilde's romantic assertion 'that life imitates art far more than art imitates life,'²¹¹ and Massumi's postmodern assertion that 'there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect.'²¹²

What links specific structures of feeling described by Raymond Williams as 'a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities,'²¹³ is their attempts to 'correlate material, social, and affective structures,'²¹⁴ which reflect their respective 'generation or ... period.'²¹⁵ This correlation is what I am attempting to do in both my creative project and this exegesis which officially began in the tumultuous – for both personal and political reasons – year of 2016.

To answer the second question – what comes first, the affect or the emotion? – I ask another question: what came first, my anxious feeling of finding myself in a world I felt less and less part of, or understood, or was the anxious feeling part of a collective anxiety? A collective anxiety manifesting in closed borders and far right hate speech, which in a feedback loop fed back into my own anxiousness. It has been nearly five years since 2016 which began with the election of Trump and the decision of Brexit, culminating in the fires, floods, and plague of 2020. Over this period, while writing my novel and researching for my exegesis, each world crisis, whether it be the war in Syria and the corresponding surge of

²¹¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying and Other Essays*, London UK: Penguin Classics, 2010, p 26.

²¹² Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, p 27.

²¹³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p131.

²¹⁴ Devika Sharma & Frederik Tygstrup (Eds) 'Introduction', *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Inc, 2015, p 2.

²¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p131.

displaced and traumatised refugees, the high school shootings and the ‘Me Too’ movement, the rates of female deaths from domestic violence, Indigenous deaths in custody, and terrorist attacks on young music fans, and innocent Muslims, the demonization of welfare recipients ... the list goes on ... I felt overwhelmed with the intensity. It seemed as if I too had put up a wall to protect myself, which corresponded with a deep recognition of my own prejudices and privileges which once recognised can never be ignored.

Simply put, the more I wrote and researched, the more overwhelmed I became. Like our paradoxical ‘both/and’ age, I was living in a kind of ‘normalised intensity’ that I’d never experienced before. Some would say that that is a normal experience of writing a PhD, and they are probably right; however, what is of interest to this thesis with regards to Williams’ structures of feeling and the literature produced that reflects these specific moments in time, is the question of ‘normalising’ crisis a twenty-first century phenomena which reflects my ‘heterotopian’ reading of our current epoch of ‘intensive otherness’ and Massumi’s ‘surfeit of affect’, where crisis saturates our every-day thanks to the twenty four hour news cycle and the ubiquity of social media. Did the hopelessness and powerlessness I was experiencing on a personal level manifest in a quiet determination to focus on what I could control? The answer to that question, on a personal level, is yes, but for the purposes of this discussion the point is that ‘affects’ and ‘emotions’ manifest in different ways, at different times, in different situations, for different people.

Although my interest in this chapter lies more in what these affects and emotions are, and how they are represented, and the specific structures of feeling that produced them, I’ve discovered that ‘affect’ is a very broad term which warrants some, if not unpacking, then certainly some trawling, to borrow a more nautical turn of phrase. In keeping with Foucault’s heterotopian pirate ship, and Vermeulen and van den Akker, Dumitrescu, and Abramson’s

various metamodern sea captains, although I haven't as yet donned my diver's mask, I have definitely set sail.

'... experience and explanation are one in the same.'²¹⁶

'... a relentless attention to the structures of truth and knowledge obscures our experience of those structures.'²¹⁷

'... affective criticism in which "caring" and "empathetic" attachment ... take the place of judgement and critique.'²¹⁸

The three epigraphs above suggest the varying interpretations of 'affect' from a modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist reading. Affect's first usage in nineteenth century psychology as a generic label for emotions reflects the problematic distinction between affect and emotion similar to the semantics surrounding place and space discussed in Chapter One where the terms in certain discourses are interchangeable, but increasingly are becoming delineated as different along phenomenological, ontological, and political lines. The first quote I employ to illustrate a twentieth century modernist reflection of rational epistemology and empiricism: we know what we experience and express it truthfully. The second quote suggests the postmodern position that a blind acceptance of the previous tenet fails to acknowledge that experience and explanation are indeed not entirely one and the same as previously thought. Take memory, for example. In poststructuralist theory, memory, like 'affect' in affect theory, is thought to be a priori to its narrativisation in which Massumi suggests emotions are the 'sociolinguistic fixing'²¹⁹ of the affect, just as in lifewriting theory, the narration of latent memories is believed to give meaning and coherence to our personal existence. The third epigraph suggests, or more accurately, reflects, a concern surrounding

²¹⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 4.

²¹⁷ Clare Hemmings, 'Invoking Affect', *Cultural Studies*, Vol 19, No 5, 2005, p 553.

²¹⁸ Ruth Leys, 'Facts and Moods: Reply to My Critics', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 38, No 4, 2012, p 889.

²¹⁹ Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, p 27.

the idea that ‘affect’ is pre-cognitive and warns against a return to ‘a form of “radical empiricism” [which] privileges the “body” and its affects over the “mind”’²²⁰ with the suggestion that this will lead to ‘disagreement about meaning, or ideological dispute, irrelevant.’²²¹ These concerns, in turn, have been critiqued as ‘returning to that old defence of authorial intention as the only way to assign meaning to a literary text.’²²²

Similar to my earlier discussions surrounding place and space, and perspective and scale in Chapter One, the purpose of this initial review is not an ultimate insistence of one position over another, but a reflection of some (only some) of the varying theoretical positions taken with regards to affect in the present epoch. What is of more interest to this thesis is that this theoretical turn to affect seems to represent a paradigmatic shift (or turn) away from the epistemological towards the ontological, away from the theoretical to the practical, away from the fake towards the authentic, and paradoxically, in turn, also represents a myriad of emotive manifestations of this turn to affect away from centrist politics towards the right, away from fluid borders towards closed borders, and away from the subjective towards the objective. However, whether it is affect and emotion, or place and space, it is the tension between the two, the edges and the intersections, that are of interest as an example of a heterotopian intensity, as a ‘nearly utopian space [where] affect moves ... “more freely”’²²³ manifesting through my metamodern methodology which, albeit in a different context, endeavours to, with a ‘modest acknowledgement of the effects of our critical writing,’²²⁴ ‘... pick up everything from a track ... [and] ... follow it back to learn from the track, to know how to live with it, to pass it on.’²²⁵

²²⁰ Ruth Leys, ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’, *Critical Inquiry* Vol 37, No 3, 2011, p 468.

²²¹ Ruth Leys, ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’, p 472.

²²² Adam Frank and Elizabeth Wilson, ‘Like-Minded’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 38, No 4, 2012, p 877.

²²³ Mary Favret, ‘The Study of Affect and Romanticism’, *Literature Compass*, 2009, p 1160, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2009.00666.x>, (viewed 13/5/2019).

²²⁴ Elspeth Probyn, ‘A-ffect Let Her RIP’, Note 16.

²²⁵ David Mowaljarli, in Paul Carter, *Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence*, p 5.

In a metamodern hermeneutics of the simultaneity of ‘both/and’, just as ‘space ... manifests itself through place,’²²⁶ ‘affect is codified into emotion ... at the seeping edge ... of affective intensity [where] ... literature, perhaps more than any other art form, participates in producing and working that edge.’²²⁷ Since the birth of the novel form and the epochal structures of feeling it represents, where ‘the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same,’²²⁸ that edge (and modern subject) has been marginalised, exoticised, championed, exploited, and appropriated, and in the edge represented in our post postmodern or metamodern epoch has culminated in an intensified otherness that reflects our simultaneous and saturated existence. A turn to affect and emotion is not just a manifestation of rejecting neoliberal value models, or modernist hierarchies, as however much we would like to think we have moved on, the mists of modernist dialectics and postmodernist dualisms linger, seep, and stain our metamodern epoch through an ever persuasive neoliberal agenda of commodification, described by Nicholas Birns as ‘a time of winners and losers,’²²⁹ where ‘consumerism has affect as its main operator ... [and] ... consumption is becoming still more affect-driven ...’ which in turn explains and ‘underscores the urgency of understanding this affective layer of reality,’²³⁰ called the twenty-first century.

A ‘turn to affect’ does not mean simply a turn, or a return, to empathy, community, and solidarity, however much we desire it, as affect also manifests in divergent, but just as authentic, forms such as alienation, narcissism, and isolation, manifesting in ‘delights of consumerism, feelings of belonging attending fundamentalism or fascism ... that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order.’²³¹

²²⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Space is the Place’, p 6.

²²⁷ Rachel Greenwald Smith, ‘Postmodernism and the Affective Turn’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol 57, No 3/4, 2011, p 431.

²²⁸ Nancy Armstrong in Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel*, 2015, London UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p 2.

²²⁹ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*, p. 3.

²³⁰ Devika Sharma & Frederik Tygstrup (Eds) ‘Introduction’, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*, p 4.

²³¹ Lauren Berlant in Clare Hemmings, ‘Invoking Affect’, *Cultural Studies*, Vol 19, No 5, 2005, p 551.

Literature, due to its ability to transcend time and space, and mind and body, reflects “aesthetic experience”, and the affective dimension of this experience in various historical periods.’²³² Rachel Greenwald Smith asks the question ‘how do specific literary works actualise the affective potential they provoke?’ and replies that this question leads ‘toward an analysis of the social ramifications of literature’s inevitable affective incitements.’²³³ This question and answer echoes Wilde’s romantic conjecture where art, in this instance literature, indeed is imitated in life through its ‘provocative affective potential’ where the ‘as if’ of imagination is sometimes realised. Science fiction, speculative fiction, and cli-fi, are disturbing examples of this. Affect when ‘actualised’, or ‘put into words’ can ‘incite’ a movement, as seen in ‘#me too’ movement and Greta Thunberg’s ‘climate strike’ for instance. Again, with Wilde’s romanticism, and Massumi’s post postmodernism as book ends, the following discussion is an attempt to reflect Greenwald Smith’s question and answer with regards to notions of affect and how they manifest and echo in modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist representation.

²³² Devika Sharma & Frederik Tygstrup (Eds) ‘Introduction’, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*, p 7.

²³³ Rachel Greenwald Smith, ‘Postmodernism and the Affective Turn’, p 442.

‘... modernism ... ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous, immoral, subversive, and generally “antisocial”’²³⁴

‘Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic ...’²³⁵

‘Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and postmodern.’²³⁶

Jonathan Lethem asks ‘what exactly is postmodernism, except modernism without the anxiety?’²³⁷ This comment is echoed by David Harvey’s ‘suggestion that the latter [postmodernism] ... does not represent a break with the former [modernism] but rather its continuation ...’,²³⁸ and Frederic Jameson who suggests ‘that postmodernism is itself little more than one more stage of modernism proper (if not, indeed, of the even older romanticism).’²³⁹ Almost twenty years on from Harvey and Jameson, metamodern scholars Vermeulen and van den Akker suggest that ‘metamodernism appears to find its clearest expression in an emergent neoromantic sensibility ... defined ... by its oscillation between ... opposite poles ... [such as] ... self-realization ... as oscillating between attempt and failure.’²⁴⁰ Fellow metamodern scholar Alexandra Dumitrescu, too suggests the connection between romanticism and metamodernism where ‘as a mode, metamodernism stands for recognising the importance of self-realization ...’²⁴¹ albeit in a more prescriptive rather than descriptive mode as ‘an ethics of authenticity and care ... specifically care for the other ...’²⁴² She connects romanticism to metamodernism, where ‘romantic holistic views link both

²³⁴ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1992, p 4.

²³⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1989, p 44.

²³⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 5.

²³⁷ Jonathan Lethem, ‘The Ecstasy of Influence: A plagiarism’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 2007, p 62, <http://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/0081387>, viewed 26/10/2011.

²³⁸ Keith Woodward and John Paul Jones III, ‘The Condition of Postmodernity (1989): David Harvey’, *Key Texts in Human Geography*, Sage Publications Ltd: London, 2008, p 4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292518136_The_condition_of_postmodernity_1989_David_Harvey, (viewed 13/5/2019).

²³⁹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p 4.

²⁴⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, pp 8-10.

²⁴¹ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 1.

²⁴² Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 1.

backwards and forwards: backwards to a pre-modern tradition which runs counter to the modern mainstream insistence of rationality ... and forwards to contemporaneity.²⁴³

Vermeulen and van den Akker's 'descriptive' mode of metamodernism, and Dumitrescu's 'prescriptive' mode, echo, I think, Wilde's question with regards to reality and representation. Does art reflect what it sees or, as Wilde believes, is reality affected by its representation? Vermeulen and van den Akker qualify that their experience of metamodernism as being but a reflection of what is, is only one of a multitude of structures of feeling being experienced in the post postmodern epoch and the question of whether representation reflects or affects reality is an ongoing one. This reflects the echoing nature of these queries, as seen above in Greenwald Smith's questioning, and in other writers' positioning with regards to this questioning, which range from positive utopian imaginings to despairing dystopian capitulations, where 'reality consistently outstrips invention ... [and] novelists ... anchor us in unreality.'²⁴⁴ To be anchored in unreality is an accurate description of the paradoxical nature of both our heterotopian post postmodern world and its intensive realities and representations, and of our own desires to *feel* the authentic embodiment of being within the paradox of chaos and crisis, where, if crisis is the overriding structure of feeling of our time, metamodernism is seen as its 'romantic response.'²⁴⁵

This romantic response suggests if romanticism is the 'irresolvable tension between postmodernism and modernism', as a twenty-first century form of transcendence romanticism 'expresses the transition from a place not yet left behind, to another space it has not yet entered.'²⁴⁶ Romantic naivety, realist authenticity, modern anxiety, and postmodern irony

²⁴³ Alexandra Dumitrescu, 'Romantic and Metamodern Glimpses at Self-transformation', *Inter-textes*, 2010, p 5, <https://otago.academia.edu/AlexandraDumitrescu>, (viewed 15/5/2019).

²⁴⁴ Beejay Silcox, 'This is the way the world ends' *Australian Book Review*, No 411, May 2019, <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/current-issue/249-may-2019-no-411/5438-this-is-the-way-the-world-ends-by-beejay-silcox>, (viewed 16/5/2019).

²⁴⁵ Seth Abramson, 'The Ten Basic Principles of Metamodernism', *The Huffington Post*, 2015, p 5, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ten-key-principles-in-met_b_7143202, (viewed 12/12/2016).

²⁴⁶ Editorial, 'New Romanticism', *Notes on Metamodernism*, p 6, 2010, <http://www.metamodernism.com/2010/08/09/new-romanticism/> (viewed 9/4/2019).

collide in metamodern paradoxes where crisis calls for new grand narratives on a global scale, but also reflects the seeming impossibility of ever reaching consensus,²⁴⁷ as ‘potentially innovative de-territorialising impact[s] of the new technologies is hampered ... by the re-assertion of the gravitational pull of old and established values.’²⁴⁸ These paradoxes echo the contradiction mentioned earlier of being anchored in unreality. With the preceding discussion in mind, as Emily Dickinson so beautifully implored ‘Might I but moor – tonight – in thee!’²⁴⁹ to be anchored in the sea of unreality, if only for one night, called to me like a benevolent whistle on a moonless night. But a port, a harbour, is not on my horizon. Hopefully in Chapter Three I will reach my anchorage. For now, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, I was on open ocean.

As suggested earlier, I’ve conjured, or commandeered, the persona of sea captain for my ocean journey, but this persona takes, and was taken from, different forms. This difference is reflected in the multiple theoretical positionings it has emanated from, but also in my own embodied experience of metaphorically travelling between and among these atolls of knowledge. I borrow this island metaphor from Elizabeth McMahon and her ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, where she suggests, from her own referencing of Lyotard and Hau’ofa, the archipelago ‘As a critical model ... advocates the necessary non-fixity of the researcher of islands who is perennially off home ground; at sea.’²⁵⁰

For Foucault, it is the ship, the place of space, that is more important than the captain, and considering his oeuvre on the machinations of power, that is not surprising. In keeping with his paradoxical heterotopias, his pirate captain, not unlike a Captain Sparrow, is flawed but fun, and as Foucault famously suggests, without the paradoxical possibilities of

²⁴⁷ Andrew J. Corsa, ‘Grand Narratives, Metamodernism, and Global Ethics’, *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol 14, No 3, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Rosi Braidotti, ‘A critical cartography of feminist post-postmodernism’, p 2.

²⁴⁹ Emily Dickinson, ‘Wild Nights – Wild Nights!’, *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003, p 168.

²⁵⁰ Elizabeth McMahon et al, ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, p 125.

heterotopias, and their maritime embodiment ‘In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.’²⁵¹ In keeping with this pirating metaphor, and as a kind of Robin Hood of the seas, I’ve been sailing in and around archipelagos of space and time ‘plundering’ and ‘appropriating’ as I go, but with a metamodern sensibility where this ‘plundering’ and ‘appropriating’ stems from a desire to ‘establish an ongoing dialogue with previous paradigms of thought – as opposed to the modernist rejection of traditions and the postmodernist ironic detachment from previous texts.’²⁵² Dumitrescu’s metamodernism, ‘... that of a boat being built or repaired as it sails ...’²⁵³, reflects my paradoxical ‘benevolent pirating’, where the connections, reverberations, and echoes of ideas and concepts I was discovering reflected a more public spirited form of knowledge access and sharing, such as Jeffrey Nealon’s idea of a ‘hermeneutics of situation’²⁵⁴ discussed in Chapter One. Seth Abramson celebrates Dumitrescu’s metaphor of reconstruction as akin to his own metamodern sensibility and suggests that ‘Our [his] hypothetical metamodern sea captain can and does explore all the islands on her chart at once.’²⁵⁵ This hypothesis, although somewhat impossible, nevertheless, at times, surely *feels* ‘as if’ that is what I am doing, and certainly describes both the push and pull of my experience so far, both as a writer and researcher ‘who moves between islands taking one story to another ...’²⁵⁶, but who also saw ‘starting out in drops ... on the mountain’s brow ... joining trickles from the rocks ... the ocean of story.’²⁵⁷ Juxtaposing McMahon’s archipelagic writer and researcher and Stead’s romantic rendering of narrative emergence, not only reflects the envisioned topographical scenario of mountain, ocean, and horizon of this

²⁵¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 9.

²⁵² Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 6.

²⁵³ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space’, p 5.

²⁵⁴ Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Just-in-time Capitalism*, p 88.

²⁵⁵ Seth Abramson, ‘The Metamodernist Manifesto: The Rebirth of the Author’, p 3.

²⁵⁶ Elizabeth McMahon, ‘Archipelagic space and the uncertain future of national literatures’, p 14.

²⁵⁷ Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story: The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, Penguin Books: Melbourne, 1986, p 10.

exegesis, but also the idea of modernist depth and postmodernist surface where, in a metamodern paradigm, depth's authenticity and surface's heterogeneity merge into a 'new depthiness' which 'combines the epistemological reality of [postmodern] depthlessness with the performative possibility of [modernist] depth.'²⁵⁸ Ideas of depth and surface are not new as Felski suggests, 'the oscillation between surface and depth is a very familiar theme within aesthetics,'²⁵⁹ but in Vermuelen's metamodern paradox, 'depthiness' does not only suggest a way of reading and critiquing which combines 'a chasm of distance [and] a huddled proximity,'²⁶⁰ but also reflects a twenty-first century 'affective register ... [of] if it feels true to you ... it may well be ... true for you ...'²⁶¹

As an example of Vermuelen's 'depthiness', returning to McMahon's archipelagic writer and researcher and Stead's romantic emergence of story quoted above, while I juxtapose the quotes on the page, the phenomenology is more palimpsestic and echoes my earlier questioning of the emergence of mountains and oceans. I imagine while postmodernly travelling from one island of knowledge to another, Stead's modernist mountain and its drops of narrative trickling down, always already after, behind and beyond, as I sail in my metamodern ship, always (al)ready to anchor me in unreality as my imagination is infused by my theoretical discoveries. Many contemporary writers and theorists have described this temporal, spatial, and platial convergence as a 'presence', a 'trace', an 'echo', a 'refrain'

²⁵⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen, 'The New Depthiness', 2015, p 8, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/61/61000/the-new-depthiness/>, (viewed 1/9/2015).

²⁵⁹ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 55.

²⁶⁰ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 53.

²⁶¹ Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Metamodern Depth or "Depthiness"' in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, London UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p 149.

(Vilashini Cooppan²⁶², Gail Jones,²⁶³ Paul Carter,²⁶⁴ and Kathleen Stewart²⁶⁵ respectively) which suggests, if not confirms, Vermuelen's twenty-first century metamodern structure of feeling where 'notions of the behind and the beyond, the beneath and the inside, have reemerged [sic].'²⁶⁶ Much like my palimpsestic hypothesis suggested earlier of tectonic plates colliding and mountains emerging, this re-emergence of 'depth', much like the 'turn to affect' does not mean that 'depth' or 'affect' had disappeared, but were, as manifestations of an intensifying and flattening globalisation where our 'capacity to act and struggle ... is ... neutralised'²⁶⁷, lying dormant, in hibernation, like the metaphorical genie in the bottle. Whether we like it or not, it seems the genie has escaped, manifesting in both negative and positive ways from emotionally driven election outcomes to the explosion of # movements.

Metaphors and symbolism are used not only as 'orientation devices ... intertwining the less familiar with the already known'²⁶⁸ but also as examples of lived experience, of 'ordinary affects ... [as] ... things that happen.'²⁶⁹ As discussed above, the paradox of metamodernism, reflected in its 'meta' prefix, suggests the 'post' of post postmodernism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism, to name the most prevalent, does not altogether accurately reflect their reality as theoretical discourses where the postmodernism, modernism, colonialism, and structuralism, that they refer to are far from being 'post' or past. Similarly, the turn to affect and depth does not suggest that these modes of experience are somehow new and contemporaneous. The same can be said, of course, for heterotopias, and rites of passage. As suggested in Chapter One, these modes of experience are connected to

²⁶² Vilashini Cooppan, 'The Corpus of the Continent: Embodiments of Australia in World Literature', *JASAL*, Vol 15 No 3, 2015.

²⁶³ Gail Jones, 'A Dreaming, A Sauntering: Re-imagining Critical Paradigms', *JASAL*, Vol 5, 2006, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/10181>, (viewed 12/3/2019).

²⁶⁴ Paul Carter, *Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence*.

²⁶⁵ Kathleen Stewart, 'Afterword: Worlding Refrains', in Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, (Eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

²⁶⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen, 'The New Depthiness', 2015, p 1.

²⁶⁷ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p 55.

²⁶⁸ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 52.

²⁶⁹ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007, p 2.

each other and, combined with affect and depth, can be said to be key determinants in individual and collective temporal, spatial, and platial embodiment and its representation. If ‘affect’ as Massumi suggests is ‘an ability to affect and be affected’²⁷⁰, this ability, ‘does not so much reflect or think; affect acts’,²⁷¹ ... always becoming otherwise ... pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness ... by way of its relation to encounter.’²⁷² This state of ‘becoming other’, of ‘pulled beyond’, and of ‘surface’, ‘boundedness’ and ‘encounter’ suggests the transformative tension found in *crisis* and reflected in Foucault’s ‘other spaces’ and van Gennep’s ‘rites of passage’ where crisis is inevitably the catalyst for change, both individually and communally. In keeping with Dumitrescu’s prescriptive metamodernism, which connects modernism and postmodernism through a romantic tradition of linkage, McMahon’s ‘at sea’ researcher, and Williams’ structure of feeling as a ‘configuration of traits that marks out the profile of a feeling’²⁷³, the following considers heterotopia, and rites of passage as actioned ‘affects’ of embodiment in *crisis* and *transformation* from a modernist, postmodernist, and metamodernist perspective, where these modes converge in temporal, spatial, and platial tensions.

²⁷⁰ Brian Massumi, ‘Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements’, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p xvi.

²⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, cited in Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’, *The Affect Theory Reader*, p 2.

²⁷² Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’, *The Affect Theory Reader*, p 3.

²⁷³ Devika Sharma & Frederik Tygstrup (Eds) ‘Introduction’, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*, p 5.

‘It is not easy to be both critical and heroic.’²⁷⁴

‘A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle ...’²⁷⁵

‘Just because its fake doesn’t mean I don’t feel it.’²⁷⁶

Walkowitz’s quote above regarding modernist heroics of critique is a response to a statement by Edward Said describing the modernist ‘practice of humanistic service ... [which] ... entails a heroic unwillingness to rest in the consolidation of previously existing attitudes.’²⁷⁷ Walkowitz’s assertion accurately describes twentieth century modernism where the tension between *being* equally heroic and critical reflects, as both affect and symptom, a subjective and collective anxiety surrounding individual beliefs and world events. These world events included the steady rise of industrialism and the bourgeoisie, and the advent of the First World War, resulting in a paradoxical nostalgia for a past never to return and an embracing of a new machine age, where war was both heroic and commodified. Modernist anxiety resonates with our own contemporary paradoxical neo-nationalistic, neo-colonial, and neo-cosmopolitan metamodern epoch, where nostalgia for a past not quite left behind collides with a future that offers the ultimate anomaly of eternal life on a finite planet, where robots fight our wars, and heroism, and indeed humanism, both negatively and positively, seem to be increasingly obsolescent commodities.

However, in the early twentieth century, the planet was still seen as infinite, whereas it was life, thanks, in part, to Nietzsche, and later the existentialists, that was now seen as finite, resulting in a questioning of subjectivity and *being* in general. This questioning,

²⁷⁴ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘Woolf’s Evasion’, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p 80, <https://epdf.pub/queue/cosmopolitan-style-modernism-beyond-the-nation.html>, (viewed 24/6/2019).

²⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987, p 25.

²⁷⁶ Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘The New Depthiness’, 2015, p 8.

²⁷⁷ Edward Said, in Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘Woolf’s Evasion’, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, p 80.

nevertheless, adhered to the fundamental belief that fractures could be healed, that *being* was in the Heideggerian sense, ‘always already ... in the world’, that both individually and geographically, ‘home’, and ‘place’ were singular, and ‘time’ marked their ‘stage in the one and only narrative ... possible to tell ...’²⁷⁸ The crisis of modernism was a crisis of subjectivity, a crisis of *being*, and to be an exile was considered to be unhomed, geographically, temporally, and psychologically whether from a birthplace, a history, or a psyche. The historical ‘rite of passage’ and traditional subjective formation from adolescent to adult, for both men and women, was ruptured on the battlefields of Europe, in the growing suburban sprawl of the city, and in the ships carrying émigrés to an imagined new and safer future, while paradoxically carrying ideological exiles and marginalised outliers to an imagined freedom.

This crisis of being and its representation of a structure of feeling is iconically [now] recognised as modernist through the ‘denaturalizing of language ... [the] self reflexive text ... [the] repudiat[ion] of fixed forms ... and the very necessity of market popularity ...’²⁷⁹ The last point in this 1989 quote by Raymond Williams with regards to ‘the repudiation of market popularity’ as a trope of modernism prophetically and paradoxically points to a future intensifying commodification of modernism with regards to artistic expression, where in the same 1989 lecture he explains eventually ‘modernism lost its antibourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism.’²⁸⁰ However, in keeping with Williams’ structure of feeling in relation to an historicised modernist affect through a *crisis* of being and its manifestation through alienation and loss, to be exiled was not only an ideological and free choice made by artists and writers. The philosophical

²⁷⁸ Doreen Massey, in ‘Introduction’, Anthony Faramelli, David Hancock, & Robert G. White (Eds), *Spaces of Crisis and Critique: Heterotopias Beyond Foucault*, London UK: Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2018, p 1.

²⁷⁹ Raymond Williams, ‘When was Modernism?’ *New Left Review*, Vol 1 No 175, 1989, p 2, <https://newleftreview.org/I/175/raymond-williams-when-was-modernism>, (viewed 3/1/2018).

²⁸⁰ Raymond Williams, ‘When was Modernism?’ p 3.

questions surrounding *being* through the inter-war years metamorphoses through *crisis* – crisis of territory, of displacement, and of genealogy – into questions of *becoming* where, as Williams again prophesises, ‘[if] we still habitually use “modern” ... *indifferently* ... all that is left to us is to *become* post-moderns.’²⁸¹

Of course, while Williams’ prophesy, from a temporal perspective, is inevitable as an intrinsic element of historicity, as suggested earlier, and acknowledged across disciplines, the past lives on in our memories and experiences through affect and emotion. In *becoming* postmodern, in the relative safety, security, and prosperity of the post-war years, at least in the West, the crisis of *being* is superseded, almost forgotten, by a crisis of *becoming* in both Western and Eastern ideologies. These ideologies were multifariously experienced by the emergence of Indigenous and first people’s land rights, feminism, and the gay pride movement, by first generation migrants and refugees and their second generation offspring, by postcolonial independences, by the literal and metaphorical fall of walls and the insidious redistribution of European borders, and by the free market which silently continues to commodify all in its path. Movement and circulation becomes, as opposed to modernist platial and temporal linearity and hierarchy, the indifferent detachment of a postmodernist ‘theoretical discourse of alternatives.’²⁸² The Heideggerian static ‘always already’ which in turn influenced the existentialist and phenomenologist ‘ethical responsibility’ of subjectivity expands into the more fluid ‘always becoming’ of Deleuze and Guattari where a crisis of identity evolves into a crisis of representation through a growing theoretical and philosophical identification of a politics of difference and location, and the corresponding material tensions inherent within this becoming.

²⁸¹ Raymond Williams, ‘When was Modernism?’ p 1.

²⁸² Peter V. Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature*, p 151.

While heterotopias, as Foucault suggests, have historically and temporally always existed, connected and embodied through, as van Gennep identifies, rites of passage, the difference, the *hetero*, of these places and passages, begin to concentrate in postmodernity and become ‘powerful sites of social and discursive transformation.’²⁸³ Modernist roots become postmodernist rhizomes, epitomised by Deleuze and Guattari in the second quote that introduces this section. Roots and rhizomes are botanically differentiated by rhizomes’ subversive reversal of the ‘normative’ root system which, from seeds, sends roots down into the soil while stems push vertically towards light, whereas rhizomes spread their roots and shoots horizontally from nodes on stems underground where if ‘the tree is filiation ... the rhizome is alliance ...’²⁸⁴ The national *becomes* transnational, territory *becomes* deterritorialised, subjectivity *becomes* minor, theory *becomes* nomadic, and the only elements that appear to remain constant, like heterotopias and rites of passage (and the perpetual argument between form and content, reality and mimesis, place and space, and aesthetics and politics), are the immanent tensions ingrained in our experience and perception of the ‘other’, and the growing globalisation of capitalism and its intensive commodification of this *becoming* and this ‘other’.

Critical analysis emerges as just as much a symptom of, as a possible antidote to, the structure of feeling of postmodernism where the transnational metamorphoses into the multicultural, and perceptions of the ‘other’ and of ‘difference’ are only intensified. The fluid freedom of deterritorialisation while subverting on the one hand, also enhances on the other, the modernist dialectic of imperialist centre and heroic margin where becoming minor ‘[as] a utopian process of letting go of privileged identities and practices ... through imagining ... the production of sites of escape or decolonisation ... signals a kind of theoretical tourism.’²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Rosi Braidotti, ‘A critical cartography of feminist post-postmodernism’, p 171.

²⁸⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p 25.

²⁸⁵ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 88.

This romanticised notion of ‘deterritorialisation’ which, although Deleuze and Guattari suggest ultimately involves ‘reterritorialisation’: ‘the return of sense after the experimentation of “becoming minor”²⁸⁶, the nomad, however radical, remains alteric in postmodernism as the ‘location and situation of the critic become[s] ... crucial ... in the politics of theoretical production’²⁸⁷ where although ‘the dialectical [postmodern] subject [is] the subject thought fit to overturn a dualist system,²⁸⁸ only creates a subverted one, and in so doing, the dualist system remains.

Along with Deleuze and Guattari, Williams, and Jameson, a number of other critics intuited the cyclical action and reaction nature of experience, its representation, and its rationalisation and interpretation, where in response to Deleuze and Guattari’s ongoing rhizome without beginning or end, Bertens identifies ‘the difficult position of trying to honour the claims of both ... representation and anti-representation, of both consensus and dissensus ... to reconcile the demands of rationality and those of the sublime ...’²⁸⁹ Just as Jameson suggests that postmodernism is simply another step on the process we call modernism, which itself evolves out of romanticism. Funk also suggests postmodernism is ‘the consistent and radical continuation of modernism’s aesthetic premise of dissociation and a crisis of representation.’²⁹⁰ Where ultimately Funk may be right in saying ‘postmodernism’s most lasting achievement [is] to have shown that eventually even an endless free play of signifiers will not be able to deliver us – as individuals and as a society – from an inherent pining for closure and congruence.’²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 89.

²⁸⁷ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 96.

²⁸⁸ Rosi Braidotti, in Rosi Braidotti and Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Borrowed Energy’, *Frieze*, 2014, p 6, <https://frieze.com/article/borrowed-energy>, (viewed 17/10/2018).

²⁸⁹ Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, Milton Park UK: Taylor and Francis, 1994, p 238.

²⁹⁰ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 4.

²⁹¹ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 4.

Funk's suggestion reflects an intensifying evolution into the simultaneous metamodernism of our present, where Delueze and Guattari's 'always becoming' combines with Braidotti's 'subject that is multiple ... constantly in flux ... [but paradoxically] ... allows us to identify our own *belonging* in the very structure we are trying to undo ... [and] with humility ... we can go about reterritorialising it.'²⁹² This respectful materialist reterritorialising combines the fluidity of spatial becoming with the solace of platial being and metamorphoses into a configuration of belonging *with* the world. Of course our metamodern crisis then is one of *belonging* and the tensions this enacts with regards to communication, critique, and creation, or repeats with regards to borders, boundaries, and bodies. An overwhelming desire to have a 'tribe' or to find 'our people' intensifies in a digital environment of 'non-mobile transnationalism'.²⁹³ Difference atomises our existence into particles of position, location, and politics where paradoxically as the contemporary world seemingly moves toward an annihilation of itself, a growing identification for planetary monism and a twenty-first century cosmopolitanism emerges, which (metamodernly) leads us back to where we started in this section.

Said's modernist 'practice of humanistic service ... [which] ... entails a heroic unwillingness to rest in the consolidation of previously existing attitudes'²⁹⁴ describes a cosmopolitanistic structure of feeling inherent in the historicised period of modernism, but also colours our own present where a 'new cosmopolitanism' sits alongside a 'new materialism' and 'affective turn' which reflects a practice, while not necessarily 'heroic' in the modernist sense alone, certainly remains, for some, an inherent 'unwillingness to rest.' However, through this crisis and tension, affective empowerment and agency allows for a

²⁹² Rosi Braidotti, in Rosi Braidotti and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Borrowed Energy', *Frieze*, 2014, p 6.

²⁹³ Kristian Shaw, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-first century Fiction*, Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p 140.

²⁹⁴ Edward Said, in Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Woolf's Evasion', *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, p 80.

more positive and vital possibility of transformation through redefined ideas of becoming where traditional heterotopic spaces and rites of passage affirmatively intensify and atomise into endless reflections of embodied subjectivity. These becomings and belongings emerge out of modern and postmodern metaphorical and linguistic representation and theoretical discourses which sees hierarchies of value with regards to margins and centres subvert and switch but ultimately remain dialectic, evolving into a metamodern politics of location which requires a deeper acknowledgement of our own and others' actions, advantages, and abilities, to affect, and to be affected.

Braidotti sees Deleuze's 'nomadic thought', not as a concept, but as a 'navigational tool'²⁹⁵ [which] 'encourages us to recognise the intersections between mobility, multiple identities, and ethical belonging and accountability [through] a vital materialist political philosophy of change for this millennium.'²⁹⁶ Using the idea of philosophy as a navigational tool reflects Genocchio's recognition of Foucault's heterotopia discussed in the preceding chapter which suggests heterotopias 'designate not so much an absolutely differentiated space as the site of that very limit, tension, impossibility,'²⁹⁷ which allows for authentic transformation through 'recognising the need for "strategically fixed fronts, boundaries, and centres" ... [but also] acknowledges tactical, political exigencies'²⁹⁸ as 'a contact zone for analysis.'²⁹⁹

Returning to Vermeulen's description of metamodern 'performative affect' quoted earlier in this chapter – if it feels true to you ... it may well be ... true for you ... – relates to the third epigraph, also by Vermeulen, that introduced this discussion with regards to

²⁹⁵ Rosi Braidotti, in Rosi Braidotti and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Borrowed Energy', *Frieze*, 2014, p 5.

²⁹⁶ Rosi Braidotti in Rosi Braidotti and Lisa Regan, 'Our Times Are always Out of Joint: Feminist Relational Ethics in and of the World Today: An Interview with Rose Braidotti', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2017, p 174, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09574042.2017.1355683>, (viewed 23/7/2019).

²⁹⁷ Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces, in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Eds), *Postmodern cities and spaces*, p 42.

²⁹⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 96.

²⁹⁹ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007, p 5.

historicised and evolving structures of feeling: ‘Just because it’s fake doesn’t mean I don’t feel it.’ Vermeulen uses this line to suggest an intensification of postmodernism’s *crisis* of representation where ‘the unfamiliar through instant replays and “real-time” transmissions,’³⁰⁰ normativises into a metamodern subjective structure of feeling, ‘one whose empirical reality lies above the surface even if its performative register floats just below it: depthiness.’³⁰¹ This ‘depthiness’ acts as an example of Kathleen Stewart’s ‘contact zone for analysis’ mentioned above and reflects a metamodern ‘oscillating between past and present, absence and presence ...’³⁰² where if ‘the modernists excavated depth from the surface, [and] the postmodernists flattened it by means of the surface, the metamodernists apply depth onto the surface.’³⁰³

Braidotti and Vermeulen’s positions epitomise the tensions between prescriptive and descriptive models of metamodernism, which reflect similar tensions between ‘style’ as an aesthetic and a lived experience which recalls Wilde’s provocative and prescriptive position of life imitates art in tension with Vermeulen’s descriptive art imitates life position. This tension is reflected in discourses which see ‘style’ as a literary manifesting of ‘attitude, stance, posture and consciousness’,³⁰⁴ while others see ‘style’ as ‘crucial to many ... other non-literary practices ...’³⁰⁵ where ‘life ... develops its own “style” [and where] ... establishing ways of existing or styles of life isn’t just an aesthetic matter ...’³⁰⁶ However, the paradoxical simultaneity of metamodernism’s ‘both/and’ paradigm also suggests a converging of both descriptive and prescriptive positions with regards to life, style, and

³⁰⁰Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, HKU Press: Hong Kong, 1997, p 78.

³⁰¹ Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘The New Depthiness’, 2015, p 11.

³⁰² Irmtraud Huber and Wolfgang Funk, ‘Reconstructing Depth: Authentic Fiction and Responsibility’ in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*, London UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p 151.

³⁰³ Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Metamodern Depth or “Depthiness”’, p 149.

³⁰⁴ Kristian Shaw, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-first century Fiction*, p 16.

³⁰⁵ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘Introduction’, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, p 2.

³⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze in Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, ethics, and the limits of materialism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, p 133.

aesthetics, in ‘the rhythms of the present as a compositional event.’³⁰⁷ Jameson’s insistence that ‘the disappearance of history, of historicity, [and] the reduction to the present ... [is] ... a reduction to the body, because if you’re in the present that’s really all you have’³⁰⁸ in a metamodern paradigm combines this embodied present with Stewart’s present as a ‘bloom space ... [of] being *in* history ...’³⁰⁹ Lauren Berlant explains ‘Affect works in the present, and so the ongoing historical present ... stands ... as a thing being made, lived through, and apprehended.’³¹⁰ In other words, and contrary to Jameson’s suggestion that ‘artistic forms which used to be able to draw on longer and larger temporalities ... now seem incapable of doing that,’³¹¹ metamodernist literature reflects, not so much an incapability of appreciating temporal influence, but instead combines both a surface reality – a postmodern horizontal plane of endlessly repeating experience – with a modern sensitivity of atmospheric affect which flows under, around, and above, geographically and temporally, the surface of presence as a lingering of absence. We intuit or *feel* something is missing, but we don’t know what it is. This intuition manifests, not simply, or only, as an anxiety of direction or of something lost in metamodern literature, but also as a *feeling* of possibility. Stewart describes this ‘bloom space’ as ‘a promissory note ... an allure and a threat that shows up in ordinary sensibilities of not knowing ...’³¹² Somewhere between Moretti’s ‘national literature for people who see trees [and] world literature for people who see waves,’³¹³ metamodern literature reflects the Woolfian ‘I am rooted but I flow’³¹⁴ as ‘a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions.’³¹⁵

³⁰⁷ Kathleen Stewart, ‘Afterword: Worlding Refrains’, *The Affect Theory Reader*, p 340.

³⁰⁸ Frederic Jameson, ‘Revisiting Postmodernism: An Interview with Frederic Jameson’, p 145.

³⁰⁹ Kathleen Stewart, ‘Afterword: Worlding Refrains’, *The Affect Theory Reader*, p 340.

³¹⁰ Lauren Berlant, ‘Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event’, p 845.

³¹¹ Frederic Jameson, ‘Revisiting Postmodernism: An Interview with Frederic Jameson’, p 145.

³¹² Kathleen Stewart, ‘Afterword: Worlding Refrains’, p 340.

³¹³ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures of World Literature’, p 68.

³¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, in Rosi Braidotti and Lisa Regan, ‘Our Times Are always Out of Joint: Feminist Relational Ethics in and of the World Today: An Interview with Rosi Braidotti’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2017, p 174.

³¹⁵ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures of World Literature’, p 67.

The above discussion is my theoretical attempt to trace the evolution of historical affect which manifests in crisis and transforms through difference to suggest, as I have discovered, it is the similarities and connections that reverberate, both geographically and temporally, just as much as the differences and the contradictions that are important in the kind of comparative methodology that supports my research. These reverberations became the embryotic underpinning of my novel as I discussed in my introduction and Chapter One of this thesis, and have organically materialised once again on this journey as an ‘at sea’ researcher, leaving suggestions and signs that comfort and confirm, acknowledging, for me at least, that I am in the right place, at the right time, while accepting that it can only ever be so.

‘We felt we belonged to the sea.’³¹⁶

‘Privileged? We came with nothing.’³¹⁷

‘Without need we cannot be disappointed.’³¹⁸

Judith Brett suggests ‘a decentred subject is all very well on paper, but it’s best kept there’ [explaining that] ‘detachment from and mastery over the text’s pain’ is a strategy that critics can use to ‘regain ... a unified subject position ...’³¹⁹ Fiction writers, also, use this strategy. Brian Castro describes this state of detachment as wanting ‘to be someone else, somewhere else, in order to see myself.’³²⁰ Both Stead, de Kretser, and I too as a writer, use this writerly decentredness to discover through juxtapositions of geographic, textual,

³¹⁶ Christina Stead, in Rodney Wetherell, ‘Christina Stead talks with Rodney Wetherell’, *Journal of Poetics Research*, 1979, p 3, <http://poeticsresearch.com/article/christina-stead-talks-with-rodney-wetherell-1979-2/>, (viewed 1/2/2019).

³¹⁷ Michelle de Kretser, in Alexandra Watkins, ‘Tourists, travellers, refugees: An interview with Michelle de Kretser’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol 52, No 5, 2016, p 576, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1233681> (viewed 15/8/2019).

³¹⁸ Fiona Wright, *The World was Whole*, Sydney NSW: Giramondo Publishing, 2018, p 234.

³¹⁹ Judith Brett, ‘The Process of Becoming: Antigone Kefala’s *The First Journey* and *The Island*, Book Review, *Meanjin*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Mar 1985, p 126.

³²⁰ Brian Castro, ‘Heterotopias: Writing and Location’, p 179.

aesthetic, and embodied sites, the paradox of heterotopian transformation as ‘locations [of] the unfamiliar’³²¹, which manifest through stories of travel. Simone Fullagar suggests these stories of travel are ‘always intertextual, referring ceaselessly to other journeys, images, and associations ... [and that] ‘writing and travel both afford the possibility of rupture,’³²² where this possibility is ‘at the risk of decentring the self.’³²³

As Fullagar suggests, writing, like travelling, is a risky (ad) venture. In an interview De Kretser explains that ‘When you write a novel, you realise you are writing a different novel to the one you thought.’³²⁴ The same could be said for travelling. Even if, as de Kretser’s Laura recognises upon arriving in London, ‘That was what it meant to be Australian: you came to London for the first time and discovered what you already knew,’³²⁵ Fiona Wright describes her first trip to England, as ‘somehow familiar even as it was entirely alien, entirely new ... I hadn’t expected this at all.’³²⁶ There is a paradox at work here where even the familiar, the expected or planned, can de-stable and desist when de-centred through travel, and the space of writing. Stead’s decentring takes the form of an ‘expatriate woman modernist ... working *from the other direction* ...’³²⁷ while de Kretser’s decentring emanates from a postmodern ‘manifestation of existential homelessness’³²⁸ and my own decentring takes the form of a metamodern ‘existential implosion: a self that feels empty inside but at the same time entrapped in the self.’³²⁹ These decentrings, I suggest, far from being kept on the

³²¹ Brian Castro, ‘Heterotopias: Writing and Location’, p 179.

³²² Simone Fullagar, ‘Narratives of travel: desire and the movement of feminine subjectivity’, p 61.

³²³ Simone Fullagar, ‘Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis’ travel writing’, *Tourist Studies*, Vol 1, No 2, 2001, p 174, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/146879760100100204>, (viewed 10/9/2019).

³²⁴ Michelle de Kretser, Author Interview, ‘Adelaide Writers’ Week 2018.

³²⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 57.

³²⁶ Fiona Wright, ‘The Green Country’, *Southerly*, 2019, <https://southerlyjournal.com.au/2019/07/01/the-green-country/>, (viewed 25/7/2019).

³²⁷ Fiona Morrison, ‘Modernist/Provincial/Pacific: Christina Stead, Katherine Mansfield and the expatriate home ground’, *JASAL*, 2013, p 1, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/9863>, (viewed 9/10/2019).

³²⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 140.

³²⁹ Ncoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* p. 171.

page, oscillate and reverberate via Birns' emotional reading that sits between text and context, which 'give middle distance emotional categories a relevance they lacked in more hierarchal days.'³³⁰ Affective registers resonate with unspoken experiences and mysterious ambiguities in Stead's, de Kretser's and my own writing, and reflect a particular 'Antipodean effect of de-centring ... which offer ... complex ... accounts of region, gender and geography,'³³¹ through both oscillating and simultaneous cosmopolitan, transnational, and transcultural readings and representations.

Reflected in the quotes that introduce this section, Stead's modernist cosmopolitanism, de Kretser's postmodern transnationalism, and Wright's metamodernist transculturalism imbue each other in a palimpsestic fashion, with notions of globality, locality, and belonging with the shared pronoun 'we'. However, while inclusive in connotation, their use of this 'we' infers a subtext of embodied difference. Stead's 'we', although pertaining to her family in this context, connotes also an imperialistic confidence of 'all were equal'.³³² A postmodern suspicion would identify that Stead's 'all' not only 'belong' to the sea, but the sea 'belongs' to all through a critique of modernist colonisation which questions who this 'all' exactly is? Of course, Stead would say quite sincerely 'no, not at all ... the sea is a continent with no passports ...'³³³ without recognising any underlying privilege with that, to some, maddening modernist utopianism. However, from a metamodernist perspective, Stead's vitalist cosmopolitanism, while recognising its problematics in our atomised world, still desires its outcome where indeed, 'all' includes land, sea, and air, as well as the animate and inanimate that make up our planet, and in some ways Stead's cosmopolitanism could be read as having an almost posthuman sensibility.

³³⁰ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*, p. 90.

³³¹ Fiona Morrison, 'Modernist/Provincial/Pacific', p 2.

³³² Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story: The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, p 5.

³³³ Christina Stead, in Rodney Wetherell, 'Christina Stead talks with Rodney Wetherell', p 3.

De Kretser's 'we', once again, pertains to family, but the connotation here suggests this 'we' reflects the experience of her fellow Sri Lankan Burghers who did not all make their escape due to cultural persecution. Her questioning of privilege as it relates to her own experience suggests a problematic postmodern transnationalism, where its utopian suggestion of borderless nations, manifests in a multicultural, but one-way dialogue that 'does not distinguish ... they are just ... economic migrants ...'³³⁴ who must assimilate and be grateful. De Kretser's 'we', far from Stead's naïve, but sincere inclusivity, suggests a postmodern deconstruction of subjective identity which at the time of de Kretser's arrival in Australia (1972) suggests a postmodern, however subverted, negative dialectic. Once again, however, by reading de Kretser's 'we' through a metamodern lens, which is 'not linguistically framed,'³³⁵ this 'we' can be 'firmly located somewhere' and seen as both 'materialist and relational'.³³⁶ De Kretser's 'we', through a more metamodern transcultural rather than simply a transnational reading, calls for both respect as well as recognition: recognition of geographical difference, but also respect for embodied suffering.

Fiona Wright's 'we' reflects, through a metamodern reading which combines both modernist and postmodernist sensibilities, Braidotti's posthuman subject described above as both 'materialist and relational'³³⁷ and one could say epitomises its definition of inclusivity and individuality where the postmodern playfulness of representation through the second person singular 'you' develops into a more inclusive metamodern usage of the first person plural. The title of the non-fiction text Wright's quote comes from, *The World was Whole*, while not a focus of my overall project, acts as an example of a turn to affect of our current epoch which reflects a structure of feeling that simultaneously recognises postmodern subjective fracturing and modern yearning for 'wholeness'. Alison Gibbons suggests that

³³⁴ Michelle de Kretser, in Alexandra Watkins, 'Tourists, travellers, refugees, p 576.

³³⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2013, p 51.

³³⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp 51-52.

³³⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 52.

‘while the postmodernist sense of subjectivity (as fragmented, socially constructed and textually fabricated) persists, it does so alongside a renewed desire to recognise personal feelings and interpersonal connections.’³³⁸ Wright’s statement suggests a postmodern irony which reflects in itself a modernist representation of individualistic angst combined with a metamodernist ‘desire for some form of community ... in other words: “a structural need for a we”’.³³⁹ This need connects Stead’s modernist idea of ‘belonging’ which, as I suggest above, could also be read through a posthuman paradigm, with Gibbons’ metamodern identification of a desire, a yearning, for community.

‘She created a design ... in colours ... curled and dark-blue waves were the locks of a woman’s hair ...’³⁴⁰

‘Laura put it down to the weather ... a sultry dampness that recalled childhood ... a jacaranda haunting went on for weeks.’³⁴¹

‘There’s a pattern you know ... in the colours ... there’s no sea in that one ... it’s the odd one out if you think about it.’³⁴²

Keeping in mind Birns’ emotional reading, which sits in between text and context, and the metamodern sensibility and methodology of reverberation that underpins this thesis, the following final section of this ‘oceanic’ chapter connects the autobiographical ‘we’ of the previous section to the imagined ‘she’ suggested in the fictional quotes above through recognising patterns of affective registers of colour and the heterotopic transformations they represent and engender.

³³⁸ Alison Gibbons, ‘Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect’ in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, Roman & Littlefield International: London, 2017, p 130.

³³⁹ Noline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* p. 359.

³⁴⁰ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 238.

³⁴¹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 203.

³⁴² Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 285.

Like the famous ‘blue planet’ image of the earth as seen from space, the colour blue, in all its variations, is a presence that saturates Stead’s, de Kretser’s, and my own narrative. Whether it be Stead’s character Teresa’s menacing dark blue waves, de Kretser’s character Laura’s recurring and uncanny purple-blue flowers, or my own character Sophie’s refracted recognition of the absence of a blue sea in a certain photograph, the evocations of blue in these quotes adhere to its melancholic representation of yearning and loss which permeates all three narratives.

Stead’s blue, as represented in her ‘dark-blue waves’ is a heavy blue, and in *For Love Alone*, the sea, although very familiar to Stead and to her character, Teresa, who both live (Teresa) and lived (Stead) within walking distance from the Pacific Ocean, often materialises as threatening:

Hundreds of feet beneath, the sea bursting its skin began to gush up against the receding tide; with trumpet sounds, wild elephants rose in a herd from the surf and charged the cliffs; the ground trembled, water hissed in the cracks.³⁴³

And again:

The ocean was stirring again. *Boom!* Yes, at the foot of the cliffs, it was beginning again. The first sounds had come several hours before, a faint boom, washing the silent bay. In the clear still weather, with the hordes of fish and the filming of the sky, this irregular humming meant a disturbance approaching.³⁴⁴

These descriptions of the sea are very different from Stead’s prologue of the ‘crowded Pacific Ocean with its reefs, atolls, and archipelagos,’³⁴⁵ which sees a more benevolent and possibly nostalgic remembering by Stead, as suggested in Chapter One of this thesis, transform into a more materialistic rendering of experience as the narrative progresses which sees the sea as ‘full bellied ... a woman who had known ... men’s love and been deserted ...

³⁴³ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 74.

³⁴⁴ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 80.

³⁴⁵ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 2.

felt a bud growing on its stalk in her body ... drank up the ocean and was drowned.’³⁴⁶

Stead’s ‘dark-blue waves’ suggests the sea as both dangerous and powerful and reflects Teresa’s confusion and frustration with regards to her own sexual potential and situation where the sea, specifically the Pacific in this instance, offers both escape and extinction which also suggests, from a metamodern reading, far from an ‘either/or’ dialectic, a more ‘both/and’ heterotopian materiality. For Stead, as Fiona Morrison suggests, ‘the material and the social were inextricably linked with a powerful affective and aesthetic sense of the interconnection of things.’³⁴⁷

Stead’s heavy and humid blue atmosphere of Sydney deepens into an almost perpetual midnight blue in Teresa’s London where, as opposed to her Australian incarnation of ‘the woman clothed with the sun ... mad with ardour ...’³⁴⁸, the sun seems never to be shining. The abyss suggested in the interminable darkness of the London scenes reflects Teresa and Johnny’s ‘blindness’³⁴⁹ with regards to their relationship and their own, albeit oblivious, responsibility for its failure due to their profound differences and desires. The dark blue, almost blackness, of Stead’s London abyss conjures impressions of depth as well as darkness, which denotes the modernist ‘problems of the human heart in conflict with itself ...’ and its hierarchal system of value ‘because only that is worth writing about ...’³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as Rooney illumines, paradoxically it is ‘the betrayal of the self that transforms the self’³⁵¹ in *For Love Alone* and suggests this transformation is a heterotopic one where an ‘othering’ of the self opens up the possibility of recognition and responsibility.

³⁴⁶ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 74.

³⁴⁷ Fiona Morrison, ‘A Transfiguration of my Local Patriotism’, *Westerly*, Vol 62, No 2, 2017, p 93.

³⁴⁸ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 100.

³⁴⁹ Brigid Rooney, ‘Manifesto of the Senses: Blind Sightedness in Christina Stead’s *For Love Alone*’, *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol 24, No 3-4, 2009, p 53-65.

³⁵⁰ William Faulkner, ‘Nobel Prize in Literature Speech’.

Teresa, in her continuous self-questioning, simply finds ever more questions than satisfactory answers and indeed, with regards to her own musings on the colour blue, suggests a simultaneity of affect where ‘fifteen or sixteen blues can produce a hundred or more sensations; also feelings of joy, melancholy, despair and sensations without form or which have not yet borrowed a form ... does pleasure exist by itself?’³⁵² Here, Stead is anticipating the current turn to affect and its polemics which, as discussed previously in this chapter, centre around the differences between emotion and affect in a what came first tug of war; however, Stead, as an example of her metamodern and posthuman sensibility sees ‘the multiple vague sensations of contact, sight, sound, smell, fear, expectation, hate, blood-lust, all at once ...’³⁵³ Having said that, she attributes these ‘confused and relaxed feeling[s]’ noted above with the ‘so-called crowd instinct’ but aligns herself with ‘the lunatic, the lover, the poet and the nervous child [who] have no use for the crowd,’ and shortly after ‘for the poor, those who learn to cry young, they are careful to teach impure, unhappy, harsh laughter, amusements that bring only sorrow – like the lovers in the bay. By “they”, I don’t know who I mean. But I am trying to get by them – whoever they are.’³⁵⁴

This isolating and unknowing but instinctual avoidance of societal expectations, reflects the midnight blue perpetual twilight atmosphere Stead creates in *For Love Alone*, where Teresa only has eyes for Johnny as the song goes, and only sees a ‘dull green country’ and a ‘dull rainy light’³⁵⁵ when she first arrives. In fact, ‘She looked at nothing. It was nothing to her that she was in England. She had never wanted to see England. It was Johnny she was seeing.’³⁵⁶ The perpetual midnight blue twilight of blind denial and unawareness persists throughout the novel until Teresa finally recognises her choices have been fated in

³⁵² Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 253.

³⁵³ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 254.

³⁵⁴ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 254-255.

³⁵⁵ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 296-297.

³⁵⁶ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 295.

some way, but that paradoxically by making these choices, she sees a more colourful future: ‘She suddenly understood that ... she had merely fought through that bristling black and sterile plain of misery and that beyond was the real world, red, gold, green, white ...’³⁵⁷

However, in keeping with a metamodernist reading of Stead’s understanding of the paradoxes of existence, she doesn’t end the novel in this polychromatic world, but instead returns the reader to the shadows of modernist ambivalence with Teresa’s novel ending question: ‘It’s dreadful to think that it will go on being repeated for ever, he – and me! What’s there to stop it?’³⁵⁸ However, Teresa is complicit in this dreadful repetition: ‘She had not loved him for a long time. It was a lie. She had played with his emotions merely to help herself out’ and later ‘... her affair with Jonathan was only a step to the unknown man; she would use him for that.’³⁵⁹ This is reflected in the penultimate scene before Stead’s final question, where Teresa sees Johnny in the street and while Johnny appears ‘vile faced ... and bent backed’, Teresa also, in the lamplight looks ‘ghastly ... blue ... her eyes ... pale vapours in brilliant eye-balls.’³⁶⁰ This mirroring suggests that they both had hidden their true colours at times throughout the narrative which is reflected in the flash of the lamplight’s illumination and the dark shadows beyond it.

As I suggested in Chapter One of this thesis, while not endeavouring to answer Stead’s concluding question quoted above, I intuit that in de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* through her depiction of her character Laura, suggests that Stead’s question is still a relevant one. Laura’s relationships are but a small part of de Kretser’s overall narrative, but to keep the painterly motif of this discussion continuing, Stead’s ‘fifteen or sixteen’ shades of blue with regards to the experience and representation of love, in *Questions of Travel* Stead’s dark blue oceanic abyss of misunderstandings and misreadings gives way to a haziness of purple

³⁵⁷ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, Virago Press: London, 1981, p 494.

³⁵⁸ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, Virago Press: London, 1981, p 502.

³⁵⁹ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, Virago Press: London, 1981, p 228.

³⁶⁰ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, Virago Press: London, 1981, p 501.

blues interspersed with the occasional flash of contrasting reds and greens. These occasional flashes both replicates the experience of snorkelling along a reef with brightly coloured fish coming in and out of view, reminiscent of Stead’s jewelled Pacific, but also a more metaphorical representation of memory and the past as experiences and objects appearing and disappearing. The affect is less one of profound melancholy perpetuated through dark blues and shadowy chiaroscuros, but instead de Kretser skips from one shiny surface scenario to the next. Melancholy is indeed present, but not allowed to be experienced in any cathartic or obvious transformative sense and instead is reflected back to the reader and away from the character like light bouncing off the ocean. As discussed previously in this chapter, this surface skimming conjures a metamodern sensibility which combines a postmodern flattening of experience along with a metamodernist depth which while not eschewing modernist notions of ‘height, texture, [and] abyss’³⁶¹, this metamodernist depth, which is reflected in de Kretser’s prismatic prose, is hidden beneath the shimmering surface.

As suggested in the quote that heads this section and the above discussion, de Kretser’s blue, unlike Stead’s menacing perpetual midnight, is silky and pale, and tinted with hues of lavender, lilac, and violet. Like a post-impressionist painting where ‘space is suggested almost exclusively by colour ... [in] a new prismatic chiaroscuro ...’³⁶², de Kretser uses colour to convey emotions and feelings that are at the same time languid and lofty, hinting, in their seeming innocence, to deeper demons and desires. The lilac blue of the Jacaranda flowers that haunt Laura connote not only the melancholy of nostalgia for her childhood home of Sydney, but in their lilac tinge, also the melancholy of mourning where in Victorian culture, black was replaced by lilac to indicate the second stage of mourning that allows for a gradual ‘return’ to society. This historical detail is explained by de Kretser when

³⁶¹ Diana Senechal, ‘The “Old Verities” and the Lamentation Sprawl’, 2013, <https://dianasenechal.wordpress.com/2013/08/04/the-old-veritys-and-the-lamentation-sprawl/>, p 2, (viewed 7/2/2018).

³⁶² Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, p 141.

describing Ravi's mother after her husband's death, 'now in the purple stage of mourning, donned an uncrushable lilac dress'³⁶³, but also suggests, through the Jacaranda haunting, Laura's 'returning' to Australia, and more sinisterly, the ghost-like 'lilac woman' who 'returns' to find her long lost son. The melancholy of nostalgia and mourning, of loss and yearning, saturates de Kretser's text like a blue base layer of a painting which, almost palimpsestically, allows for other colours that reflect specific memories and moments, subjects and objects, to appear more noticeable as they are mirrored and repeated throughout the narrative. Uncannily, these other colours that are repeated and mirrored – red and green – also connect to Stead's 'real world' of colour quoted above.

Green, both in the psychology of colour and in de Kretser's text, represents jealousy, life, and money. The green-eyed monster, the green light, the green-back (money), are mainly represented through the character of Laura's Aunt Hester whose Venetian 'sea-green, gold-flecked bead'³⁶⁴, along with a substantial inheritance are bestowed to Laura by her aunt upon her death in a kind of palimpsestic and intertextual hall of mirrors. This reflects not only, it seems, Laura's fatedness to travel to London, and her disappointment in love with an unavailable married man and the jealousy which ensues from this situation, which mirrors Hester's, but also Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*. White's main character, Theodora, unhappy in love, also travels overseas via an inheritance. Hester's green bead is mentioned again towards the end of the novel, when Laura looks at photographs of a recent holiday to Venice and remembers Hester's forgotten green bead of 'solid green water.'³⁶⁵ Much earlier on in the novel Hester, when moving house, also loses the bead which mirrors Laura's later loss, and Laura realises 'that her faith in *away* had also been lost ... [but that] ... *away* [also] took on the aspect of a solution.'³⁶⁶ The green bead represents the dynamism, the life force,

³⁶³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 22.

³⁶⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 5.

³⁶⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 466.

³⁶⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 466.

of forward movement for both Hester and Laura, but the wash of de Kretser's melancholic lilac blue, which colours the entire novel, reflects their experience of loss and yearning and echoes in the loss of the green bead. Hester's loss is due to the ravages of time and choices while Laura's loss reflects a more restless spirit of never being satisfied (and mirrors Hester's experience) where 'away is hard to go, but no one / Asked me to stay'³⁶⁷ which is repeated again much later in the novel when Laura also realises 'No one was asking her to stay.'³⁶⁸

The opposite of green on the colour wheel is red. De Kretser's recurring red pinpoints subjects and objects that echo and reverberate throughout the novel in a heterotopic form of 'doubling, repetition, return.'³⁶⁹ In her use of the colour red, de Kretser references modernism once again through another palimpsestic allusion to Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*. Like flashes of an ambulance's light, red represents danger, violence, and anger, but also passion, lust, and desire. These affects are represented in both name and deed in Theo, whose name echoes White's character Theodora. Theo gives Laura (and gives away his own connection to these affects) a red teapot that Laura desires, which represents stability to her; he also gives her a red star bought in Naples, where Laura's Jacaranda haunting began; and he gives her a red kilim that belonged to his mother. Laura carries these red items with her throughout her travels and throughout the text, until she too, prophetically, also gives away the red star towards the end of the novel, as if, unknowingly, she is leaving life and love behind in some way. The echoing and mirroring continues with Laura's 'round red sparkler of faceted glass'³⁷⁰, one of three rings she wears while living in Naples, which suggests, unlike Hester's 'ringless fingers'³⁷¹ that 'fate, magic, outcomes that seemed ordained – they hadn't yet

³⁶⁷ Kathleen Raine, 'Soliloquies' in Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 8.

³⁶⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 488.

³⁶⁹ Anthony Faramelli, David Hancock, Robert G. White (Eds), 'Introduction', *Spaces of Crisis and Critique: Heterotopias Beyond Foucault*, London UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p 10.

³⁷⁰ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 161.

³⁷¹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 16.

finished with Laura.³⁷² This culminates in another mirroring at the end of the novel when Laura meets the equally jewelled Nimal whose ‘ring set with a garnet’³⁷³ he is still wearing when, ‘turning a dull red stone on his finger’³⁷⁴, he fantasises about a future life with Laura in Sydney, the last thoughts he has when the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami hits Sri Lanka.

De Kretser’s male protagonist, Ravi, also experiences a haunting through the use of colour, but unlike Laura’s nostalgic powdery lilac mourning, Ravi is predominately haunted by the colour red: the red blood of his murdered wife and son, and the ‘red hair curled on the back of the man’s hands’³⁷⁵ of the ‘devil’³⁷⁶ (Australian Foreign Affairs official) Ravi is taken to weekly who abuses Ravi to pay for his refugee visa to Australia. This use of red is shockingly repeated at Ravi’s refugee status hearing, where Ravi realises the new presiding member who will make the decision has ‘fingers ... felted with reddish fur’³⁷⁷ and as ‘he tried not to stare at that soft red hand’³⁷⁸ he realised ‘all the devils were one in the same.’³⁷⁹ Apart from the horrifying details of Ravi’s experience, this reference to red and devils also alludes to Patrick White and ‘the red seducers of White’s imagination, men like Frank Parrot ...’³⁸⁰ who becomes Theodora’s attempted seducer in *The Aunt’s Story*. For both Ravi, and White, it seems ‘red hair on wrists gave him a sharp – and a pang of disgust – all his life.’³⁸¹

De Kretser continues a heterotopic form of ‘doubling, repetition, return’ in her use of colour when Ravi sees the ‘lilac woman’ twice who is actually a boy he knew back in Sri Lanka who is transgender, and has come to Australia to find the son she had while still male, and Laura sees the boy with the red back pack, also twice, who is the searched for son. This

³⁷² Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 152.

³⁷³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 193.

³⁷⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 514.

³⁷⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 233.

³⁷⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 232.

³⁷⁷ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 458.

³⁷⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 459.

³⁷⁹ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 459.

³⁸⁰ David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Sydney NSW: Vintage Classics, 2008, p 101.

³⁸¹ David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, p 101.

doubling and repetition of colour connects Laura and Ravi in a surfeit but surface relation, along with de Kretser's other colourful couplings, where shadows are colourised and the only colours missing are black and white. These tiny details of repeating colour interspersed throughout the text simultaneously soften and illuminate, through their juxtaposition, the 'both/and' metamodernist effect of 'wonderful and terrible things'³⁸² that de Kretser achieves in *Questions of Travel* in a 'thrilling suspension between surface and depth.'³⁸³

Returning to the melancholic blue of de Kretser's base colour that washes under and over *Questions of Travel*, as suggested above both Laura and Ravi experience this melancholy in a refracted or atomised way where they both are in mourning for something lost, but where if mourning and the ability "'to let go" becomes a healthy relation to loss' it turns into melancholy where "'to hold on" becomes a form of pathology.'³⁸⁴ Laura's loss, and her holding on to it, is reflected in her restlessness, which manifests in the novel in her perpetual house sitting, which suggests the 'weird melancholy'³⁸⁵ of the white 'Australian colonial space in the unhappiness of a mass unhousing'³⁸⁶ where a repudiated and manufactured connection to the landscape is based on lies and illegitimacy. Ravi, whose mourning for the loss of his wife and child, and his homeland which he is unable to let go of, is at best misunderstood and at worst belittled by his experiences in Australia. Similar to Laura, Ravi's is also a subverted type of mourning where he is not allowed to truly grieve due to the perceived, unideal nature of his loss. Both Laura and Ravi, through Laura's 'ungrateful' idea that 'away' is better (than Australia), and Ravi's 'ungrateful' idea that

³⁸² Max Liu, Interview with Michelle de Kretser' *The Independent*, 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-enigmas-of-arrival-novelist-michelle-de-kretser-on-a-life-of-leave-takings-and-homecomings-8679008.html>, (viewed 31/5/2019).

³⁸³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 137.

³⁸⁴ Sarah Ahmed, 'Melancholic Migrants' *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p 139.

³⁸⁵ Jennifer Rutherford, 'Undwelling; Or Reading Bachelard in Australia', Jennifer Rutherford and Barbara Holloway (Eds), *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces*, Crawley WA: UWA Publishing, 2010, p 121.

³⁸⁶ Jennifer Rutherford, 'Undwelling; Or Reading Bachelard in Australia', p 123.

‘home’ (Sri Lanka) is better (than Australia), manifests in what Sara Ahmed identifies as ‘affect aliens’³⁸⁷ where ‘if an affective community is produced by sharing objects of loss, which means letting objects go in the right way, then the melancholics would be affect aliens in how they love: their love becomes a failure to get over loss, which keeps them facing the wrong way.’³⁸⁸ However, as de Kretser herself explains, ‘Even if she’d never left Australia, Laura would have been a floating person. She’s searching for a connection to someone, to somewhere. Ravi must flee to save his life but he’s still tethered to Sri Lanka by history and family. In that way, he’s richer than Laura.’³⁸⁹ Indeed, Ravi, having returned to the west coast of Sri Lanka was spared as the tsunami hit the eastern and southern coasts where Laura was holidaying, although Laura’s demise was always ‘fated’ as de Kretser hints at throughout the novel, and points to a more global comeuppance through climatic disaster than a loss at the game of life on Laura’s part.

Stead’s shadowy chiaroscuros and De Kretser’s jewelled palette, along with their melancholic protagonists, as suggested earlier, colour my novel, *The Heartbeats Echo*, but, as the third quote taken that heads this section suggests, it is what is missing that is most important, where a certain colourlessness or lack of vibrancy reflects my protagonists’ personalities and experiences as well as the patterns of what connects them. This reflects the ‘surface skimming’ mentioned earlier where my novel endeavours to act as an example of the metamodern ‘structure of feeling’ which also underpins the methodology of this thesis as one of a ‘postmodern flattening of experience’ combined with ‘modernist notions of height and texture’. This methodology echoes Elspeth Probyn’s suggestion that ‘style and surface are intimately connected’ where surface is seen more as a process of ‘surfacing ... as a way of configuring ... lines of force that are by their very nature *deeply* material and historical.’³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Sarah Ahmed, ‘Melancholic Migrants’ *The Promise of Happiness*, p 141.

³⁸⁸ Sarah Ahmed, ‘Melancholic Migrants’ *The Promise of Happiness*, p 141.

³⁸⁹ Max Liu, Interview with Michelle de Kretser’ *The Independent*, 2013.

³⁹⁰ Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p 12.

My experience of writing is more one of exiled albatross rather than predatory raptor when it comes to plumbing the depths of emotion and their representation where my own melancholic tendencies render, at times, both an overwhelming desire and at the same time an inability to somehow break below the surface in my narrative performance, which is reflected in my character's rather opaque worlds, and in their metamodern yearning for something unknown. For my characters, this yearning manifests through crisis and chaos, into an anxiety of direction, but, paradoxically, also as a *feeling* of hope and possible transformation through patience and acceptance. This patience requires the recognition of the problematics inherent in the idea of a live and let live world corrupted, constrained, and complicated by the commodification of capitalism which are, while not overtly explicated, hinted at throughout my novel *The Heartbeats Echo*.

If Stead's world in *For Love Alone* is coloured in traditional chiaroscuro of black and white, of shadows and light, with splatterings of red and green, and the world de Kretser creates in *Questions of Travel* is based with blue and shot with jewels, the colour palette in my novel *The Heartbeats Echo* sits in between the two. Like looking through a window, the colours are refracted and dispersed, and at times dull and depthless which reflect my characters' metamodern view of the world, which is tired but hopeful, melancholic but mindful. Like Teresa and Johnny, and to some extent, Laura and Ravi, my protagonists, Sophie and Robbie are somewhat blind at times, both to their surroundings and to the emotions and affects that their behaviour has on others, and others' behaviours have on them, not to mention the busy universe, always working to move them forward towards their fate. This twilight living is suggested in the prologue which introduces both characters through their births – Sophie's in the southern hemisphere morning twilight, and Robbie's in the northern hemisphere evening twilight, both under the auspices of the first morning and

evening star, Venus, which suggests both as equal polean opposites, but also their connections and similarities.

As children, Sophie imagines and wishes ‘her white wardrobe was the doorway into a different world’³⁹¹, and Robbie stares out of his bedroom window and ‘daydreams of the ocean.’³⁹² Sophie’s white wardrobe, as a threshold to something exciting, is repeated when her first room in London is furnished with a white wardrobe, and much later in her hotel room at The Anchorage as she stares out to an empty horizon from the painted white doors. Sophie’s world is coloured through her imagination, which comes from a place of child-like innocence represented by the white wardrobe and doors. Sophie’s persona is also one of negativity, in the photographic sense, where her connection to white is also mirrored in ghost-like experiences which seem to have been foretold through Sophie’s imagination: ‘Let’s write a ghost story’³⁹³, Sophie says as a child, and later in the novel ‘You are the ghost, Sophia’³⁹⁴ she is told by a lover, and through Sophie’s experience of being in the world as ‘never really present, never really there.’³⁹⁵

Robbie seems to be forever staring into or out of windows where his black-eyed and black-haired reflection is always directed back at himself, and which he feels he can never escape. Robbie’s world is dark and represented through his Blues music and his penchant for dark places and experiences, which is suggested through the tricycle incident where the child Robbie, ‘Looking at the red tricycle through the window and his own reflection staring back at him, it was as if they were one’³⁹⁶ but the desired red tricycle is never acquired. This experience of loss, while not the specific cause of his melancholic moods, still represents classic melancholy, which sees ‘aggressivity toward the lost object is turned back on the

³⁹¹ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 144.

³⁹² Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 145.

³⁹³ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 162.

³⁹⁴ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 188.

³⁹⁵ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 188.

³⁹⁶ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 193.

self.’³⁹⁷ This experience is mirrored later on in the narrative, where as an adult, he ‘caught sight of his reflection in the window, his almost black eyes staring back at him from behind black-framed glasses ... Was it fear, emptiness or simply acknowledgement that he could see reflected back at him?’³⁹⁸ This disdain of his reflection suggests the ‘self-recrimination’³⁹⁹ of melancholy which doubles back on the self as a form of punishment.

Robbie and Sophie’s monochromatic worlds are broken, filtered through their experiences of others, as if they need others to show them that life can be more colourful. Sophie sees the green of England through the more experienced eyes of her companion: ‘You should see New Zealand,’ Helen said with the nonchalance of someone who had seen it all before.’⁴⁰⁰ And later in the novel with another companion: ‘He wanted to show her something ... they padded softly over a carpet of red and gold fallen leaves ...’⁴⁰¹ When observing colours herself, Sophie can only write about what she sees where the colours take on a life through her imagination: ‘The sea *was* steely and grey like an undulating blanket, and the beach of small smooth pebbles reminded her of the bottom of an aquarium. The green-and-white striped deck chairs that they hired looked like peppermints scattered about ...’⁴⁰² she writes in a letter back home. Sophie’s colourlessness or photographic negativity is also reflected in her comparison of her newly acquired caravan with her colourful neighbour Thea’s: ‘She thought sadly of her bare melamine and vinyl as she gazed upon Thea’s ... crimson crushed velvet ... with angular embroidered designs in hues of emerald and rose quartz ...’⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ Sarah Ahmed, ‘Melancholic Migrants’ *The Promise of Happiness*, p 141.

³⁹⁸ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 159.

³⁹⁹ Sarah Ahmed, ‘Melancholic Migrants’ *The Promise of Happiness*, p 141.

⁴⁰⁰ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 195.

⁴⁰¹ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 212.

⁴⁰² Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 221.

⁴⁰³ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 254.

Robbie too, only sees colour through the other in juxtaposition to his own darkness such as his observation of the kaleidoscopic shopkeeper Linda, whose lips ‘were coated in a bright orange lipstick ... wearing ... orange and red flowery patterned boots ... In his old blue jeans and black hoody, he felt drab and colourless’⁴⁰⁴ or through others’ experience such as Megan’s descriptions of home where ‘miles of grape vines would turn yellow, then orange, and finally red’⁴⁰⁵ but when asked to respond in kind he related ‘watery twilight ... cobbled stone paths ... bubbling with silvery fish’ and ‘snow fall ... on a dark winter afternoon.’⁴⁰⁶ Unable to acknowledge the beauty of his adopted home of Adelaide as seen through the eyes of Megan, his now ex-wife, he replies with ‘it is kind of pretty when the Jacarandas are in bloom, another introduced species he noted’⁴⁰⁷ in a reference to Laura’s jacaranda haunting from de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel*.

For Robbie and Sophie, objects have lost their vibrancy and consequently their significance as represented through a postmodern flattening of experience and refraction of colour. However, a metamodern sensibility sees, as suggested above with regards to my own narrative performance as an inability to somehow break below the surface combined with an overwhelming desire to affect and be affected emotionally, this certain colourlessness or emptiness, paradoxically, draws Sophie and Robbie closer. Just as the ‘lilac woman’ and the ‘boy with the red backpack’ connects Laura and Ravi in *Questions of Travel*, Sophie and Robbie are connected through the prism of a photograph when Thea identifies a pattern in the photographs that Sophie has on display: ‘There’s a pattern you know ... in the colours ... the muted blue in that sky with the plane and the flowerpots matches this one with the silhouetted figures on the rocks ...’⁴⁰⁸ This identification reflects their refracted experiences of life, but

⁴⁰⁵ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 182.

⁴⁰⁶ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 183.

⁴⁰⁷ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 148.

⁴⁰⁸ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 285.

also a kind of return to their fated twilight arrivals which although separated by hemispheres, are connected by the morning and evening star. This twilight haunting suggests Sophie and Robbie's refracted perceptions and experiences of life also reflects the pathology of melancholy, where 'melancholic subjects expect to be hurt and are unable to love ...'⁴⁰⁹

The identification of this heterotopic 'doubling, repetition, return'⁴¹⁰ found in *For Love Alone*, and *Questions of Travel*, through inter (and intra) textual references to places and objects via their colouring, and also present in my novel *The Heartbeats Echo* as the title suggests, endeavours to continue the metamodern conversation that allows for both influence and ingenuity in my creative practice. This practice also adheres to the methodology of this project suggested in the introduction, and prevalent throughout this thesis, which also endeavours to act as a representation of the oscillating and reverberating nature of the metamodern and the transformative nature of heterotopias. In both embodiment and creativity this transformative nature is illustrated in Castro's 'very plain truth that the power of imagination can never be underestimated in its search for heterotopias.'⁴¹¹

Keeping in mind Castro's imaginative powers and the 'hetero' or 'otherness' of heterotopias, it is to the 'other' that I now turn. Having journeyed from the relative safety of the mountain top of Chapter One, sailed the seas and archipelagos of affect in this, Chapter Two, I now look toward the horizon of Chapter Three. Just as Sebald's fishermen 'just want to be in a place where they have the world behind them, and before them nothing but emptiness,'⁴¹² of course does not mean there is nothing out there or reflects a vacancy of intellect. As Foucault intimates, 'there is always some thought in the most silent of habits.'⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Sarah Ahmed, 'Melancholic Migrants' *The Promise of Happiness*, p 141.

⁴¹⁰ Anthony Faramelli, David Hancock, Robert G. White (Eds), 'Introduction', *Spaces of Crisis and Critique*, p 10.

⁴¹¹ Brian Castro, 'Heterotopias: Writing and Location', p 182.

⁴¹² W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, London UK: Vintage Books, 2002, p 52.

⁴¹³ Paul Rabinow, 'Foucault's Untimely Struggle: Toward a Form of Spirituality', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol 26, No 6, 2009, p 32.

To know the ‘other’ may be an impossibility, but this not knowing does not negate the other’s subjectivity and ability to objectify, nor indeed the subjective desire to ‘know’ this other, whether for altruistic or more sinister reasons. Foucault’s question ‘What does it cost? (both for oneself and others)’⁴¹⁴ becomes, through the saturation of intensifying otherness in the twenty-first century, the more pressing question with regards to a reckoning of power relations both personal and political as well as economical. Uncannily it seems, Michelle de Kretser was thinking along the same lines, as towards the end of the second year of my candidature (2017), she released *The Life To Come*, a horizontal title if ever there was one, which I immediately read and realised the conversation was continuing with regards to connections and reverberations, both inter and intra textual, with regards to ‘alterity’ and ‘belonging’ in Australia and globally. This manifested, once again, in a confidence that indeed I was on the right track and in the right place as far as my research and my fiction were concerned, and *The Life To Come* will feature in my discussions in the following third, and final, chapter of this thesis. In a purely mercenary performance, I end this chapter on affect with a suggestion from Christina Stead who states: ‘Well, let us be discontented then; it has never hurt art.’⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Simon Morgan Wortham, Review, Jeffrey T. Nealon *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, p 376.

⁴¹⁵ Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story: The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, p 520.

Chapter Three: The Horizon

‘Whatever my “self” might be is always beholden to the other, not vice versa.’⁴¹⁶

‘The other is the one who does not miss me, and that is radical alterity.’⁴¹⁷

‘The only life in which you play a leading role is your own.’⁴¹⁸

Just as my methodology is one of connection, suggested through the umbrella of metamodern reverberation and heterotopian transformation that forms the title and the overriding sensibility of this thesis, the materiality of its objectivity is also one of cyclical connection which follows a mountain top trickle down through its vein like tributary and then arterial riverway towards its oceanic emptying and tidal disbursement out towards the horizon which, in turn, through condensation and precipitation, finds its way back to the mountain top. Of course, while taking into account that this insignificant trickle may never reach the tributary, let alone the river, river mouth or sea; nevertheless, as Eliot opines ‘... the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started ...’⁴¹⁹, and like that lucky mountain top trickle, I find myself returning to the beginning.

Just as I noticed the term post postmodern for the first time on a tutorial room white board, which uncannily suggested a direction for my research back in 2016, another sign kept haunting me as I went for my morning coffee most days in 2019 while contemplating my ever emerging and changing thesis. Passing a wall of posters which advertised, among other things, climate change protests and psychology experiments, I noticed a poster: on a background of the Indigenous flag, the plea ‘If sorry is what you mean, please don’t

⁴¹⁶ Immanuel Levinas, quoted in Jeffrey T. Nealon, ‘The Ethics of Dialogue: Bakhtin and Levinas’, *College English*, Vol 59, No 2, 1997, p 132.

⁴¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard/Marc Guillaume, Ames Hodges (trans), *Radical Alterity*, Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2008, p 148.

⁴¹⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 288.

⁴¹⁹ T. S. Eliot, ‘Little Gidding’, *Four Quartets*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1943, p 58.

intervene.’ The Northern Territory interventions. and the ongoing debate as to their effectiveness, morality, and legality are not the primary focus of this thesis, but as I quietly passed by this poster each morning its connotations with regards to notions of otherness and alterity, of subjectivity and objectivity, of response and responsibility, and of longing and belonging invaded my thinking and fitted well with my geographical musings on the horizon and its unknowable qualities, which ultimately became the theme of this final chapter. Once again, through a metamodern sensibility of echo and reverberation, and Birns’ idea of an emotional reading that sits between text and context, this chapter will endeavour to explicate how these notions are represented in Stead’s, de Kretser’s, and my own fictions of travel, and where, as suggested in the poster anecdote above, my journey as a writer also encompasses negotiations with these notions of otherness and alterity.

Just as the terms place and space, and affect and emotion, discussed in the preceding chapters, are used by writers and theorists at times interchangeably, so too, difference, other, and alterity contain and enable multiple interpretations. Chapter One’s introduction to concepts of place and space and heterotopias suggested that the translation from Foucault’s French to English of heterotopia revealed, not only the penchant for pedantics that is, rightly so, inherent in translation, but that this recognition of multiple interpretations brought with it a deeper level of analysis when certain translators were confronted with the choice of using ‘other’ or ‘different’ – Of *other* Spaces or Of *different* Spaces – to use in the translation of Foucault’s ‘Des espaces autres’ where ‘different’ connotes a relation to the ordinary and ‘other’ connotes a privilege of separation.⁴²⁰ This distinction of interpretation is also found when comparing ‘other’ and ‘alterity’ where once again, historically ‘the other’ ‘is seen as ... an inferior ... [while] ... alterity ... shifts the focus ... to ... [a] materiality located in social

⁴²⁰ Michiel Dehaene & Lieven De Cauter (trans), ‘Of other spaces’ (1967) Michel Foucault, (Notes) *Heterotopia and the City*, p 23.

and cultural institutions ... [with an] emphasis on relationality.⁴²¹ Ultimately, and what is of most interest to this discussion and this thesis with regards to the transformative value of heterotopias and the relations between difference, other, and alterity is Dehaene and De Cauter's hypothesis that 'Foucault's discussion takes place at the intersection of a reflection on alterity and difference.'⁴²² Similarly, is Genocchio's decidedly metamodern suggestion of heterotopias's 'ability to *both* question and undermine ... limits ... [and its] ... transformative implications'⁴²³, which is also of interest to this chapter with regards to notions of subjectivity and objectivity, and otherness and difference.

In keeping with the idea of cyclical beginnings and endings, inspired by Eliot, informed by Foucault and van Gennepe, and discussed earlier in Chapter Two of this thesis with regards to the affects, manifestations, and representations of specifically Antipodean de-centered subjects, to go back to the beginning: for a subject to be de-centred, the general consensus is there must be a centre and a subject from which to be de-centred from. Once again, and referring back to Chapter One's ideas surrounding perspective, this centred subject and non-centred other also bring connotations of perspective – who sees and who is seen – which also incorporates complicated and problematic notions of action and passivity, and of singular and collective naming. These varying positions are connoted in the epigraphs that head this discussion, which will act as a basis for an exploration into the historical evolution of the philosophy of the subject for the purposes of illustrating the echoing and reverberating nature of Williams' structures of feeling that define and delineate, but also repeat and resonate over time, as discussed in previous chapters with regards to place and space, and

⁴²¹ Sevinc Turkkan, in Michael Ryan (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, 2011, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444337839.wbelctv1o001>, (viewed 11/2/2020).

⁴²² Michiel Dehaene & Lieven De Cauter (trans), 'Of other spaces (1967) Michel Foucault, (Notes) *Heterotopia and the City*, p 23.

⁴²³ Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces, in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Eds), *Postmodern cities and spaces*, pp 41-42.

affect and emotion, and their corresponding representations in heterotopic spaces of narrative which is the overriding focus of this thesis.

Whether thought of as a benign ‘individual consciousness’⁴²⁴ or a more hostile ‘self-centred individualism’⁴²⁵, varying degrees of relationality with regards to the subject and object have historically evolved, both benign and more pathological, where the object was recognised as both an equivalent living presence, and a self-subjugating responsibility. This in turn brought with it further delineations with regards to passive acceptance and political action. These ranged from Heidegger’s always already being-*in-the-world* referred to in Chapter One of this thesis with regards to the re-evaluation and re-emergence of being *in* place, to both Sartre and Levinas’ acknowledgement of a certain subjective vulnerability as being *for* others which involved a more responsive approach within their respective positions.

Both Levinas and Sartre critiqued Heidegger’s ‘oblique independence’⁴²⁶, in Sartre’s words, who saw a responsibility to the other as more one of ‘frontal confrontation.’⁴²⁷ For Sartre this position manifests in a horizontal equality, which recognises, through ‘the Look’⁴²⁸ that ‘a free consciousness must positively value the freedom of others’⁴²⁹, and Levinas’ position which comes more from a place of vertical enslavement, which ‘identifies asymmetry as the only rubric that adequately captures my [sic] relation to alterity ... [as] an encounter with the Face.’⁴³⁰ In other words, whereas Sartre’s position of responsibility to the other is reciprocal – the look goes both ways – and based on a mutual freedom, Levinas’ responsibility is based on burden and a passive obligation to the Face, suggested in the

⁴²⁴ Sevinc Turkan, in Michael Ryan (Ed), *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, 2011, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444337839.wbelctv1o001>, (viewed 11/2/2020).

⁴²⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 50.

⁴²⁶ Dan Zahavi, ‘Intersubjectivity in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*’, *Alter 10*, 2002, p 266, <https://cfs.ku.dk/staff/zahavi-publications/sartre-alter.pdf>, (viewed 11/2/2020).

⁴²⁷ Dan Zahavi, ‘Intersubjectivity in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*’, *Alter 10*, 2002, p 266.

⁴²⁸ Kris Sealey, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre, and the Question of Transcendence*, Albany New York: State University of New York Press, 2013, p 125.

⁴²⁹ Kris Sealey, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre, and the Question of Transcendence*, p 118.

⁴³⁰ Kris Sealey, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre, and the Question of Transcendence*, pp 118-119.

epigraph above, which for the freedom loving (in the existential sense) Sartre, is an impossibility. However, through both Sartre and Levinas' phenomenology, 'the self is re-imagined not on the basis of an absolute a priori nature of the human but rather on the basis of the way in which free human persons discover their meaning or purpose by opening themselves to other persons.'⁴³¹ This opening to others, for both Sartre and Levinas, is a form of *radical alterity* where for Levinas the radicalness of alterity lies in its 'metaphysical ... beyond being ...'⁴³², whereas for Sartre, he sees radical alterity as 'the moment I encounter that which does not become an object *for me* but rather makes *of me* an object.'⁴³³ For both Levinas and Sartre, and reflected in the Levinas epigram quoted above, in phenomenological and existential terms, the self relies on the other for its own significance whether it be through transcendence or immanence, response or responsibility. However, what happens to the self when the other, or in this case, the dialectic between self and other, retreats, or even disappears?

As discussed in Chapter Two with regards to crisis and affect and the subsequent epochal structures of feeling that embody them, the idea of subjective erasure or a subverted dialectic between subject and object epitomises postmodernism's crisis of representation where, paradoxically intensified through deification and fetishization and erased through defamiliarization and deconstruction, radical alterity is taken to its ultimate end in the second quote that introduces this section. Both vilified for his 'objectification of women ... [and] ... essentialist constructions of race, ethnicity, and nation'⁴³⁴ and validated by some who see the 'fear of the conditions of postmodernity'⁴³⁵ manifest in his "'cultural criticism'"⁴³⁶, Jean

⁴³¹ Jennifer E. Rosato, 'Opening Oneself to an Other: Sartre's and Levinas' Phenomenological Ethics', PhD Dissertation, Indiana USA: University of Notre Dame, 2010, p 11, <https://curate.nd.edu/show/k356930920d>, (viewed 11/2/2020)

⁴³² Kris Sealey, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre, and the Question of Transcendence*, p 124.

⁴³³ Kris Sealey, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre, and the Question of Transcendence*, p 126.

⁴³⁴ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 74.

⁴³⁵ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 73.

⁴³⁶ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 75.

Baudrillard attempts to solve the postmodern problematics of representation he sees inherent in both subjectivity and otherness by suggesting a negation of both, where ‘subjects are simulated’ and the ‘other is erased through a denial of representation ...’⁴³⁷ As opposed to Levinas’ responsibility to the face and Sartre’s response to the look, Baudrillard’s subjects are faceless and his objects look away. For Baudrillard, radical alterity, as an antidote to the simulated existence of postmodernism, lies in the ultimate strangeness and ambivalence of the other which, noted by Kaplan, through this ‘valorisation of the object’ only reinforces the modernist ‘conventional construction of “others” found in any “Western” theory.’⁴³⁸ No matter how much Baudrillard’s subjectivity is simulated and therefore faceless, and his other looks away, it does not negate the material situatedness of this facelessness that ‘reasserts itself as a structuring gaze ... reinforcing rather than deconstructing this binary opposition ...’⁴³⁹

However, what is of most interest to this thesis as discussed in previous chapters with regards to ‘descriptive’ and ‘prescriptive’ forms of metamodern discourse is Baudrillard’s philosophy being recognised by some as an accurate ‘description’ of the structure of feeling of postmodern existence as a negatively recurring and continually commodifying construction, where Baudrillard himself becomes ‘world-weary ... exhausted ... and depressed ...’⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, Foucault, as Nealon suggests, concluded ‘each variety of agency and resistance always becomes recuperable as already a function or condition of power itself.’⁴⁴¹ Baudrillard’s exhaustive attempt in ‘challenging capitalism to provoke its own demise’ can only be acknowledged that ‘it [capitalism] is still working on it.’⁴⁴² This

⁴³⁷ Elspeth Probyn, ‘Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local’, *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge, 1990, p 183.

⁴³⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 76.

⁴³⁹ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 9.

⁴⁴⁰ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 85.

⁴⁴¹ Simon Morgan Wortham, Review, Jeffrey T. Nealon *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, p 375.

⁴⁴² Sylvere Lotringer, Nicole Dufresne (Trans), Introduction, Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, Semiotext(e), 2007, p 8.

sensibility or intuition connects the two philosophers in their overlapping deliberations, which see a postmodern otherness develop and intensify, through Foucault's ideas of heterotopia, and Baudrillard's ideas of the economy of signs, where both foresee that 'it is not conformity and sameness that guarantee power's domination; instead, *difference is intensified* as the means by which neoliberal economics maintains control ...'⁴⁴³, whether through an entrenched desire for exoticism or a continuously technologised and commodified atomisation of subjectivity.

As discussed previously in Chapter Two with regards to postmodern affect and its subjective floundering in the fluid freedom of deterritorialisation, Gilles Deleuze takes a more 'prescriptive' approach with regards to the perceived postmodern erasure of subjectivity. As opposed to the 'deep-seated nostalgia for the real that permeates Baudrillard's description ... Deleuze's hallucinatory perception ... affirms the indetermination of the subject ...'⁴⁴⁴ and points to "a new conception of subjectivity," of an entirely different subject capable of being "with the world."⁴⁴⁵

What is of interest here with regards to the reverberating nature of ideas and sensibilities that underpins this thesis is a return to the Heideggerian *being with*; however, Heidegger's 'we' transforms from 'an essential, intrinsic, and a-priori determination of being ... in company with others'⁴⁴⁶, to a Deleuzian '... life ... of combinatorial living ... of de-situated openness.'⁴⁴⁷ In other words, the Heideggerian 'we' resonates with a centred subjective individuality (closed/self-replicating) while Deleuze's 'we' suggests multiple decentred singularities (opened/difference) where 'singularity', connotes a more relational

⁴⁴³ Simon Morgan Wortham, Review, Jeffrey T. Nealon *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, p 376.

⁴⁴⁴ Temenuga Trifonova, 'Is There a Subject in Hyperreality?', *Postmodern Culture*, Vol 13, No 3, 2003, p 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Ming-Quian, Ma 'De-Situatedness: The Subject and its Exhaustion of Space in Gilles Deleuze', in Tymieniecka AT. (eds) *Phenomenology and Existentialism in the Twentieth Century Analecta Husserliana* (The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research), 2009, Vol 104. Springer, Dordrecht, p 300.

⁴⁴⁶ Dan Zahavi, 'Intersubjectivity in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*', *Alter 10*, 2002, p 266, <https://cfs.ku.dk/staff/zahavi-publications/sartre-alter.pdf>, (viewed 11/2/2020).

⁴⁴⁷ Ming-Quian, Ma 'De-Situatedness: The Subject and its Exhaustion of Space in Gilles Deleuze', p 308.

horizontal experience and 'individuality' connotes a more hierarchal and less referential one. However, as Kaplan describes, 'Deleuze and Guattari have, in effect, removed the conditions for resistance and opposition that most people in the world have no choice but to struggle for.'⁴⁴⁸ Rosi Braidotti affirms Kaplan's concerns that while 'Deleuze talked of reconstruction ... [and] ... the multiple, processual one [subject] [as] the one able to pervert the flexible system [capitalism]'⁴⁴⁹, 'the politics of *locations* of the subject is something *we* cannot let go.'⁴⁵⁰ Both Kaplan's and Braidotti's statements reflect the paradoxical growing intensity of post postmodernism and its concurrent increasing atomising and commodification of subjectivity, and the emerging tensions between individuality, singularity, and belonging.

Whether with regards to the hermeneutics, the lived experience, or the narrativisation of place and space, affect and emotion, and other and difference, it is perspective that defines and drives these modes, both ontologically and epistemologically. What we see, what we know, and what we present and represent, are intrinsically linked with who we are and where we are. Add to this mix ideas of value, both economically and culturally, and the seeming distinctions between 'I', 'We', and 'You', as discussed in Chapter Two, become increasingly blurred. Like the simultaneously refracted, palimpsestic, and prophetic perspective of looking through a window, in a certain light, one can see simultaneously, oneself ('I'/the present), a reflection of what's behind ('We'/the past), and what's beyond ('You'/the future). The third quote that heads this section taken from de Kretser's *The Life To Come*: 'The only life in which you play a leading role is your own'⁴⁵¹ expands the idea of haunting, both subjective and nationalistic, through its use of the second person pronoun 'you'. However, it is the future perspective of the metaphor of the window in its affirmation of possibilities that also expands in *The Life to Come* which is reflected in de Kretser's 'you' as an example of an

⁴⁴⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*, p 98.

⁴⁴⁹ Rosi Braidotti, in Rosi Braidotti and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Borrowed Energy', *Frieze*, 2014, pp 5-6.

⁴⁵⁰ Rosi Braidotti, in Rosi Braidotti and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Borrowed Energy', *Frieze*, 2014, p 9.

⁴⁵¹ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 288.

intensifying metamodern sensibility where the ‘potential ambiguity’⁴⁵² of the second person pronoun can function both as inclusive and collective, accusatory and rejective.

In other words, and as discussed above, the modernist subjective sameness of ‘we’, which evolves into the postmodernist ‘we’ of multiple difference, intensifies in a post postmodern structure of feeling of simultaneous desire and disgust, refracted and distilled through multiple perspectives where ‘I’, ‘We’ and ‘You’ are not necessarily mutually inclusive or exclusive. Instead of asking, as Foucault suggests, “‘maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse who we are’”⁴⁵³, Butler, while not eschewing the ‘we’ altogether, acknowledges ‘that any effort to fully identify with the collective “we” will fail’⁴⁵⁴ and that the question instead maybe “‘Who are you?’”⁴⁵⁵

As an example of the potential ambiguity of the second person pronoun, de Kretser’s ‘you’, and indeed a style prevalent in *Questions of Travel* and intensifying in *The Life To Come*, suggests a form of post-irony which sees irony used less as a form of postmodern insincerity, but more as a form of metamodern ‘accountability.’⁴⁵⁶ This accountability transforms, in the heterotopic space of narrative, de Kretser’s irony from an ‘inauthentic ... use of language ...’ into an authentic, albeit paradoxical, intent of ‘dedicated and truth-seeking deception.’⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, de Kretser’s nameless minor character who, in the epigraph repeated above, frightened Bunty with her ironic take on personal fulfilment was in fact able to ‘express an opinion and its opposite, and believe both’⁴⁵⁸ which reflects the ‘both/and’ sensibility of a more metamodernist subjectivity.

⁴⁵² Jarmila Mildorf, ‘Reconsidering Second Person Narration and Involvement’, p 150.

⁴⁵³ Michel Foucault, in Daniel E. Palmer, ‘On Refusing Who We Are, p 402.

⁴⁵⁴ Adriana Cavarero, in Judith Butler, ‘Giving and Account of Oneself’, *Diacritics*, Vol 13, No 4, 2001, p 25.

⁴⁵⁵ Adriana Cavarero, in Judith Butler, ‘Giving and Account of Oneself’, p 24.

⁴⁵⁶ Alison Gibbons, “‘Take that you intellectuals!’ and “kaPOW!’”: Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style’, *Studia Neophilologica*, Vol 87, No 1, 2014, p 41, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2014.981959>, (viewed 15/3/2017).

⁴⁵⁷ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 99.

⁴⁵⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 288.

In keeping with the theme of this chapter of the unknown beyond of the horizon, and the equally paradoxical perspectival pivoting of ‘I’, ‘We’, and ‘You’ discussed above, if dramatic irony requires, or indeed allows, the reader or observer to know more than the characters within the story world, de Kretser’s use of dramatic irony in *Questions of Travel*, an echoing of Stead’s use of the form in *For Love Alone*, evolves into a post ironic style in *The Life to Come* where both the reader and de Kretser’s characters are deceptive and deceived, knowing and unknown. However, it is this lack of certainty for both reader and characters, also prevalent in my novel, *The Heartbeats Echo*, that can create a kind of ‘empathy ... between fictional figures and the flesh and blood “real” reader’, which reflects a metamodern structure of feeling where thinking about what is beyond the horizon or thinking about ‘the life to come’ as in de Kretser’s novel, and the uncertainty of both, requires ‘taking a leap of faith’.⁴⁵⁹ Although de Kretser herself believes ‘that it’s wishful thinking on the part of the novelist’⁴⁶⁰ with regards to creating empathy in novels, the ‘I’, ‘We’, and ‘You’ perspectives are indeed more connected than we think, even if, paradoxically, all that connects them is uncertainty and unknowing. Indeed, irony, in its metamodern manifestation of a ‘dedicated and truth-seeking deception’⁴⁶¹ as suggested above, reflects this paradox in its ‘performance of two sides of the philosophical question: the responsibility of our inevitable locatedness within a context, and the inadequacy of context to answer our deepest questions.’⁴⁶² In other words, within a metamodern paradigm, irony has returned to its original purpose where ‘deception ... is employed in order to reveal other ... even more

⁴⁵⁹ Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* p. pp 359-360.

⁴⁶⁰ Jack Cameron Stanton, ‘Interview with Michelle de Kretser’, *Southerly*, Vol 79, No 1, 2019, p 3, http://southerlyjournal.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ar-edit-Southerly_MdKtranscript-2.pdf, (viewed 14/7/2020).

⁴⁶¹ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 99.

⁴⁶² Claire Colebrook, ‘The Meaning of Irony’, *Textual Practice*, Vol 14, No 1, 2000, p 27.

destructive forms of deception'⁴⁶³ but which requires 'sincerity in order to question and challenge'⁴⁶⁴ this deception.

This brings this introductory discussion back to the plea of non-intervention that found me musing most mornings as I passed by, and its inclusive and accusatory 'you' which both shamed and shunned, and which seemed paradoxically to require both empathy and disinterest. Once again, Foucault's ideas surrounding difference are at their most productive when utilised in undermining limits – both imaginatively and geographically – where the heterotopic space of difference allows for 'a subject anchor[ed] in an ethical bond to alterity ...'⁴⁶⁵ Keeping in mind Rich's identification, Massey and Kaplan's recognition, and Braidotti's affirmation of a politics of location, these bonds recognise difference just as much as celebrate sameness, and the ethical may merely involve an act of unknowing acceptance whether directed outwardly towards the other, or inwardly towards the self. This unknowing acceptance, descriptive in its connotations of an intensifying heterotopian post postmodern experience of a 'simultaneous ... center and ... periphery ... [where] ... every competing center makes us marginal,'⁴⁶⁶ is also prescriptive where 'to know the limits ... of acknowledgement is a self-limiting act ... [which] can ... constitute a disposition of humility and generosity ...'⁴⁶⁷ Emerging from a metamodern paradox of 'informed naivety'⁴⁶⁸, metamodern irony manifests in post ironic performances which attempt to eschew the 'radical doubt' of postmodern irony and indeed, *ironically*, aim to 'achieve consensus ... [and] ... recuperate lost values'⁴⁶⁹, however impossible that aim may be.

⁴⁶³ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 99.

⁴⁶⁴ Jon Doyle, 'The changing face of post-postmodern fiction: Irony, sincerity, and populism', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol 53, No 3, 2018, p 268.

⁴⁶⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 100.

⁴⁶⁶ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 178.

⁴⁶⁷ Judith Butler, 'Giving and Account of Oneself', *Diacritics*, Vol 13, No 4, 2001, p 28.

⁴⁶⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 5.

⁴⁶⁹ Lucinda O'Brien, 'Satirising white Australia in Christina Stead's *For love alone*, p 1.

Returning to the specifically Antipodean decentred subjectivity discussed in Chapter Two, and reflecting the ongoing discussion in this thesis with regards to reverberating philosophical notions of modernist being, postmodernist becoming and metamodernist belonging, sees an Antipodean desire for belonging only intensify as subjectivities and communities atomise into outlying perspectives, and places. The experience of a specifically Antipodean decentredness from its binaric centre, both culturally and geographically, evolves into post postmodern multiple centres and peripheries, both local and global, which can simultaneously conflate, confuse and comfort where notions of belonging and alterity collide and collude.

As mentioned previously, the metaphor of the window with its notions of palimpsestic simultaneity in regards to perspectival pronouns also reflects a metamodernist form of problematic prepositions which sees a consideration of the 'I', 'We', and 'You' expand further into a consideration of the use of 'to', 'in', and 'of' when it comes to alterity and belonging. To say 'belong *to*' something (or someone) connotes a certain relational experience which includes both positive and negative assumptions with regards to agency, while 'belong *in*' infers a more corporeal connection, again with both positive and negative associations, this time with regards to place and space. However, to say 'belong *of*' combines both relationality and corporeality as an act of, in its dictionary definition, 'expressing the relationship between a part and a whole,' which suggests a less hierarchal affinity, one less 'representational' and more 'metonymic.'⁴⁷⁰ Of course to say 'belong *of*' also comes with its own problematics with regards to agency and place and space, but also reflects, more positively, 'the development of a horizontality that comes to problematise seeing itself as the *privileged* access to the sublime'⁴⁷¹ through a more inclusive understanding of metonymic

⁴⁷⁰ Bill Ashcroft, 'The Horizontal Sublime', *Antipodes*, Vol 19, No 2, December 2005, p 145.

⁴⁷¹ Bill Ashcroft, 'The Horizontal Sublime', p 145.

experience, which recognises centres and margins as fluid and manifold and simultaneously located and singular.

The above discussion reflects the evolution of emerging Antipodean subjectivities and structures of feeling as represented in Stead's confident cosmopolitanism through to de Kretser's multiple marginalism in *Questions of Travel*, and her subsequent post ironic performance in *The Life to Come*, which as both Miles Franklin award winners, tell 'the stories the characters ... and nations tell or choose not to tell about themselves.'⁴⁷² At the same time, Stead and de Kretser's fictions of travel also reflect the cyclical and reverberating nature of van Gennepe's rites of passage and Foucault's heterotopias discussed throughout this thesis, which combine to engender an emerging twenty-first century Antipodean subjectivity which both reflects and requires a new way of being, becoming, and belonging, with ourselves, and each other. This new belonging incorporates a postmodern suspicion with a consideration of '... traditional human verities that have to do with spirituality and emotion and community.'⁴⁷³ These considerations will be the focus of the following section which reverberate in Stead, and de Kretser's fiction, and echo in my own, through a commonality of ironic suggestions and silences, and *Bildungsroman* transformations, which act as examples of a metamodern journey from naivety to post irony.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Michelle de Kretser, in Jason Steger, 'Michelle de Kretser wins her second Miles Franklin award', Culture Books, *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 27, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/michelle-de-kretser-wins-her-second-miles-franklin-award-20180824-h14hcu.html>, (viewed 11/3/2020).

⁴⁷³ David Foster Wallace, in Lee Konstantinou, 'Four Faces of Postirony', in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, p 93.

⁴⁷⁴ Lee Konstantinou, 'Four Faces of Postirony', in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, p 96.

‘All I ask is to be unknown to all that know me.’⁴⁷⁵

‘She knew that she was lost. She knew that she loved this place.’⁴⁷⁶

‘All my life I had been waiting for something wonderful to happen ...’⁴⁷⁷

‘She intuitively felt the future that was out there somewhere.’⁴⁷⁸

Like the stars and the moon, constant in their global simultaneity, the horizon can represent both the end of one’s journey and the beginning exemplified by Sebald’s fisherman, alluded to earlier, and my imagining of their silent musings on what is to come and what has gone before. As also alluded to in the previous discussion, the cyclical passage of my humble raindrop returning to the ocean from the mountain top, and subsequently returning to the mountain top through precipitation, reflects the perpetual arrival and departure nature of life itself. Reflecting this constant, Stead’s, de Kretser’s, and my own fiction connect through the trope of the *Bildungsroman* journey; however, each subverts in their own way this traditional literary genre with regards to gender, geography, and generation, and indeed, the idea of the journey itself through the ironic performances they present which reflect, in turn, the historical and cultural structures of feeling that they are written from.

These performances are suggested through the epigraphs that head this section, where the existing exegetical pattern of using three quotes to head sections expands into four in this discussion to not only reflect the inclusion of de Kretser’s *The Life to Come*, but also to reflect the ongoing evolution of the perceived singular subject. This evolution sees a journey from binaric thinking to the subversion of this binaric thinking into a recognition of a more pluralistic embodiment represented through the inclusion of a fourth quote, and suggests a further discussion with regards to what this number four can illuminate when thinking about

⁴⁷⁵ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 487.

⁴⁷⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 156.

⁴⁷⁷ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 341.

⁴⁷⁸ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 158.

the three problematic prepositions: ‘to’, ‘in’, and ‘of’ when applying them to considerations of identity. This speaks back to my earlier discussion of the phenomenological philosophy of Levinas and Sartre and their being *for* others as a fourth preposition (or proposition) which can illuminate a different approach to othering in a more holistic sense, which includes a posthuman approach to subjectivity suggested by Braidotti’s ‘monism [which] implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed, and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others.’⁴⁷⁹

The *Bildungsroman* is defined as ‘a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity.’⁴⁸⁰ A further definition explains this kind of novel as a ‘formation novel ... [which] ... recount[s] literal or figurative voyages of discovery, the final destination of which is a sense of one’s unique purpose.’⁴⁸¹ Of course, these are descriptions of the narrativisation of these journeys, but equally, indeed, it is in fact this *desire* to narrativise these journeys that goes hand in hand with the experience of them. David Malouf eloquently describes this desire as ‘one of the oldest stories we tell ... because it touches our lives at the two extremes of our experience, the moment when we leave our mother’s body and the moment when we must leave our own.’⁴⁸² He goes on to identify, similarly to Van Gennep’s rites of passage, that this desire ‘speaks as well for the daily business of going out in into the world ... it speaks, that is, for both a personal and a tribal history.’⁴⁸³ What is of interest here to this chapter and this thesis with regards to travel and subjectivity, is his separating of this journey into three versions. For Malouf, the first version in the *Bildungsroman* journey sees the protagonist ‘set

⁴⁷⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 88.

⁴⁸⁰ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p 24.

⁴⁸¹ Dr Katherine Carlson, *The Bildungsroman Project*, University of North Carolina, 2013-2014, <http://bildungsromanproject.com/define>, (viewed 23/4/2020).

⁴⁸² David Malouf, *A First Place*, Sydney: Random House, 2015, p 1.

⁴⁸³ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 1.

out ... get lost ... [but] ... [in the end] ... reach home ...⁴⁸⁴ The second version sees the protagonist follow the same steps as the first, but in this instance, 'never gets home ... doomed to perpetual movement and exile.'⁴⁸⁵ For Malouf, both these dialectic positions reflect the classic genres of comedy and tragedy.

It is Malouf's third version which suggests a way out of the either/or conundrum, which combines elements of both, where the protagonist 'never gets home [but] ... finds a new home elsewhere ... it is a story of hardship and loss, but the end is open and therefore hopeful.'⁴⁸⁶ Looking at this third perspective through a metamodern paradigm of 'both/and', a possible fourth version of Malouf's *Bildungsroman* would be a journey where the protagonist(s) leave home, get lost, return home or find a new home elsewhere, but this home is both the same and different, as although home, either the one left or the one found elsewhere, may be familiar or recognisable; however, unwittingly, it is the protagonists who have changed. These four versions of the *Bildungsroman* reflect the metamodern journey from naivety to postirony as discussed earlier where if, as suggested in Chapter Two, postmodernism is simply modernism without the anxiety⁴⁸⁷ and further extrapolated that post postmodernism is, then, simply postmodernism with the return of anxiety, it could be said that post irony is simply irony with the return of naivety. However, also keeping in mind the paradoxical nature of the metamodern, both irony and naivety are transformed through the process where modernist naivety evolves as this naivety is rejected and replaced with postmodern irony which in turn, through saturation, becomes cynicism, and eventually, through the affect of this saturation, a desire for enlightened innocence, the 'informed naivety'⁴⁸⁸ of metamodernism, appears.

⁴⁸⁴ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁴⁸⁵ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁴⁸⁶ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁴⁸⁷ Jonathan Lethem, 'The Ecstasy of Influence: A plagiarism', *Harper's Magazine*, 2007, p 62.

⁴⁸⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 5.

The following discussion considers the four epigraphs that introduce this section from the prepositional positionings suggested earlier, that of ‘to’, ‘in’, ‘of’ and ‘for’, and my analogous reading which equates these positionings with the four *Bildungsroman* versions and the corresponding metamodern journey from naivety to postirony. This journey will be illustrated in the following section through representations from Stead’s, de Kretser’s and my own fiction, which I use as examples of the evolving, reverberating, and transformative nature of subjectivity, which is the focus of this chapter, and the overall theme of this thesis.

‘All I ask is to be unknown to all that know me.’⁴⁸⁹

The first epigraph comes from towards the end of Stead’s *For Love Alone* which sees Teresa and Harry Girton having a conversation on the night of their soon to be consummated affair, but it is not Teresa who utters these words. The traditional *Bildungsroman* epitomises the first of the problematic prepositions that colour this discussion: ‘to’, which connotes movement towards something. This idea of action and movement reflects the traditional idea of the ‘*bildung*’ which is formative, educational, and male; however, much has been written about Stead’s subversion of this traditional form in *For Love Alone*, which while a classic bildungsroman in the sense of the definition described earlier: that of ‘a troubled quest for identity’,⁴⁹⁰ Stead’s protagonist is female. However, while Teresa, from a binaric postmodern reading, certainly subverts the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* of male self-discovery, her naivety reflects Stead’s modernist confidence that ‘freedom, self-expression and horizon expanding love’⁴⁹¹ is a possibility, and a necessity, for both men and women, for ‘it’s only by

⁴⁸⁹ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 487.

⁴⁹⁰ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p 24.

⁴⁹¹ Dr Katherine Carlson, *The Bildungsroman Project*, University of North Carolina, 2013-2014, <http://bildungsromanproject.com/define>, (viewed 23/4/2020).

loving each other that they can achieve anything'⁴⁹² but Teresa only finds her purpose refracted through Girton's words and acknowledges to herself that 'she saw herself, too, as going alone, into other regions, even though she would probably never have the energy or strength to do so.'⁴⁹³ Although after her night in Oxford with Girton, travelling back alone to London on a train, Teresa has a heterotopic epiphany where she realises that 'she had reached the gates of the world of Girton and Quick ... and it was *towards* them ... that she had been travelling all her life and would travel, farther, without them ... she had a passport to paradise'⁴⁹⁴ (my italics): she in fact doesn't use her metaphorical passport and stays with Quick. A postmodern reading would identify the irony in Teresa's passport metaphor, which suggests she still required some sort of imperialist (read patriarchal) permission to enter this world of men and paradise, but it is her choice and within that choice Teresa understands 'I am free.'⁴⁹⁵

Stead's modernist naivety, reflected in Teresa's admission and acknowledged by Stead herself as a 'buffoon Odyssey'⁴⁹⁶ reflects Malouf's comedic first journey as discussed above, which 'is the story of Odysseus' [who] 'gets lost for a time, but in the end reaches home.'⁴⁹⁷ For Stead, and Teresa, however naïve, love was home, for both men and women, which is reflected in the title of the novel as a 'dedication ... to the principle of love as a mode of knowledge, of engaging with the world, and as a creative power.'⁴⁹⁸ Both Stead and Teresa finally reach their destination. Stead herself admits, in the closing lines of a piece of autobiography entitled 'Les Amoureux' about herself and her husband Bill Blake, that 'home

⁴⁹² Christina Stead, in Rodney Wetherell, 'Christina Stead talks with Rodney Wetherell', p 13.

⁴⁹³ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 487.

⁴⁹⁴ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 494.

⁴⁹⁵ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 496.

⁴⁹⁶ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 348.

⁴⁹⁷ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁴⁹⁸ Susan Sheridan, 'Christina Stead: Portraits of the Author as a Young Woman', in Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore, and Sarah Shieff (eds), *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature*, New York: The Modern English Association of America, 2017, p 119.

was where the *other was*⁴⁹⁹ (my italics). Stead's naivety, like her use of irony, whilst resisting 'singular paradigms'⁵⁰⁰ is informed by the cultural and historical moments in which she lived and certainly, like all naïve desires, is utopian in its confidence of a world where love, and the opportunity to experience it, and to travel towards it, should be possible for all: 'All things desired ... are they there for all? ... Yes, it must be! Yes, we will have it.'⁵⁰¹

This naivety is a connecting theme that runs through Stead's, de Kretser's, and my own fiction as a sensibility of the reverberating nature of metamodernism, and indeed Judith Butler, in her essay on accountability, forgiveness, and humility, with regards to subjectivity and otherness explains that 'one can only give and take recognition on the condition that one becomes disoriented from oneself ... that one undergoes a decentering'⁵⁰² which, to me, while an intuitive and insightful analysis of the science of human relations, could simply be called 'falling in love', however naïve that may sound, although I could imagine Stead, in her interminable contrariness, saying something similar. However, Stead's utopian modernist naivety, as a gendered *Bildungsroman* reflection of a 'world in the process of change'⁵⁰³ also points to the epochal transformations that were to come in the latter part of the twentieth century, where Stead's revolutionary naivety of love and freedom for all transforms into an ironic embodiment of experience which eschews utopian ideals for hyper-reality. Reflected in the preposition, and indeed the experience, of being immersed, of being 'in', to be in the know, to be in the loop, where irony and satire mocked and mauled, was the objective, and where naivety like Stead's, who sees Teresa's journey less as a 'struggle to achieve

⁴⁹⁹ Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story: The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, p 512.

⁵⁰⁰ Anna Snaith, 'Christina Stead: Transnationalism and the Sea Voyage', *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p 200.

⁵⁰¹ Christina Stead, *For Love Alone*, p 494.

⁵⁰² Judith Butler, 'Giving and Account of Oneself', *Diacritics*, Vol 13, No 4, 2001, p 28.

⁵⁰³ Susan Sheridan, 'Christina Stead: Portraits of the Author as a Young Woman', in Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore, and Sarah Shieff (eds), *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature*, p 120.

independence' but more as a 'struggle to achieve union with a man'⁵⁰⁴, becomes in a postmodern reading, a 'surrender to patriarchal cultural hegemony.'⁵⁰⁵

Malouf's first version of the comedic hero/heroine reflected in the traditional idea of journeying towards a destination and returning home as the ultimate goal, evolved post war as travelling became more mainstream and affordable. For some, it wasn't the destination so much as the journey that was important, but also notions of home became somewhat arbitrary through multicultural movement and migration, both as a choice, or as an ongoing and intensifying necessity of economic and/or physical safety. Once again, informed by the cultural and historical fluctuations of the time, Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* epitomises the prepositional 'in' of postmodern ironic experience discussed above, and also reflects and subverts Malouf's second version of the tragic *Bildungsroman* journey where the protagonist(s) is/are 'doomed to perpetual movement and exile.'⁵⁰⁶ Stead's modernist naivety with regards to gender relations, while not eschewed completely in *Questions of Travel* and certainly, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, de Kretser's imaginings, represented through her character Laura's experiences of love, reflect and talk back to Stead's closing questioning of repeating and ongoing troubles between the sexes, is, however, usurped by a postmodern irony. This irony is reflected in multiple geographical and cultural clashes that represent a burgeoning experience of postmodern 'cool thinking'⁵⁰⁷ of which de Kretser both reflects and refutes through her ironic representations of travel. This reflection and refutation allows *Questions of Travel* to be read through a postmodern and metamodern lens, where her use of irony, as suggested earlier, is used both as a reflection of postmodern society, but also as a critique of its failings and shortcomings and its paradoxical nature of being 'in' which

⁵⁰⁴ Christina Stead, in Rodney Wetherell, 'Christina Stead talks with Rodney Wetherell', p 12.

⁵⁰⁵ Susan Sheridan, 'Christina Stead: Portraits of the Author as a Young Woman', in Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore, and Sarah Shieff (eds), *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature*, p 120.

⁵⁰⁶ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁵⁰⁷ Marc Guillame, 'Cool Thinking', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol 6, No 2, 2009.

connotes both a knowingness of familiarity and an unawareness of alterity, but which also subverts these connotations through heterotopical transformations.

‘She knew that she was lost. She knew that she loved this place.’⁵⁰⁸

As discussed above, Teresa’s identification of her own longing to be ‘unknown’ to all that knew her reflects Butler’s description of the decentred self who becomes disoriented and in so doing opens to the other. As noted in Chapter Two of this thesis, Simone Fullagar alludes to the experience of travel as something similar, where ‘travel as an ethical encounter requires an openness to the affect of the other, at the risk of decentring the self’.⁵⁰⁹ While de Kretser’s *Questions of Travel* considers these aspects of self-disorientation and decentredness, reflected in the second epigraph that heads this section, where her character, Laura, finds herself lost and in love, in this instance, and paradoxically echoing Stead’s modernist revolutionary confidence, Laura was in no doubt about her condition. In Naples, although unaware as she is about her own unconscious motivations, Laura is aware that she is geographically lost, but also in love with the effect of this loss through her experiencing of the disorienting streets of Naples for the first time which suggests, as Muecke notes, that ‘getting to know may mean leaving home and getting lost for a while’.⁵¹⁰ Laura’s experience of Naples paradoxically subverts her earlier experience of travel which begins as an alienating foreignness and eventually becomes, through her job as a travel writer, a frightening familiarity, and instead undergoes a more postmodern (read Deleuzian) experience of travel as ‘a site of surfaces, affects and desires that perceive and connect with other planes of existence, energies and affects.’⁵¹¹ However, even though at one time she

⁵⁰⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 156.

⁵⁰⁹ Simone Fullagar, ‘Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis’ travel writing’, p 174.

⁵¹⁰ Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen All The Way)*, p 130.

⁵¹¹ Simone Fullagar, ‘Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis’ travel writing’, p 174.

thinks ‘I’d like to live here forever’⁵¹² after finding a vocation in teaching English and experiencing the quiet contentedness of belonging with neighbours and acquaintances, not to mention the offer by Theo to father a child with her which she at first declines, but later regrets, Laura’s sojourn in Naples comes to an end. Laura ignores her intuition to remain and instead as the ‘late twentieth century global person’ she was, she ‘kept moving’ as she was advised to do ‘if she was smart ... Geography was beside the point.’⁵¹³ This idea of being smart, of not being naïve, reflects the postmodern irony of the age and is reflected throughout *Questions of Travel*, where everyone is striving to keep up, keep ahead, and keep moving forward, although de Kretser both reflects and refutes this structure of feeling through heterotopically juxtaposing the difference between Laura and Ravi’s reasons for movement and travel, which sees Laura having the economic choice to travel; whereas, Ravi is forced to travel to escape death.

However, as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis with regards to the inevitability of Laura’s connection with blue water, and in Chapter Two with Laura’s experience of jacaranda haunting, it is in Naples and its ‘sultry dampness’⁵¹⁴ where she first experiences the rumblings of nostalgia for her geographic first home; she ultimately acts upon her nostalgic longing ending in tragedy through the, albeit unintentional, choices she makes. Having said that, and in keeping with the paradoxical sensibility and affect of heterotopias and their connection to travel, while in Naples, Laura makes two decisions, both of which turn out to be life altering, which suggests that heterotopic transformation is not necessarily unproblematic. Laura’s inability to stop moving acts as an example of Malouf’s second version of the tragic *Bildungsroman* journey where, the protagonist(s) is/are ‘doomed to

⁵¹² Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 173.

⁵¹³ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 184.

⁵¹⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 203.

perpetual movement and exile'⁵¹⁵ where for Laura, the tragedy of death is the inevitable outcome.

Ravi is also doomed to this perpetual movement and exile foregrounded in the early part of the novel where Ravi's primary school teacher, Father Ignatius, declares 'Geography is destiny.'⁵¹⁶ Father Ignatius' declaration also foreshadows Ravi finding his way back home to Sri Lanka through his epiphanic recognition after being granted asylum in Australia that he in fact didn't 'want to be a tourist in [his] own country' and where for Ravi, due to the execution of his wife and young son by terrorists, the tragedy of his *Bildungsroman* journey had 'already happened.'⁵¹⁷ Through Ravi's initial experience of tragedy that forces him to leave his first home, and his decision to return even though he is finally offered asylum, de Kretser ironically juxtaposes and subverts Malouf's tragic *Bildungsroman* journey through a transnational lens which sees geography and its concurrent implications of race reflect a postmodern experience of multiple ironies and multiple decentring, but also refute this experience of postmodern plurality as an intensifying transnational and transcultural reckoning. Both Laura and Ravi are transformed, albeit tragically, through their heterotopic experiences of travel. De Kretser's narrative can be seen as both 'descriptive' of a postmodern intensifying celebration, while at the same time othering, of difference, but also 'prescriptive' with regards to the consequences of ignoring the rising tide of displaced peoples and climate change disasters, which requires an ongoing reckoning with the politics of location. As Braidotti reminds us, this reckoning calls for both a 'need to strike a rigorous and coherent note of resistance against the neutralization of difference' and 'an ethical-political theory of subjectivity.'⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ David Malouf, *A First Place*, p 2.

⁵¹⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 21.

⁵¹⁷ Michelle de Kretser, *Questions of Travel*, p 476.

⁵¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 88.

The dramatic irony in *Questions of Travel* reflects both these descriptive and prescriptive positions where Laura and Ravi, unknowingly, inhabit their situations with regards to geography as either irrelevant or historical, which ironically in turn reflects a postmodern 'repression both of the past and any imaginable future' reflected in the 'continuous present'⁵¹⁹ of the prepositional 'in'. However, de Kretser's use of irony also points to an 'ontological pacifism'⁵²⁰ which is considered in *The Life To Come* through the more relational prepositions, 'of' and its generational implications, and ultimately 'for' with its notions of hospitality, but within these generational implications and acts of hospitality, transformation, as has already been noted, is not always pretty or what is expected.

Keeping in mind the metamodern journey from naivety to post irony where the third incarnation sees irony evolve into cynicism, De Kretser's irony, evolves from the comedic dramatic irony of Stead's *For Love Alone* and its more tragic form in *Questions of Travel* into a more acerbic representation of the norms of our current epoch. This sees comedic naivety and dramatic tragedy, although reflected more positively in Malouf's third and my own fourth version of the *Bildungsroman* journey, take on a sheen of cynicism.

The majority of the characters in *The Life to Come* want to be either someone or somewhere else and, reflecting their intensifying postmodern moment, they are constantly on the move, either running towards someone or something, or running away. Reflecting Malouf's third version of the *Bildungsroman* journey, where protagonists 'find a new home elsewhere', de Kretser's characters are all in various stages of hardship, loss, and hope, albeit from a postmodern perspective, on the surface, their experiences of hardship, loss, and hope, are somewhat vapid compared to Stead's naïve exuberance in *For Love Alone* and de Kretser's tragic irony in *Questions of Travel*. Through a metamodern reading, de Kretser uses

⁵¹⁹ Christopher K. Brooks, 'Defining the Postcontemporary Moment' in C. K. Brooks (Ed) *Beyond Postmodernism: Onto the Postcontemporary*, Newcastle Upon Tyne UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p 148.

⁵²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p 86.

irony in *The Life to Come* both as a cynical tool to reflect her characters' relative lack of self-awareness and their privilege, but also their own underlying tired cynicism. However, as a transcultural writer, de Kretser also suggests 'alternative ... approaches and practices based on notions of alterity and subversion.'⁵²¹ However prosaic their problems appear to be, their inner turmoil is tangible, and through each's hardship and loss, as the narrative progresses, de Kretser allows her characters, relative to their personal situations, a semblance of hope, or at least understanding, which in turn imbues the narrative with a more post ironic 'informed naivety.'⁵²² However, this informed naivety culminates or intensifies in the final section with de Kretser's story of Bunty and Christabel, where these characters' innocence and authenticity juxtapose the cynical preoccupations of characters in the previous sections, where notions of 'of', albeit relational, for these characters revolves around confusion as to which 'of' applies to them.

In the story of Bunty and Christabel preoccupations with agency, space, and place which are the hallmarks of considerations surrounding the prepositional problematics of 'of' ultimately recede and notions of 'for' and its suggestion of giving and hospitality arise. Bunty and Christabel are far from naïve, but the dramatic irony that de Kretser employs, suggests the evolving use of irony as discussed earlier, where 'deception ... is employed in order to reveal other ... even more destructive forms of deception'⁵²³ but which requires 'sincerity in order to question and challenge.'⁵²⁴ This sincerity sees the intensified cynicism of late postmodernism become a form of metamodern post irony manifest in these characters and their transformations which subvert the traditional *Bildungsroman* journey of young innocence to knowing maturation into a form of middle aged *Bildungsroman*. This reflects

⁵²¹ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 196.

⁵²² Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 5.

⁵²³ Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, p 99.

⁵²⁴ Jon Doyle, 'The changing face of post-postmodern fiction: Irony, sincerity, and populism', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol 53, No 3, 2018, p 268.

my own suggestion of a fourth version of Malouf's *Bildungsroman*, which is also reflected in my own novel, where first homes are left and new homes are found, but these new homes become in themselves defamiliarized through the transformation of the protagonists as they proceed into older age.

'All my life I had been waiting for something wonderful to happen ...'⁵²⁵

The juxtaposition of young and old is at its most prevalent in *The Life To Come* in the last section which encompasses the story of Bunty and Christabel and the one protagonist that appears in all five sections of the narrative as a whole, Pippa. As in *Questions of Travel*, de Kretser once again plays the game of spot the connection and is a further example of de Kretser's style as a metamodern writer who 'stresses the power of confluences, overlappings, and interactions'⁵²⁶ within her work. While de Kretser takes the title of her novel from a line in a Samuel Beckett play which she uses as an epigraph, *The Life to Come* is also the title of a posthumously published story by E M Forster about a tragic same-sex love affair.⁵²⁷ What connects Pippa to the novel, apart from, or possibly because of, her appearance in each section, is an indirect reference to a popular poem by Robert Browning entitled 'Pippa Passes'⁵²⁸ (not uncoincidentally the title of her own section in de Kretser's novel). Through Pippa, and Bunty and Christabel, de Kretser juxtaposes the traditional *Bildungsroman* journey of young innocence to knowing maturation against a more contemporary form of middle aged *Bildungsroman* as 'a kind of reckoning that occurs in mid-life.'⁵²⁹ This

⁵²⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 341.

⁵²⁶ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, , p 1

⁵²⁷ E M Forster, *The Life to Come & Other Stories*, London UK: Edward Arnold, 1972.

⁵²⁸ Robert Browning *Pippa Passes and other Poetic Dramas* (1896), London UK: Scott, 1896.

⁵²⁹ James Ley, 'The Drug of Otherness' *The Returns* by Philip Salmon', *Sydney Review of Books*, 2019, p 3, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/the-drug-of-otherness-the-returns-by-philip-salom/>, (viewed 2/8/2019).

juxtaposition suggests a more post ironic and less cynical outlook reflecting, as suggested earlier, a form of metamodern journey from ‘naivete through irony to cynicism to post irony.’⁵³⁰ This outlook also acts as an example of a metamodern form of *Bildungsroman* which endeavours to ‘revive historical forms ... to show that these conventions retain their emotional, intellectual and representational power ...’⁵³¹ Post irony also reflects metamodern literature in general which by ‘acknowledging how contemporary society both functions and feels ... places ... the concept of community at the centre ... without being decentred by postmodern irony ...’⁵³²

Just like her namesake in Browning’s poem, through her naïve unawareness as she passes through the lives of the characters that inhabit *The Life to Come*, de Kretser’s Pippa acts as an ironic juxtaposition to highlight the almost comical, at times, late postmodern sensibility of cultivated cynicism ‘unhampered by history or geography’⁵³³ where her ‘snappy answers and impersonal brutishness’⁵³⁴ masks a somewhat tired mien which suggests in her ‘world of appetite and detail ... Pippa was neither wholly glad nor wholly sorry about any of those things.’⁵³⁵ However the irony of Pippa’s unawareness is juxtaposed by a growing awareness of ‘a whisper that lived in a folded, reptilian corner of Pippa’s brain ... She was always for the underdog ... What caused turmoil were underdogs who failed to respect their allotted rank.’⁵³⁶ For Pippa, Christabel was one of these underdogs who, although useful as a dog sitter and a passive but grateful recipient when Pippa decides to exercise her idea of the spirit of hospitality: ‘when you cook for someone it’s good to know if they liked it’⁵³⁷, was

⁵³⁰ Lee Konstantinou, ‘Four Faces of Postirony’, p 96.

⁵³¹ Lee Konstantinou, ‘Four Faces of Postirony’, p 95-96.

⁵³² Kristian Shaw, ‘Global Consciousness Local Consciousness: Cosmopolitan Hospitality and Ethical Agency in Zadie Smith’s *NW*, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-first century Fiction*, p 95.

⁵³³ James Ley, ‘Fictive Selves: *The Life To Come*, *Sydney Review of Books*, 2017, p 8, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/life-to-come-michelle-de-kretser/>, (viewed 20/11/2018).

⁵³⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 187.

⁵³⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 265.

⁵³⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 222.

⁵³⁷ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 320.

ultimately ‘only a former neighbour’⁵³⁸ or ‘no one who mattered’⁵³⁹ when she had the temerity to actually require something in return.

Juxtaposed against the writers, academics, and culture vultures, of the earlier sections of *The Life to Come*, de Kretser exposes through her ironic representations of a postmodern structure of feeling that involves negotiations with the sometimes problematic and confusing prepositional positionings of ‘in’ and ‘of’ as discussed earlier, Bunty and Christabel emerge as the true heroes of the novel. As metamodern characters, while ‘innocent, unsophisticated, and childlike’⁵⁴⁰ ... [they] ... ‘ride the watershed between postmodern disappointment ... and modernist longing’⁵⁴¹ ... [where] ... ‘the agent of synthesis is often love or care of others.’⁵⁴² Bunty and Christabel’s authentic hospitality sees the responsibility of ‘taking care of’ someone or something evolve into a ‘caring *for*’ someone or something which involves a less transactional framework, such as Pippa’s idea of neighbourliness, and instead a form of helpful encouragement and acceptance.

The sensibility of the metamodern ‘both/and’ suggests our epoch is, at times, one of recognition, but at the same time rejection, with regards to the metonymic properties reflected in the prepositional ‘of’ which requires ‘integrat[ion] to become part and parcel of a whole.’⁵⁴³ This ‘both/and’ sensibility also suggests that while the intensifying ‘for’ with its notions of non-transactional generosity, epitomised through the characters of Bunty and Christabel, is an evolving one, it is not without its own problematics with regards to agency and action, which is reflected in the third quote that introduced this section: ‘All my life I had been waiting for something wonderful to happen ...’⁵⁴⁴ Although Christabel’s epiphany can

⁵³⁸ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 186.

⁵³⁹ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 268.

⁵⁴⁰ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 3.

⁵⁴¹ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 4.

⁵⁴² Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 3.

⁵⁴³ Alexandra Dumitrescu, ‘What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?’ p 6.

⁵⁴⁴ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 341.

be read negatively through a postmodern lens with regards to issues of agency and action as passive and static, it can also be read positively through a metamodern lens which sees these issues of agency and action not as obstacles, but both as a reflection of our evolving epochal structure of feeling of a post ironic weariness, but also, through this weariness, an evolving form of patience which requires acceptance and respect, where waiting can also be just as life changing as moving.

While Christabel herself recognises that the something wonderful she had been waiting for was ‘when I came to live with Bunty ... What I didn’t realise was that there would be no more big unexpected changes’⁵⁴⁵ and earlier when she realises ‘life is long! How had she missed the warning in that?’⁵⁴⁶ Christabel comes to accept ‘the life to come’ where ‘one morning after another would make its entrance. She would light the oven, pull up the blind and inspect the sky. Life is long!’⁵⁴⁷ It is through her acceptance of this life to come which epitomises Christabel’s final transformation and is reflected in my hypothetical fourth version of Malouf’s *Bildungsroman* journey which sees a transformation of the protagonists as they proceed into older age, where it is not their home that has changed, but themselves. In keeping with the cyclical sensibility of this thesis, and the ‘informed naivety’⁵⁴⁸ of metamodernism, Bunty and Christabel’s transformation can be seen, not just as another new reincarnation, but more as a return to the accepting innocence of childhood which is reflected in de Kretser’s depiction of their final trip to Romania, with its mixture of references to fairy tales and poetry learned long ago, but also as a reflection of Bunty’s Alzheimer’s which is slowly transforming her back into a child. This juxtaposition of benign innocence and malignant disintegration suggests that this final transformation, like all of life’s transitions, will not be easy, and that innocence can be both benign and destructive, but that patience and

⁵⁴⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 341.

⁵⁴⁶ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 330.

⁵⁴⁷ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 372-373.

⁵⁴⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 5.

acceptance, of ourselves and of others, can assist in this transition. In the final lines of the novel, as Christabel sits in a park and watches her life pass before her, she imagines Bunty's dog, Olly Faithful, reincarnated in a stray dog that stops its playing and stares across at her: 'Olly Faithful! She called. He lowered his head and started moving towards her. Her arms rose, joyful and triumphant. And still he came.'⁵⁴⁹ Christabel's elegiac moment of joy and triumph as she opens her arms to embrace past, present, and future can be juxtaposed against the brutal final lines of Pippa's section where she realises, 'There were no memorial plaques in the future, only a daunting horde to which Pippa was of no account. It called over its shoulder as it rammed past: "You missed everything important."⁵⁵⁰ Pippa's need for 'a new world that offered ... an unlimited expanse in which she might live out her best idea of herself'⁵⁵¹ suggests Pippa will cling to this static best idea while Christabel, through her more fluid and hospitable opening, will transform through acceptance and love.

'She intuitively felt the future that was out there somewhere.'⁵⁵²

The first completed draft of my novel existed before de Kretser's *The Life to Come* was published and my initial intent was to focus on the echoes and reverberations, connections and contrasts, between *For Love Alone*, *Questions of Travel*, and *The Heartbeats Echo*. However, the intuition represented in the fourth quote, taken from my own novel that will inform the following and final discussion of this chapter also reflects the echoing reverberation of a structure of feeling that I found present in *The Life To Come*. It suggested to me that my writing was indeed 'of' its time, but also 'for' its time. Although Sophie's words, the quote above reflects the intuition of both of my protagonists who have only just

⁵⁴⁹ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 373.

⁵⁵⁰ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 268.

⁵⁵¹ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 268.

⁵⁵² Amanda Williams, 'The Heartbeats Echo', (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 158.

begun their hypothetical fourth stage of *Bildungsroman* transformation; however, they intuit, just as Christabel does, a sense of postmodern weariness of perpetual movement and action and a metamodern yearning for authenticity and acceptance. They are tired, but hopeful, as one early reader noted.

In Stead's *For Love Alone*, Teresa and, in his own way, Johnnie, subvert Malouf's comedic first version of the *Bildungsroman* journey, where after some missteps and misadventures, the protagonists return home, by replacing a geographical home for a gendered one. Laura and Ravi, the two main protagonists in *Questions of Travel* subvert Malouf's second form of *Bildungsroman*, that of never finding home again, through the juxtaposition of the tragedy of their individual geographies. The doublings continue with Bunty and Christabel who subvert the traditional *Bildungsroman* journey of innocence to knowledge through a generational distortion which sees an older age *Bildungsroman* transformation from knowledge back to innocence. My two protagonists, Sophie and Robbie, reflect, at times, all three of these subversions of Malouf's *Bildungsroman* journeys through their own gendered, geographical, and generational experiences, but which ultimately involve ongoing negotiations with difference, understanding, and acceptance, both within themselves and with others. These experiences and negotiations in turn reflect, as I have endeavoured to illustrate throughout this thesis and of which my novel is an example, a structure of feeling prevalent in our metamodern epoch which sees 'individuals assume perspectives from which paradigms and traditions integrate, while the fragmented postmodern self becomes a whole'⁵⁵³ paradoxically through an intensifying and atomising heterotopic difference that ultimately requires 'an ethics of care for the other'⁵⁵⁴ (my italics) as has been discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter.

⁵⁵³ Alexandra Dumitrescu, 'What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?' p 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Alexandra Dumitrescu, 'What is Metamodernism and Why Bother?' p 3.

The paradox of fragmented wholeness is suggested in the prologue of *The Heartbeats Echo* where Robbie and Sophie, born on opposite sides of the world, simultaneously are born under the auspices of the morning and evening star: Venus. As they draw ever closer to each other, malevolent and benevolent forces combine to guide and/or push them towards an eventual meeting. However, just as the mystery of who the book of Leonard Cohen poems Robbie finds actually belongs to, or what really happened to Thea and Bill's son, Nathaniel, is never solved, as an ode to the many 'gaps and slippages'⁵⁵⁵ found in de Kretser's work, is also a stylistic choice that reflects my own predilection for horizon gazing and unsatiated outcomes. It is also an example of an emerging metamodern sensibility that sees through 'a revival of the mythic; sublimity, narrative, depth, meaning ... a daring to imagine transcendence again ... arising *out of* and ultimately held in check by the acknowledged immanent frame.'⁵⁵⁶ This metamodern transcendence emerges not as any hierarchical higher power, but unfolds in de Kretser's novels, and my own, as an enigmatic layer that forms at the intersection where transcendence and immanence meet, reflecting, in a way, a post ironic reading which suggests it is okay not to know, that mysteries do not need to be solved, and the 'moral complexity, ambiguity, [and] nuance'⁵⁵⁷ of life. In this instance, Abramson's proposal noted earlier and repeated here, that 'metamodernism seeks to collapse distances'⁵⁵⁸ between a myriad of binary oppositions such as '... enthusiasm and irony, hope and melancholy, naivete and knowingness ...'⁵⁵⁹ not only also points to a collapsing of distance between the transcendent and the immanent, but also between reader and author, author and text. This thesis acts as an example of this collapsing of distance where connections between

⁵⁵⁵ Jack Cameron Stanton, 'Interview with Michelle de Kretser', p 3.

⁵⁵⁶ Brendan Dempsey, '[Re]construction: Metamodern 'Transcendence' and the Return of Myth' *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2014, <http://www.metamodernism.com/author/brendandempsey/>, (viewed 27/3/2017).

⁵⁵⁷ Jack Cameron Stanton, 'Interview with Michelle de Kretser', p 3.

⁵⁵⁸ Seth Abramson, 'Metamodernism: The Basics', *The Huffington Post*, p 1.

⁵⁵⁹ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', pp 5-6.

Stead's and de Kretser's own motivations and that of their characters and my own experiences and characters' actions reverberate historically, geographically, and temporally.

A form of fragmented wholeness is also reflected in the four sections of my novel: 'Home', 'Away', 'Homeless', and 'Harbour' which in turn reflect the four versions of the *Bildungsroman* journey discussed earlier, where home is left, home is never returned to, home has changed, and finally home hasn't changed but the protagonist(s) have. These four sections also act as representations of the metamodern journey from naivety, through irony, to cynicism, and post irony, which author, character, and reader may all undergo, emerging 'from the gauntlet of postmodernism on firmer foundations ... weary but non-cynical ...'⁵⁶⁰ For both Robbie and Sophie, *home* is a place to get away from, being *away* is generally where innocence is lost, being *homeless* in your own home suggests a form of tired cynicism, and finally finding a *harbour* suggests a place to wait, rest, and recuperate. It is in the 'Harbour' section of my novel that Robbie and Sophie are finally tested and confronted with their own otherness which questions and disturbs their equilibrium, but 'as an ethical encounter requires ... openness.'⁵⁶¹ It is this struggle with their own willingness to open that Robbie and Sophie are forced to confront, which confirms them as purely metamodern characters in search of some form of community to remedy the existential crisis of their imploding selves.⁵⁶²

Reflected in its double meaning, the 'harbour' that Sophie and Robbie reach encompasses both the idea of safety and secrecy that informs their choices and desires, and which also epitomises the place but no place phenomena of heterotopias as spaces of transformation. Harbours, in both their physical and more metaphysical manifestation, suggest 'the archetypal image of ... confluence ... the place ... of being with others, of

⁵⁶⁰ Lee Konstantinou, 'Four Faces of Postirony', p 96-97.

⁵⁶¹ Simone Fullagar, 'Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis' travel writing', p 174.

⁵⁶² Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too?* p 359.

meeting the Other.⁵⁶³ Like travel, heterotopic spaces collapse distance and this collapsing of distance intensifies in this section of my novel where secrets are harboured within the heterotopic spaces that Robbie and Sophie inhabit and encounter. Robbie's houseboat and Sophie's caravan, the hotels, shops, and fairground all act as points of arrival and departure that drive and guide them toward the many 'others' they confront that also drive and guide them over the space of a single day towards their individual epiphanies which for both, although manifesting differently, entails a form of patient acceptance, of themselves and others. This confrontation and final acceptance manifests most significantly with Bill and Thea, ex husband and wife, who while outsiders themselves, are not without consequence in the coastal towns they inhabit as they minister to the economical and spiritual wellbeing of the local population.

Through their exchanges with Bill and Thea, both Robbie and Sophie first experience their epiphanies through unintentional openings. Fullagar explains Lingis' suggestion that the connection between self and other 'is affected most when ... touched unintentionally by the other'⁵⁶⁴ and Irigaray, as Fullagar again explicates, describes 'an openness to the other in terms of *porosity*; the corporeality of self allows the other to pass through ...'⁵⁶⁵ It is the sonorous reverberation of music for both Robbie and Sophie, emanating from and passing through each of them differently that breaches the walls they have erected, but paradoxically these walls play a part where, as Carter describes, 'the source of echo is the wall and the direction of this is always toward song.'⁵⁶⁶ After a somewhat climactic physical altercation with Bill, Robbie is literally undone, which suggests a corresponding reconstruction, when he hears, or more accurately *feels* the sounds of whales singing:

⁵⁶³ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 190.

⁵⁶⁴ Alphonso Lingis in Simone Fullagar, 'Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis' travel writing', p 178.

⁵⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray in Simone Fullagar, 'Encountering Otherness: Embodied affect in Alphonso Lingis' travel writing', p 178/179.

⁵⁶⁶ Paul Carter, *Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence*, p 183.

The sound seemed to move through him, ghost-like. What does sound feel like? He should know. The sounds he played were heavy and dark, like mud and mire. They came up through the floor, like grasping tentacles pulling him down. This sound felt like that moment when his young son first took his hand: the quiet intensity of contentment. The high pitch was still there, but something was underneath it: a sweet moan which entered his abdomen and rose up into his chest, then up through his neck and jaw, his cheeks, and finally his eyes, as he realised he was crying. It was as if the very vibration had released something inside of him, and he instinctively turned towards the black sea in an effort to receive more, but it was gone as suddenly as it had appeared, leaving only his weeping eyes and a strange sensation in his belly.⁵⁶⁷

Sophie too is moved by song, but for Sophie, it is her own vibrating contralto that echoes from within herself which as Carter again suggests ‘it is the echo that ... resolves the infinite regression ... of ... mimetic desire ... the affirmation of the other is inseparable from self-knowledge ...’⁵⁶⁸ Through Thea’s thoughtful encouragement Sophie is reminded of a self she left behind:

‘I wanted to be Virginia Woolf as a teenager, or Stevie Nicks, but I was told early on I couldn’t sing. No one’s told me yet I can’t write.’

‘But you like music,’ Thea said, more like a statement than a question.

‘Yeah, of course,’ Sophie said.

‘Why?’

Sophie paused. Why indeed? She used to know.

‘It lifts me up ... cuts me to the bone ... turns me on, and ... frees my soul,’ Sophie almost sang as lyrics from a long-forgotten song filled her mind.

‘Sing me a song, Sophia,’ Thea commanded as if she was a mind reader. The command sounded familiar.

‘No ... really ... well ... okay,’ Sophie said, surprised at her own desperate desire to oblige. ‘Day after day I’m more confused ...’ she began tentatively ... ‘Yet I look for the light in the pouring rain ... you know that’s a game that I hate to lose, but I’m feelin the strain, ain’t it a shame ...’ and she

⁵⁶⁷ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 271.

⁵⁶⁸ Paul Carter, *Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence*, p 183.

was off, ‘ ... oh give me the beat, boys, to free my soul ... I wanna get lost ...’ but she couldn’t continue.⁵⁶⁹

This initial releasing opens, for both Robbie and Sophie, a way into accepting themselves and consequently others. In his final epiphany Robbie realises that he’s always been the one who follows, the one who waits. And that is okay. His latent misogyny is a mask he uses to shield himself from the realisation of his perceived weakness. While Sophie, always berating herself for her own perceived lack of feminine decorum, finally accepts that she is enough just as she is. However, these doublings reflected in Robbie’s and Sophie’s epiphanies are not simply representative postmodern subversions of the perceived historical roles of men and women, just as Bill’s and Thea’s reflections are not simply used as mirroring tools for the same purpose, but, as de Kretser describes, as literary characters they are ‘individuals in all their complexity, ambiguity, and difficulty.’⁵⁷⁰

As suggested above, the ‘harbour’, as both a metaphoric and geographic heterotopic space, where ‘the river ... meets the ocean’⁵⁷¹ allows *for* both ‘new cultural imaginaries’ and the reconciliation *of* ‘different ... cultural perspectives.’⁵⁷² Like the horizon, the harbour can represent beginning, end, and waystation with regards to journeys which also reflects the comingling of these new imaginings and different perspectives, as noted above. This comingling encompasses not only ‘transcending one’s culture ... [but also] ... one’s self ...’⁵⁷³ which paradoxically by ‘being with others – by meeting the Other ... the individual gradually realises that the Other is not an enemy, not a stranger ... and most of the time not even an other ...’⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁶⁹ Amanda Williams, ‘The Heartbeats Echo’, (PhD Thesis), Flinders University, 2020, p 288.

⁵⁷⁰ Jack Cameron Stanton, ‘Interview with Michelle de Kretser’, p 3.

⁵⁷¹ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 190.

⁵⁷² Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 190.

⁵⁷³ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 197.

⁵⁷⁴ Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, p 190.

While it would be almost comedic to imagine Christina Stead breaking out into song, one could imagine her happily humming away to herself as she banged away on her typewriter skewering some poor unfortunate on paper, while Wagner's *Parsifal* played in the background. However, her prose, at times, can be read as almost musical, albeit more opera than Okie, and her modernist spirit echoes as I finish this final chapter on horizons and harbours, on otherness and difference. Through my own welling tears, I join in with de Kretser and Christabel as she opens her arms and sings her melodic mondegreen: 'Oh come Olly Faithful ... joyful and triumphant' as 'small hearts ticked in the grass at her feet ...'⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵ Michelle de Kretser, *The Life To Come*, p 373.

Conclusion: In-between Days

‘... if I could, say, look back over travelled roads; or on the other hand, look forward confidently, chart in hand. Instead I find myself betwixt and between ...’⁵⁷⁶

‘As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology.’⁵⁷⁷

‘Recognition of sites as relations of power, recognition of cultural multiplicity and immanent difference, means that every act of writing is *writing across*.’⁵⁷⁸

Like the title of this thesis, ‘All in the Same Boat’, the title of this conclusion, ‘In-between Days’ was envisaged long before Covid 19 surfaced early in 2020, and the irony of these terms and how they are used to explain our current and continuing situation of paradoxical universal responsibility and nation/state/individual isolation is not lost, where indeed it is obvious we are far from all being in the same boat, and simply being able to live in the relative safety of the in-between is a luxury not all can accommodate. But, through a more post ironic perspective, the wonder of the unending temporal reverberations of experience that echo through these words continues to enthrall as I sit down to write this conclusion.

I remember hearing The Cure’s song ‘In Between Days’ in 1985, a few months before I boarded a plane to London, clutching a ticket with an open-ended return date, and much like Stead’s *For Love Alone*, it sound-tracked my twenties like a whispered warning. While I certainly, or so I thought at that time, agreed with Robert Smith’s admission that it was indeed wrong to suggest the *ménage à trois* he had in mind, the bittersweet B minor chords of the chorus that reflects the problematic position of Smith’s protagonist suited my

⁵⁷⁶ Paul Carter, ‘Keynote Address, Crossing the Line: Space as Colonialism’, *JASAL*, 1995, p 1, <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/view/9946>, (viewed 27/7/2020).

⁵⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’ p 4.

⁵⁷⁸ Gail Jones, ‘A Dreaming, A Sauntering: Re-imagining Critical Paradigms’, p 14.

melancholic musings at the time with regards to families, friendships, and freedom, and reverberates still. Although these days my musings are just as much philosophical and political as painful and poignant, it must be said that I had a penchant for the existentialists at an early age. Smith's entreaty 'that it couldn't be me and be her in between without you'⁵⁷⁹ could be a rallying cry for Butler's suggestion discussed in the preceding chapter with regards to individual and collective subjectivity and relationality on which she further extrapolates as an example of her 'Levinasian-psychoanalytic model of relational ontology'⁵⁸⁰ that '... I am nowhere without *you* (my italics). I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you" ...'⁵⁸¹ Who would have thought that Robert Smith was also a Levinasian, but then again, when I think about his oeuvre, how could he not be?

In my introduction to this thesis I was 'oscillating wildly', both temporally and spatially as I, channelling de Kretser it seems, magpie-like, followed each shiny new theory that came my way, and as I have already acknowledged in Chapter One's The Mountain, my elevated vista afforded me both a type of omniscient and multiplicitous perspective of which I used to illustrate methodologically the embodiment of metamodernism as I initially understood it. This embodiment entails an oscillating 'both/neither' paradigm in its 'descriptive' manifestation as connoted by Vermeulen and van den Akker as 'the double-bind'⁵⁸² of existence, and a 'both/and' dynamic in its 'prescriptive' guise, as suggested by Abramson and Dumitrescu's more hopeful definitions as discussed throughout this thesis, which sees this oscillating double negative less dialectically and more a palimpsestic type of simultaneity. Instead of oscillating wildly, although at times still an accurate description of post postmodern affect as discussed in Chapter Two's The Ocean, Abramson and Dumitrescu

⁵⁷⁹ Robert Smith, 'In Between Days', Crows Nest Sydney: WEA Records, 1985.

⁵⁸⁰ Mari Ruti, 'The Ethics of Precarity: Judith Butler's Reluctant Universalism', in Maurits van Bever Donker, Ross Truscott, Gary Minkley, Premesh Lalu (Eds), *Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid*, Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2017, p 93.

⁵⁸¹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London UK: Verso, 2004, p 49.

⁵⁸² Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', p 6.

suggest a way forward, and in their spirit of a metamodern simultaneity this way forward is not only linear but also horizontal, to encompass the notion of the ‘both/and’ as a pivoting geographical, generational, genealogical, and gendered paradoxical centred decentring. This centred decentring, in turn, encompasses the prepositional positionings discussed in Chapter Three’s *The Horizon*, which, while acknowledging a temporal evolution by way of differing readings of these positionings through a modern, postmodern, and metamodern lens, also illustrates a reverberating relationality that sees subjectivity and society atomising into ever smaller delineations of heterotopic difference. Through a metamodern reading, this atomising subjectivity paradoxically leads to both an intensifying recognition of difference and at the same time rejection of otherness increasingly evident as the crisis of Covid 19, and the aftermath of the Trump presidency, continues. Reflected in the geographical and metaphorical title of this conclusion, the principal research question of this thesis – ‘How do heterotopias act as spaces of transformation?’ – is answered by suggesting the space of the in between not only allows for connection through mediation and relation but also transformation through converging lines of flight. This sees heterotopic spaces of crisis allow for transformation through an intensifying metonymic relationship between dynamic notions of centres and margins.

As this thesis has shown through its comparative study of Stead and de Kretser’s fictions of travel and my own *The Heartbeats Echo*, these heterotopic spaces of crisis require ‘some significant travel – some expulsion from mainstream society ...’⁵⁸³ Whether this travel occurs through the multiple versions of Malouf’s *Bildungsroman* or through Van Gennep’s Rites of Passage, heterotopias act as thresholds and waystations which connect and contrast materially differing points of experience and embodiment and temporally differing epochal

⁵⁸³ Arun Saldanha, ‘Heterotopia and Structuralism’, *Environment and Planning A*, Vol 40, 2008, p 2083.

structures of feeling such as modernist ambivalence, postmodernist indifference and the ambiguousness of metamodern alterity as suggested in the introduction to this thesis.

In keeping with the ‘both/and’ paradigm of metamodernism, heterotopias are real spaces of the in between in which travel figures extensively, but also as suggested at various points in Chapters One, Two, and Three of this thesis, as a tool, a form of heterotopology that can also allow for differing ways of thinking and theorising which sees ‘heterotopia ... [as] a process rather than a thing’⁵⁸⁴ although, through a more metamodern reading, I would replace Hetherington’s *rather* with *just as much as* here. This process of heterotopic thinking informs this comparative study of *For Love Alone*, *Questions of Travel*, and *The Life To Come* as an attempt to illustrate Abramson’s suggestion of the metamodern collapsing of distance and the move away from postmodernism’s dialectical bind, which sees the heterotopic in between mediate between oscillating hierarchal notions of place and space, surface and depth, truth and imagination, self and other, home and away, naivety and irony, and transcendence and immanence.

My thesis encompasses a type of research, reading, and writing, that embraces rather than avoids Carter’s critique of an historically postmodern approach which suggests any attempt of ‘keeping open a communication across difference is largely treated as poetic excess, if not an infantile regression.’⁵⁸⁵ While also acknowledged in Chapter One, Felski’s warning that ‘the writer who strives to capture everything will end up conveying nothing,’⁵⁸⁶ and a subsequent acknowledgement on my part in Chapter Two of another Felski caveat that an academic engagement with affect cautions against ‘lapsing into subjective effusion or an idiosyncratic flurry of private associations,’⁵⁸⁷ it feels as if I have perhaps, through at times

⁵⁸⁴ Kevin Hetherington in Arun Saldanha, ‘Heterotopia and Structuralism’, *Environment and Planning A*, Vol 40, 2008, p 2091.

⁵⁸⁵ Paul Carter, ‘Keynote Address, Crossing the Line: Space as Colonialism’, *JASAL*, 1995, p 4.

⁵⁸⁶ Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature*, p 79.

⁵⁸⁷ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p 178.

some poetic excess and infantile regression of my own, achieved some semblance of success in my attempts to illustrate the paradoxical structure of feeling of our current epoch which both requires and rejects, desires and denounces these lapses.

As Hetherington suggests, heterotopias ‘can be textual sites just as much as geographical ones’⁵⁸⁸ and as a Creative Writing thesis which endeavours to use ‘theory ... to resonate with the emotions as well as the intellect’⁵⁸⁹ my novel and exegesis endeavours to participate in a textual call and response conversation which resonates between Stead’s and de Kretser’s fictions and my own as epitomised in the closing section of Chapter Three where, indeed, the tears were real as I sang along, or in Chapter One where I soared like an eagle, or Chapter Two which saw my persona evolve from pirate to sea captain to landlocked sailor. Through form as well as content, each of my chapters reflect the overall geographical phenomenology of my thesis of mountain vista, ocean depth, and receding horizon through a kind of scaling of focus where each chapter opens with a broad approach and incrementally zooms in to a final close up through a close reading of a certain feature of the texts to illustrate the connections and reverberations between them through what Nicholas Birns describes, as I’ve alluded to in previous discussions, a type of ‘emotional analysis ... between text and context ...’⁵⁹⁰ Moretti’s suggestion that ‘the larger the geographical space one wants to study, the smaller should the unit of analysis be: a concept ... a device, a trope, a limited narrative unit ...’⁵⁹¹ resonates where I focus on incipits in Chapter One, on colours in Chapter Two, and on pronouns and prepositions in Chapter Three to illustrate the more wide ranging overall themes of each chapter, such as place and space, and omniscience and limited view points in Chapter One, emotion and affect, truth and imagination, and surface

⁵⁸⁸ Kevin Hetherington in Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p 186.

⁵⁸⁹ Dominique Hecq in Daniel Southward, ‘Dealing with the creative/critical divide: these men as readers simply cannot know what it is to write’, *New Writing*, Vol 13, No 2, p 276.

⁵⁹⁰ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*, p. 90.

⁵⁹¹ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures of World Literature’, p 61.

and depth in Chapter Two, and self and other, home and away, and naivety and irony in Chapter Three. These small units of analysis and wide-ranging themes reflect and are reflected, reverberate and resonate, through my chosen fictions of travel and my own novel as representative of both epochal structures of feeling and unique artistic responses to these structures of feeling. As I suggest in the introduction to this thesis and as Braidotti confirms, it is ‘the critical task ...[of] ... creativity ... the invention of new ways of thinking about what we are in the process of becoming’⁵⁹², which ‘encourages us to recognise the intersections between mobility, multiple identities, and ethical belonging and accountability.’⁵⁹³

Paradoxes abound at these intersections, which reflects the tension between the ‘descriptive’ and ‘prescriptive’ perspectives of our metamodern present where the paradoxical simultaneity of metamodernism’s ‘both/and’ paradigm also suggests a converging of both these descriptive and prescriptive positions through the possible impossibility of the place-but-no-place phenomenology of the heterotopia. The idea of the mountain, ocean, and horizon, as noted above, acts as both a literal and figurative linear journey of my evolving thesis and the more cyclical experience of its continuity, but also suggests a convergence where all three exist simultaneously, reflected in a familiar image of a towering mountain overlooking a vast ocean and the horizon as a neat pencil line that completes the picture. From Vermeulen and van den Akker’s ‘descriptive’ position that the “‘destiny” of the metamodern wo/man [is] to pursue a horizon that is forever receding’⁵⁹⁴ and Abramson’s more prescriptive suggestion of a metamodern methodology which seeks the ‘collapse of distance’⁵⁹⁵, somewhere in between this futile pursuit and hopeful seeking lies Janet Frame’s pragmatic appeal to ‘remember that we are human, to forget our preoccupation

⁵⁹² Rosi Braidotti in Rosi Braidotti and Lisa Regan, ‘Our Times Are always Out of Joint’, 2017, p 184.

⁵⁹³ Rosi Braidotti in Rosi Braidotti and Lisa Regan, ‘Our Times Are always Out of Joint’, 2017, p 174.

⁵⁹⁴ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’, p 12.

⁵⁹⁵ Seth Abramson, ‘Metamodernism: The Basics’, p 2.

with distances ... and remember the unbearable closeness of one human being to his neighbour.⁵⁹⁶ Lingis expands this appeal of closeness to include the natural world and ‘the sound of the mountain ... the rumble of the waves ... the cries of the fledgling bird ...’⁵⁹⁷ Frame’s appeal and Lingis’ inclusivity echo and inform the undercurrent of sensibility within my novel, *The Heartbeats Echo*, to ultimately suggest ‘There are no others. That very concept is a mirage. The closer you come, the farther away it is.’⁵⁹⁸ This metamodern sensibility is prevalent as both a methodology as well as a research theme that underpins this thesis and its hypothesis of the reverberating potential of literature to both reflect and connect structures of feeling across historical, geographical, and temporal planes, and the idea of an intensifying heterotopic otherness, both real and imagined, that through the recognition and acceptance of difference, can allow for transformation.

In keeping with the performative persona that I have adopted, it feels as if a ‘without further ado’ is necessary as all that has been said previously is simply a rather long, very long, preface to the main action which is my novel. However, while still occupying the in between which allows a looking back as well as a looking forward I’d like to pause ever so slightly and think back to that fledgling novelist I was at the start of my candidature, as Turchi describes, standing ‘at one moment in the expanse of time, holding a blank sheet of

⁵⁹⁶ Janet Frame, ‘This Desirable Property’, (1964), in Denis Harold and Pamela Gordon (Eds), *Janet Frame in Her Own Words*, Rosedale, New Zealand: Penguin Books, 2011, p 39.

⁵⁹⁷ Alphonso Lingis, ‘Doubles’, *Itinerant Philosophy: On Alphonso Lingis*, Bobby George and Tom Sparrow (Eds), Brooklyn New York: Punctum Books, 2014, p 67, <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/25547/1004548.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, (viewed 20/7/2020).

⁵⁹⁸ William Michaelian, ‘How Do You Feel?’, *Recently Banned Literature*, Blog, 2016, <https://recently-banned-literature.blogspot.com/2016/11/how-do-you-feel.html>, (viewed 19/7/2020).

paper.⁵⁹⁹ De Kretser's *The Life to Come* was still in its drafting phase and her subsequent monograph on Shirley Hazzard a distant desire, but fast forward four years and I found myself reading her own preface to her writing on Hazzard: 'A book comes to find you at a particular season of your life.'⁶⁰⁰ I think that is the same for writing too. As Hazzard suggests 'One can only say, it will be a whole – a region from which a few features, not necessarily those that seemed prominent at the start, will stand out in clear colours. Not to direct, but to solace us; not to fix our positions, but to show us how we came.'⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, p 236.

⁶⁰⁰ Michelle de Kretser, *Writers on Writers: Shirley Hazzard*, Melbourne VIC: Black Inc., 2019, p 4.

⁶⁰¹ Shirley Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon*, London UK: MacMillan and Co Ltd, 1970, p 190-191.

‘For time’s not cheated by a moment’s quiet;
The heartbeats echo to eternal riot.’ (Tennessee Williams)

The Heartbeats Echo

'We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.' (T S Eliot)

Prologue

(Earth, 1960)

In the Southern Hemisphere, the benevolent morning star lit the way in the near dawn, as a man in a great coat rode shotgun in a borrowed car through the empty streets of Port Adelaide, screaming hold on, hold on to his pregnant wife in the back seat. They made it to the hospital just as the baby, a girl, nosedived into the antipodean sphere, swallowing the life-giving amniotic waters of her first home as she arrived, coughing and spluttering, into a world that was never ready for her.

In the Northern Hemisphere it was early twilight in the village of Brentford, and the evening star glittered as the baby began to crown. The doctor felt for the soft shell of skull but found instead the little ball of heel. Stop pushing, the doctor commanded, stop pushing, but it was too late. Like falling feet first through a plaster ceiling, the baby, a boy, broke through, trailing blood and membrane in his wake, forced out into an unfamiliar place he wasn't ready for.

Sophie was named after her great-grandmother Sophia who had travelled from Tasmania to South Australia searching for a better life. Sophie never got to meet her great-grandmother as Sophia died at the age of thirty from septicaemia, otherwise known as abortion. Thus named, Sophie came home from hospital to her parents' Lefevre Peninsula beachside home. Hungry for life – milk, touch, attention – her parents found her demands at first a novelty which soon subsided. When Sophie discovered reading, she found a way to leave her little pale blue and white room for lands unknown, and she wished more than anything that her white wardrobe was the doorway into a different world, just like in her favourite book. Sophie wasn't to know then that years later the sound of gently lapping waves that washed over her young years like a watercolour would draw her back, again and again. Like two magnets, forever searching and repulsing, the pull and push of here and there mapped her movements as she navigated her way through a world where the horizon, as we all know, was always out of reach.

Robbie was named after his grandfather Robert, a trawler man from Portsmouth. This detail never ceased to impress him. He was related to a seaman, a deckhand, an adventurer. As he sat atop the toy box in his bedroom of his parents' two-up two-down and looked out over the flowerpot rooftops of Brentford, he would place his stubby fingers flat against the glass and imagine these were Grandfather Robert's hands, the skin calloused and hardened from years of salty seawater and hauling rope. The magical family holidays Robbie spent in Portsmouth visiting his old and wizened namesake fed his feeling of being special and important. He too would be a seaman and have wonderful adventures. Like anything that is familiar and routine, he didn't take much notice of the planes forever moving past his eyeline as he stared out of his bedroom window, daydreaming of the ocean. He didn't notice the constant rumble and the way the jets seemed to skim the rooftops, like toys. They were just planes. The desire for difference, for something and somewhere exotic, was his escape and his comfort. He didn't know that one day a photo of a row of English flowerpot rooftops with a plane soaring overhead would bring tears to his eyes. A baby brother came to share his second-floor room, and, over the years, as school, and football, and neighbourhood children beckoned, Robbie's dreams of the sea retreated into a latent hibernation, and over the years the ocean became a place of fear for the once sea loving boy.

‘A lifetime adrift in a boat or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home.’ (Basho)

Part One

Home

(Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia, 2018)

He'd had another sleepless night. The tautening and slackening of the moorings of his houseboat had kept up an offbeat kind of rhythm all night. But he knew that wasn't what had really kept him up. The insomnia had become part of his routine. Like breathing, it just happened, or more precisely, it didn't happen. Sleep, that obliterating unconsciousness that more innocent souls took for granted.

It was as if his old falling down West Thebarton bungalow had been transported the over eighty kilometres from Adelaide down to this almost river mouth berth and set atop a pontoon. The wooden dado rail that ran the length on the inside wall of the one-room houseboat reminded him of his old kitchen. Sitting at the padded corner table seat, it reminded him also of holidays spent caravanning when he was a boy back home in England. The glimpse of river through the window over the sink was grey-brown and muddy. Not unlike his beloved Thames. The azure sky of his adopted home sometimes blinded him with its brilliance, but a sad grey drizzling morning like this one could still move him. He thought of his parents. What would they be doing now? He could see his dad pouring over the oracle that was *The News of the World*, when it was still published, nodding his head in agreement with the editorials on unwelcome refugees and the dire state of the nation. He remembered his dad's raised eyebrows one time when he brought home *The Times* for the Literary Supplement. Fascists, his dad's eyebrows said. *The Guardian* wasn't much better. Left wing loonies, son, left wing loonies. Oh to be so sure of what was good and what was bad, what was right and what was left. Robbie smiled at his punning. What was left? What indeed?

As he waited for his morning coffee to perk and drip, he started writing out the cards he would place on the advertisement boards in the local supermarkets: *Drum Lessons, Experienced Teacher, Flexible Rates and Times, Beginners Welcome, Apply in person – Berth 3, Goolwa Wharf*. He hesitated over including his phone number, but decided that genuine students would make the trip, and he wouldn't get sucked into that old waiting for

the phone to ring game again. He looked at his battered and stickered drum cases, still waiting to be unpacked. It will be cosy, he thought, not unlike the small rehearsal room he had hired to give lessons back in Adelaide, but without the soundproofing. Books and albums lay in neat towers along the dock side empty wall of the houseboat. Insulation maybe, or a fire hazard. He had tried to cull them, distil them down to their essence, but, like moments in time, each was connected to the other. Like reading J G Ballard while listening to Miles Davis, or like coffee and cigarettes, they just went together. Owen wouldn't hear of it, anyway. He missed him, but his mother was right. There's nothing for him down there. If you want to hide yourself away, well, that's up to you. Was that what he was doing? Hiding? He didn't think so, but maybe she was right. She always was. You're wasting your time. You're not getting anywhere. The old and tired conversation started up in his head as the coffee perked, more insistent now, a welcome relief, and better than the usual one or two shots of Jameson's and a couple of B&Hs that used to greet his day.

He sipped his sugared long black and stared out at the muddy water. He couldn't have found himself any farther away from his childhood home if he'd tried. Megan, his ex-wife, had said *you'll love Adelaide*. It's the Athens of the South. Well, he wondered, did that mean Athens was the Adelaide of the North? But he'd kept that to himself. It was kind of pretty when the Jacarandas were in bloom; another introduced species, he noted. But coming from London, the old east/west divide was just as apparent here and he felt more at home west of the river than the leafy streets of the Eastern suburbs, which she preferred. He remembered his first walk around Granite Island. What a desolate but magnificent place. The whole Fleurieu Peninsula reminded him of the South coast back home. He'd watched the massive waves relentlessly pounding and shaping the rocks, the powerful swell building from a place as dark and as menacing as his blues, and his dreams when he had them, but the momentary

insignificance, that feeling of something bigger than himself, brought a freedom he craved. After that first visit, he'd felt drawn to the place like an addict.

What went wrong? His talent, charm and accent worked like a magnet in the beginning. His natural superiority (some would later call it arrogance) seemed to impress the musicians he encountered when he first arrived. Even back in London he'd looked with disdain at his friends' insipid pop record collections. His textbook knowledge of jazz and blues music and players impressed easily, and he was playing in three bands within a couple of months of arriving. Everyone wanted to buy him a drink or take him home. It was the fame he had longed for, had deserved, with all those years of practising, but he knew deep down, when you're a big fish in a small pond, the food runs out pretty quick and the little fish don't like it. It took a few years, and in the meantime, he'd acquired a pretty heavy drinking habit and a penchant for wide-eyed Adelaide women who loved an English accent. Playing that prowling, growling, rolling music every night, it gave him a hard-on just thinking about it. But he was a teacher now. Sure, the pond had gotten bigger, but there was no room for big fish anymore. Everyone wanted to be a drummer, and he was their man. He wondered, though, what came first? Did the music create the lifestyle or did the lifestyle create the music? Was he just becoming a cliché? A product of all the books and albums he'd read and listened to over the years? What made him different? Questions, questions – best not to dwell – but easier said than done when the only human being you live with is yourself.

He wondered what his new students would be like. Would there be another protégé among them like his student back in Adelaide? He was good, a natural, but yeah, he'd fucked that up too. New rule: don't get involved with the mothers. He turned from the window, still sipping and tapping, and surveyed his kingdom. He certainly wouldn't be able to go wandering from room to room like he used to. In his old place, he had his summer lounge room and his winter one. When either was not in use, it would become his practice and

teaching room (for his more private lessons). The planes that flew overhead, like clockwork, morning and afternoon, were at first a comfort, then a distraction, until finally he didn't notice them anymore. Ah, that house – old and creaky, like him. He was closer to sixty than he'd like, and shit, what did he have to show for it? His battered drum cases, like his lined face, told the story. The University of Life he called it, but he still hadn't graduated. He'd put on a few pounds, sure, but he'd always been stocky. It's all in the aerodynamics, he'd realised. The length of his arms and torso and his short but powerful legs created a perfect synchronicity between his body and the drum kit. He remembered the first time he'd taken his seat behind the bass drum. He was a perfect fit. Yeah, it was going to be cosy alright. He would have to set up and pack up after each lesson, but that wasn't anything he wasn't used to. He reckoned he'd probably spent more time setting up and packing up than actually playing over the years. No roadies for him. He'd done it all himself, still did.

He pumped some water from the tap over the sink and rinsed his coffee cup. Let's get this show on the road. The morning drizzle had turned into a full-on downpour, but his ship seemed to be watertight, a good sign. Maybe the show could wait. It was certainly a Miles kind of morning, so he slipped *Kind of Blue* into his CD player (he hadn't set up the turntable yet), but even on CD the melancholic music created an ambience he was familiar with: a smoky basement jazz joint, the atmosphere resonating with sorrow as the delicate first notes of a piano and bass cut through. Then Miles starts in with his mournful melody, the drum brushes a scratchy caress.

He was a dinosaur (and proud of it), but he knew what the kids liked: Metallica, Slipknot and a bit of Zeppelin and Ramones for the ones with an ear for the old stuff. They listened in awe of his knowledge. He was their professor and they all fell for him eventually. He'd been a teenager in London in the seventies and discovering that his favourite Stones and Cream songs were covers of old blues tunes, he knew he'd found a form that somehow

mirrored his deepest desires: primordial, sexual. But just like his favourites, Ginger Baker and Charlie Watts, he'd learned his craft initially through jazz.

He was sixteen, and the Thames was a mudflat the night the music came alive for him. Kenny Clarke, the godfather of modern jazz drumming was playing at Ronnie Scott's in Leicester Square. It was stinking hot and had been for days. It seemed that half of Brentford was out walking and drinking on that high summer Saturday night. The street was full of front doors open to let in a non-existent, but hoped for, breeze. Sitting on their front steps, shirtless fathers pulled on Fullers longnecks and mothers in house coats flapped their skirts for some cooling air while they sipped their shandies. It was a relief just to be out of his stifling second-floor bedroom and his even more stifling family home. He could hear the television's canned laughter and his father and mother laughing along to *The Two Ronnies* in the front room, the sound endlessly repeating from similar front rooms as he made his way down Boston Manor Road to the tube station. He found a spot on the crowded platform and leaned back onto the cool marble of the Art Deco pillars, while gangs of lads with Brentford Bees flags, loud but harmless, chanted continuously, their voices choir-like in the perfect acoustics of the station as they gave their post-match rendition of 'Hey Jude'. They'd won, but with their signature song it was hard to tell; melancholic or celebratory, it suited either occasion. The chanting and singing continued all the way into Soho and he found himself joining in: *Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, hey Jude*. He knew there'd be some black eyes and bloodied noses by the time their night was through, and he said his goodbyes as the flag waving mass emptied the train and headed for the night clubs on Shaftesbury Avenue, while he continued on down Frith Street.

The tiny basement room was busy but not packed, and after getting a lager from the bar, he found a seat to the left of the small stage. Whispered conversations, clinking glasses and cigarette smoke filled the air. He lit up, took a sip and caught his breath as the houselights went down and the spotlight guided the quartet to their places on stage to the sound of polite but continuous hand claps. These guys had been doing their thing for over twenty years and you could tell. The alto and tenor, like a Mick Jagger or a Robert Plant, were the stars everyone had come to see, but those in the know were there for the rhythm section. The bass and drums holding the thing together were astonishing. From heavy bebop to cool blues, Robbie was floored by these two. Ten years older than their younger front men, they had a presence that screamed experience and virtuosity. He floated home that night on a cloud of certainty. His second-storey bedroom was no longer a prison where he'd locked himself in as a kid to escape his dad's occasional tirades, but a launching pad. He could see himself and his future through the window. That was what he would do with his life: play jazz and be worshipped for it.

He smiled to himself, remembering the night that it all changed. Well, he certainly was heading for the elder statesman part of the dream he'd had as a teenager. And the worshipping, well he'd experienced that too over the years. Be careful what you wish for, someone had told him recently, and looking back, he realised maybe he should have looked a bit further into the fine print. Home and hearth had never been a priority, not in the literal sense anyway, and yet the nostalgia that overtook him sometimes was palpable. Okay, enough Miles. The torrential rain had turned into a more palatable drizzle once again. He gathered the advertisement cards he had written and put them in his back pocket.

His vehicle of choice was a circa 1980s racing bike that a friend had lent him. He only used his equally circa 1980s Suzuki Hatch for gigging and date nights, both having become rarer these days. He comforted himself with the idea that he was looking after the environment. People (especially women) were initially impressed with his quaint old school ways. He even carried around a pocketbook that listed environmentally friendly supermarket items. He loved to listen to the BBC-commentated cricket and football matches on his analogue radio, much to the chagrin (but quiet respect he knew) of his Foxtel-owning musician buddies. Was he turning into his father? He put the thought, like the many other unpalatable ones he was having lately, to the back of his mind. He was good at that – compartmentalising. It drove Megan crazy. She accused him of being cold, of being emotionally absent. He may have been emotionally absent, but it didn't mean he didn't have emotions. He'd just learned to train his mind, as a survival mechanism. Why couldn't she see that? Why couldn't women see that? No man is an island? Well he was doing his best to debunk that myth. For whom the bell tolls, as they say. That last one back in Adelaide had asked him, 'what are you afraid of?' 'Conservative governments and relationships,' he'd quipped. She called him a misogynist – a misogynist – him! He loved women, but they frightened the crap out of him, especially the smart ones. He remembered the psychologist he'd dated once. When he told her he wasn't looking for a mother, she'd simply laughed, and left. It was a lose-lose situation as far as he could see. If you showed any weakness it turned them off, but if you showed any strength of mind, you were condemned for being heartless.

How did people do it, this relationship thing? He'd been on his own too long now. One look at their record collection, or how they spoilt the taste of good whisky with a mixer, or the way some women put the toilet roll on the wrong way (the paper must roll from the top!) and he was disappointed. He'd taken that last one to see *Snowtown* on their first date. He'd heard it was a good film. You didn't even hold my hand, she'd lamented. But he'd

taken her, hadn't he? Okay, they'd gone Dutch on the tickets, but he'd bought the Choc-tops. A mate suggested that a film about Adelaide blokes killing people for their social security and chucking the bodies in old barrels wasn't really first date material, and he conceded that he may be right. He saw her once, not long after, in the queue for *The Hobbit*, but she was with someone else. They were holding hands.

The drizzle had turned into a deluge again, but he knew he had to get out, get away from all these thoughts that he was drowning in, so he decided the Suzuki was the go. Closing and locking his front door, he put his sweater hood up and sprinted the hundred yards down the landing to his waiting car.

There was never enough time. And so, she always wasted it. A nice epitaph, Sophie thought as she stretched diagonally across the king size bed. At times she felt like a horse and cart with her head being the horse, dragging her cumbersome and unwilling body around, fighting the force of forward movement. She was a morning person, always had been, but these days, mornings quickly turned into dreaded afternoons. How she hated that piece of time called four o'clock, the day not yet over and the restful night not yet come. Time was the enemy, and the peace talks were rarely successful.

She stretched again, luxuriating in the seeming vastness of the unfamiliar bed. It took up most of the hotel room with just enough space on either side for a chair and a sink, with a small desk against the opposite wall that housed the kettle, tea bags, and coffee and sugar sachets. She remembered hotel stays with her parents on their long road trips from Adelaide to Newcastle where her dad came from, jumping from single bed to single bed with her brother. She remembered the excitement of ordering breakfast from the tick a box form and

being amazed when it arrived the next morning, like sitting on Santa's lap at Christmas time and her requests then arriving on Christmas Day. On these hotel holidays, her parents had liked to have a happy hour each afternoon, and she and her brother would join them for a lemonade and a bag of chicken chips. She'd repeated the ritual with her own children, but she was a newly single mother by then. She remembered the confusing mixture of freedom and sadness that she'd felt while she sipped her two for one champagne in the hotel lounge as the boys ran amok after a couple of raspberry and lemonades. But that was a long time ago now.

Remembering what the counsellor had suggested, she caught herself before the melancholy took hold, and instead forced her gaze towards the pretty white enamel painted French doors of her hotel room. She'd seen enough French films to know what they signified: languorous lie-ins and soft pillow talk. Well, she was at Encounter Bay after all. An apt name for a coastal getaway, but she had to admit, she'd had enough of encounters of that sort. There's a lot to be said for having a bed to one's self. A room of one's own, so Virginia Woolf said, was a base requirement for a writer, but a bed, a bed to one's self, well that was luxury indeed. She'd shared her bed over the years with a husband, then children, and then lovers, but they'd all grown up and moved on, the lovers anyway. She thought of her two adult sons. She'd realised very early on that by giving them life she had sentenced them to death. Must you always say that, Johnnie, her ex-husband, had pleaded. She was a realist, albeit an imaginative one, but she accepted her view of life could be a little deflating at times and encouraged her sons to be whoever they wanted, as if personality was a choice. A kind and caring old soul, her older son was studying to be a teacher. The younger one knew more about what he *didn't* want to be, and the process of elimination was continuing. They loved her deeply, she knew. That was her finest achievement. But it was her time now.

So, she'd done it. She'd always threatened jokingly to her boys, if you don't move out, I will, and now she had. She craved her own space and time. She was fifty-eight years

old and felt like an adolescent. What do I want to be when I grow up? She'd wanted to be a dancer, or a singer, but had bombed out on both, not so much from a lack of talent, but self-confidence wasn't her strong point. Her love of reading led her away from administration work to a later life of study, writing, and eventually teaching where she finally got her wish to perform, but her audiences these days were tough to win over. Johnnie believed her career change was what broke up their marriage, although she would have said his 'go to uni if you must, just don't let it affect my workload' comment may have had a hand in it. Was it the knowledge that changed her focus away from married life and suburbia, or was that desire for learning always there and drove her to never be content? She'd discovered the existentialists in her twenties and de Beauvoir's message had simply confirmed her valuation of her parents' marriage and her resolve to never repeat it. She didn't know then that whatever we deny and judge, in ourselves and in others, we get to experience.

She thought of the tattoo she got in London when she lived there in the 80s. It was on her left shoulder, faded now but still visible. Long before tramp stamps and tribal designs became the norm, she'd met a guy who was into tattoos and said he'd buy her one. How romantic, she thought. A rose was what she wanted. Yes, a rose. They walked to the tattoo parlour together from his flat in Camden, maybe holding hands, she hoped so, but couldn't really remember. All she could remember is that upon having a last look through the catalogue, she suddenly changed her mind and picked out a coiled serpent instead. Are you sure, he'd asked her? Yes, yes, she was sure. The change of mind was so instant. Why did she do that? Tattoos aren't stamps, sitting on the top layer of skin. They go deeper than that, the ink mixing with blood and muscle. Had that tattoo and all it symbolised changed her very make-up, or was she drawn to it as a symbol of her true nature, choosing knowledge over love? She'd actually chosen love, every time. She was her mother's daughter after all, however much she resisted it, but she found the unconditional bit always a little problematic.

Sophie was going to miss her little hotel room. She'd felt so at home, like a child who'd built a cubby out of draped blankets over chairs, with pillows and cushions to make it comfortable. But she was due to check out this morning and move into a battered old caravan she had bought from a friend of her mum's. It sat on a permanent site at the Port Elliot Caravan Park, just around the point at Horseshoe Bay. They'd come to Pt Elliot every year since the kids were born, together and separately, and her ex-husband had also come annually as a child, so it had its connections and family stories and she liked the symmetry and the paradox of it all. He'd talked many times of moving down to live, but she'd actually done it. Her mum was worried, and he was envious, and the kids thought she was a riot, but she'd always liked caravanning. What could go wrong?

She remembered the time, not that long ago, when her world came crashing down. Well it was actually *she* that had come crashing down – down her townhouse stairs – slipping on the worn carpet with her equally worn plastic thongs catching her frayed track pants underneath them, landing on her right shoulder with full force on the slate below. Before she went into shock, she remembered noting to herself that it wasn't good. She'd smashed her shoulder joint, ball and socket, and ended up with an eight-inch metal plate holding it all together and a scar that reached from just below her clavicle down to her bicep. She'd recovered well, done all the exercises and had avoided the frozen shoulder that she was warned about, but it had changed her. Her bones were becoming brittle and she'd started taking the vitamin D that her mother took. She was menopausal and broken and to her horror, mortal. She'd fought it in the beginning, but she had started to wear looser fitting clothes to accommodate the weight she'd put on from being inactive and her fitted fifties dresses and high heels made way for ballet flats and more comfortable high-waisted jeans. Her mother started calling her 'one of the girls' when she invited her to join her and her cronies for lunch. Johnnie, as usual, had acted as if she'd done it on purpose, and her baggage-ridden significant

other of the time had done a runner for a while too, going up to Queensland two weeks after she got out of hospital. He hadn't even told her he was going. But that was in the past now, like him. She'd put some auburn streaks in her hair, bought some more flattering clothes and when people said she 'looked well', she tried not to take offence. She was in a new phase and the freedom of not being noticed had its advantages, she kept telling herself.

As she was driving in, she'd noticed a sign that said *Welcome to Victor Harbor, A Sea Change Community*. Is that what she was doing? She didn't really see herself as a 'sea changer', more like a gypsy, but maybe that was just her romantic imagination working too hard. She remembered reacting in horror when Johnnie had suggested they could join a lawn bowling club when they got older. Maybe that was what had really ended it. She wasn't the joiner type, never had been, but she knew if she wanted to make a go of this, she would have to get involved in something. It was never too late to start again, so the therapist had told her. But she already knew that, she'd done it many times before. Stretching one last time, she decided it was at least time to get up. She put the kettle on for coffee and opened the doors. The winter sun warmed her as she looked out on to an expanse of blue water. Although the past was never that far behind her, she intuitively felt the future that was out there somewhere. But for now, she was going to enjoy this transient state that she loved. That space in between letting something, or someone, go and the inevitable reality of that letting go. That space in between departure and arrival where possibilities are endless.

As Robbie drove down the main street of Goolwa with its verandaed shopfronts and angled parking, it seemed so different from the cobble stones and bollards of the high streets from home. He remembered seeing *Walkabout* when he was a teenager. Jenny Agutter had been

his first cinematic crush, and it was the first time he had seen the Australian outback.

Granted, Goolwa was not an outback town, but to him it exuded a similar impression – the post office, the haberdashery and the pub on the corner – even if at this moment it resembled more like a scene from *McCabe and Mrs Miller* with the rain pelting down. He pulled into a vacant park outside the fish and chip shop and killed the engine, but on closer inspection, he realised that it wasn't open yet. The heavy metal-framed door was decidedly shut; plastic fly repellent strips stood flat behind the glass like a compressed fringe blocking any view inside, so he moved over to the floor-to-ceiling window next to the door and peered in.

A large painted crayfish which took up most of the wall behind the counter peered back at him, silently sneering, it seemed to him, and he took a step back to avoid its glare. What was it with these Australians and their oversized monuments to produce? Was it a reflection of the grand scale of the landscape or just another symbol of Americanisation? Maybe it was simply man's desire for attention. The Egyptians had their pyramids, the Romans their Colosseum, the Australians their giant pineapples and lobsters. He caught sight of his reflection in the window, his almost black eyes staring back at him from behind black-framed glasses, not unlike his crustacean friend he noted, minus the glasses. Was it fear, emptiness or simply acknowledgement that he could see reflected back at him? All three could freeze you in your tracks if you stared back too long.

He noticed a yellowing card, sticky taped to the bottom left hand side of the plate glass. It was a pretty looking thing despite its age, obviously professionally done with a border of rune symbols and a Celtic looking font: *Tarot Readings, Astrology, Numerology, and Rebirthing* and a phone number. He'd heard of the first three, but rebirthing was something new, to him anyway. Sounded almost scientific, like something they'd come up with on *Star Trek*. He imagined Spock saying, 'I'm just going to the rebirthing room, Captain.' Rebirthing? Really? If only. Still, he liked the look of the card, so audacious somehow, sitting

in the somewhat greasy fish and chip shop window, and he punched the phone number into his mobile.

Most of the businesses hadn't opened yet, but movement from across the road drew his attention. A woman was setting up tables and racks of clothes outside what he thought was the haberdashery shop, and he crossed over. Haberdashery, to him, meant fabric and cotton sheeting, knitting yarn and rows of buttons in cylindrical plastic containers, but as he got closer he saw this was one of those new age shops and the woman was setting up racks of flowing (frumpy, he would have said) dresses and hanging up odd-looking mobiles with feathers and metal charms that twirled in the breeze. It was then that he noticed that the rain had stopped, and the street didn't look so grey and uninhabited anymore, as if the kaleidoscopic colours of all her wares single-handedly brightened the once dismal outlook.

She spoke first, in a throaty smoker's voice, croaking a good morning. He knew that she was, or had been, a smoker as she had those faint lines around her mouth from the constant puckering of lips. Hers were coated in a bright orange lipstick that matched the oversized frames of her glasses and the scarf tied around her head. She was wearing an African print cotton caftan, and orange and red flowery patterned boots were peeking out from underneath the hem. In his old blue jeans and black hoody, he felt drab and colourless, but when he turned on the charm and in his best West London accent said, 'And a good morning to you Madame,' the glow from her wide smile warmed him.

'Now that's a lovely accent,' she said, still smiling. 'On holidays, love?' And he proceeded to explain that he was new in town, was a musician, and could he put his little sign in her window.

'Of course, love,' she said. 'Always happy to help out a fellow traveller.'

'So, you're not from around here either?' he enquired.

'Oh yes, love, born and bred.'

This comment fazed him momentarily, but he was quick on his feet and on the uptake, and he smiled.

‘Know what y’ mean,’ he replied, putting it on. He could never resist an audience, let’s face it.

Not to be outdone, she said, ‘So where’s your wee little note? I’ll give it a place of prominence don’t you worry about that.’

He sensed this to and fro could go on all morning, and he reached into his back pocket, stuffed with his half a dozen hand-written cards and presented her with the top one.

‘Now that’s a nice hand,’ she said as their fingers momentarily touched during the transaction.

‘Sorry?’

‘Your handwriting, love,’ she explained. ‘Nice and neat.’

‘Well y’ know,’ he said, ‘gotta put the effort in.’

‘Amen to that,’ she said with some finality.

She took a moment to read the card. ‘Ah, a drummer, and you’re living in old Benny’s place. That’s good. There’s something about places that have been on their own too long. There’s a sadness about them, like people. Glad you’ve found each other.’

He hadn’t known much of the history of his houseboat. The agent had said it had been empty for a while and that was why it was so cheap to rent. So, an old man had lived, and possibly died, there. Not such a good sign.

‘Anyway,’ he said, ‘thanks for the chat, best be getting on.’

‘I’d be focusing on the Pt Elliot businesses if I were you, love,’ she said.

He thought of the yellowing card he had seen in the fish and chip shop window. Yeah, she was probably right. Saying a final goodbye, he crossed back to the other side, got into his

car and backed out, heading down Cadell Street. He turned left on to the Victor Harbor Road with an endless horizon on either side.

One day Sophie's Grade Four teacher had told the class to write a story and that the best one would be read out in class. Walking home from school, Sophie had puzzled over the task her teacher had set. What would she write, and how could she stand up in front of the class if hers was chosen? When she told her mum later that night as they did the dishes together, her mum washing and she wiping, they put their heads together and started to imagine. What about a story about a little girl called Sophie, her mum suggested. Sophie had loved the *Millie Molly Mandy* stories that her mum had given her – they were her mum's own copies from when she was little – but she thought of the naughty character in those books and couldn't relate them to her well-behaved life. What would a naughty Sophie do? She remembered the game that she and her mum played sometimes called the scary game. Let's play the scary game, her mum would say and although Sophie knew what was going to happen, she couldn't resist. Her mum would take her into her bedroom and when Sophie least expected it, would turn the lights off and say boo pretending to be a ghost. Sophie would scream and plead for her to stop, and just when she felt she couldn't stand it anymore, her mum would turn the lights back on and laugh because Sophie would always ask for her to do it again. Let's write a ghost story, Sophie said.

And so every night for a week, while they were doing the dishes, the story of the little girl and the ghost called Isabella came to be. The little girl is lonely, Sophie suggested, and so is the ghost. When the teacher announced to the class that Sophie's story was the best, there were grumblings and even Sophie's best friend looked away when she caught her eye, but

when Sophie started to read, 'Isabella, the ghost, just wanted a friend ...' the class was won over and they clapped when she finished. The new boy to the class, who had come from a place called England with his missionary parents, clapped the hardest. Later in the school yard at lunch time, he came over to her while she was playing her knucklebones and invited her to come to the after school religious instruction meeting that his parents ran. Sophie had always loved Religious Instruction with its colouring in and stories about babies in bull rushes and sheep and donkeys keeping watch over little princes, and she was thrilled to be asked. He gave her a copy of a small paperback New Testament and a tiny card with a painting of a glowing but sad Jesus on the front. The boy talked funny, but he had kind eyes and she couldn't wait to tell her parents about all that had happened that day.

Sophie never got to attend the Religious Instruction meetings, as her dad wouldn't allow it. Something about brainwashing, she heard him yelling at her mum. She didn't really understand but kept the little paperback in a safe place and sticky taped the card of Jesus above her bed. When it finally came down one day, replaced with a pinup of David Cassidy, she remembered the boy who talked funny and wondered what she'd done with the once precious pamphlet.

Reading and ballet lessons had given way to The Beatles and The Partridge Family as her parents had given her a portable record player for Christmas. Her dad's complaints now, apart from his beloved Whitlam being ousted, were about the constant 'racket', as he called it, but with her new hot pants, mini skirt with matching polo neck sweater, smock top and flared jeans with a butterfly sewn on the leg, her clogs and knee high snake skin boots, she embraced her teenage years with gusto. She's from another planet, her dad said to her mum when she'd asked for the first time to be allowed, at fifteen, to go and see a band with some friends, but he eventually relented. She was stubborn and he was tired. When there'd been a knock on the door and her dad had opened it to see a black t-shirted, wild haired, young man

standing there, his motorbike parked out on the street, he knew he'd lost the battle and his daughter had become a foreigner to him. Her mum became the go-between and the receptacle of all Sophie's confessions and desires until finally she had to beg her daughter to please not tell her anymore. Her allegiances were being tested. They still did the dishes together, when she was home, but usually in silence. She'd left school and taken a job as a telephonist at the GPO, and when she moved out to live with an older girlfriend, the whole house breathed a sigh of relief.

When he came to pick her up in his EH Holden, Sophie noticed the surfboard lying in the passenger seat. I've done it she thought, I've got myself a surfer. His name was Johnnie, and when he wasn't surfing he helped out his brother who was a drummer in a band, lugging gear and setting up lights. He'd given her a lift home in the band's van the night she'd met him, another first, but she didn't see him again until she'd arrived home from work one day and noticed chewing gum stuck over the key hole. She immediately knew it was him. His personality was overwhelming; she'd never met anyone like him – so confident and capable – and he wanted to be with her? But just as she mistook his gregariousness for confidence, he interpreted her at times debilitating shyness for mysteriousness, and when the masks finally cracked they were already living together. He needed her quiet dependability to keep him from self-combusting and she had lost herself in his need for affirmation.

There's a front door and a back door, Johnnie told her one day as they sat on the old second-hand sofa they had bought together. It folded out into a bed, and it had once been their whole world at times; they spent luxuriously long Sunday afternoons lying on it together, reading and loving and eventually fighting; but it sat upright and formal these days. It was Valentine's Day and they were sharing a drink together to celebrate. He was big on cryptic statements, like 'you can't always get what you want', which he'd written on her twenty first birthday card, or 'one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest.' It always took her a moment to get his meaning.

She'd been questioning him about his staying late at work and not coming home, the usual Valentine's Day conversation, and he'd replied that the boys liked to have a drink after a long day, but after a pause, he actually admitted to what he was really doing. She worked across the road at her father's real estate agency. She liked him. She didn't give him the silent treatment.

'We're not here for a long time, but a good time, Sophie,' he said.

Not another aphorism. It seemed he had one for every occasion. He followed it with 'Take me as I am or leave me where you found me.'

'Fuck,' she said, 'can you just tell me what's going on?'

'Like I said, there's a front door and a back door,' and he downed his drink, grabbed his keys and left.

'You idiot,' she screamed at his back. 'We've only got a back door.' He moved back to his parents' the following week, and after the initial shock and anger, the relief she felt was a surprise. She had the sofa bed all to herself now.

Where did that half hour just go? Sophie had been standing, leaning against the French doors, sipping her coffee, hypnotised by the gentle eddying of the waves in the bay. Where did these memories come from? Was her brain simply full of compressed files, just waiting to be zipped into action? What if she forgot the short cut? Her nanna and her great aunt, twin sisters, had both gone that way. Use it or lose it, she'd been instructed, but that blissful ignorance didn't seem so bad at the moment. Reality was setting in once again, like it always did, like it had to, but with reality came the pleasures of the physical: taste, touch, sight. Everything has its positives, and she could almost taste the cooked breakfast she was going to shout herself from the hotel restaurant, the full one of course, with black pudding and fried tomatoes.

'Beautiful, isn't it?' came a voice from her right. She turned and saw the housekeeper cleaning and sweeping the next-door balcony landing with practiced patience.

'Yes, it is,' Sophie said.

'Changeable, though, never know what you're gonna get sometimes,' said the cleaner.

'So, what brings you to our fair city?'

Sophie wasn't sure what to do now. She hadn't bargained on the conversation going beyond the weather. To deflect any more questions, Sophie knew it was best to ask one of her own.

'So, what do people do here for fun?' she enquired.

'Well, it depends on what you call fun,' said the cleaner. 'How long you staying?'

Sophie realised there was no escape.

'I'm checking out this morning, but I've got a caravan down at the Port Elliot Caravan Park to go to. Just getting away, you know,' Sophie said, drumming up some enthusiasm.

‘Port Elliot is a pretty place, isn’t it,’ said the cleaner, ‘although it’s a bit upmarket now, what with all those cafes and boutiques.’ She was right there; it had changed over the years.

‘Yes, that’s true, but I guess it’s been good for other businesses, wouldn’t you say?’

‘Have you walked down our main street lately? It’s a ghost town during the week. But this place always does well. Couples love these balcony rooms. You on your own, love?’

Well there it was – the inevitable question.

‘Yep, just me and my laptop.’

‘Looking for inspiration, is it?’

‘You could say that.’

‘Well, there’s a band on tonight if you’re interested. Lots of the locals come along.

You should come.’

Sophie offered her thanks and said she would think about it, but she’d better get on if she was to meet the checkout deadline.

‘Yeah, me too,’ said the cleaner. ‘Maybe see you tonight?’

‘Yes, maybe,’ she said. The cleaner gave her a final quizzical look and they both disappeared back into their respective rooms, like actors leaving the stage. She grabbed her toiletry bag for the sprint down the hallway to a hopefully empty bathroom.

‘At the moment of birth every human being is an exile – or at the moment of consciousness of the first thought we are an exile and home comer, we make both landfall and departure ...’
(Janet Frame)

Part Two

Away

(Greece, London, 1985-1987)

The lights of the ferry shone bright against the blackness of an Aegean Sea and sky. From above it looked like a Chinese moon lantern floating and bobbing in an inky pool. From Robbie's perspective, sitting in the great cafeteria with food vendors selling Heinekens and soggy chips, it felt as if his beloved West End had been plucked by an enormous hand and set down again in this watery plane. The gig had come through at the last minute. His drum teacher usually spent the summer on Santorini, drumming with a jazz quartet in an old jazz bar in Fira, but couldn't go this year. His fee would cover board and breakfast and all the Metaxa he could drink. How could he refuse? It was gonna be his apprenticeship he told his parents, like when Ringo went to Amsterdam. His dad's famous raised eyebrows said it all.

'Life's not about doing what you want, son, it's about doing what you should,' he'd suggested.

'Why?' Robbie had immediately retorted, but his dad didn't, or couldn't, answer. It was quiet and still the morning he'd left. He'd headed for the tube station and the train that would take him into Heathrow and then the plane that would drop him in Athens on his way to Piraeus and the ferry voyage to Santorini. His sailor's rucksack was heavy but manageable across his shoulder, and with his *For Whom the Bell Tolls* safely stowed inside, he'd never felt so alone, or so alive.

Of all the people there to see her off, it was Sophie's small niece, her brother's daughter, who held her attention. She was crawling around on the dusty floor of the Adelaide Bus Terminal cafe, in between chairs and table legs, resting momentarily with that straight back that babies have, then off again, oblivious to the drama playing out around her. Her brother and his wife, and her mum and dad, were sitting around a chipped Formica table, nursing awful cups of

coffee, waiting for the last call to board the bus to Melbourne to connect with her flight to Athens and the Greek Islands, and then on to London. Everyone was silent, wrapped in their own thoughts: her mum's eyes filled with apprehension; her dad, she knew, was jealous that she could just leave like this, and her brother, only eighteen months older than his little sister looked shocked as the realisation hit that he was already trapped.

As the final call boomed Sophie took a window seat and waved through the grimy glass as the bus pulled out into a clear Adelaide morning. Her dad, standing apart from the rest of the family, was the only one not waving. It was as if she didn't deserve his recognition, like that time at her twenty first when he wouldn't make a speech. 'What have you done that's worth talking about?' he'd said. Well, look at me now, she thought, waving even harder at the sad and solitary figure she was leaving behind. As the bus pulled away, she stopped waving and immediately got out her creased and worn copy of *For Love Alone* and started to read. She knew she would write her own story of love one day, full of passion and sacrifice, but for now she settled into her seat as the bus carried her down Franklin Street and passed the old GPO Building where she used to work. The clock tower chimed, as if just for her.

The great mouth of the ferry opened like a space ship and passengers spilled out, rubbing their eyes in the early dawn as they moved slowly and quietly down the gang plank. Robbie joined the procession heading for the buses that would take them via a climbing and winding road, which was actually part of a volcano wall, into Fira. He'd heard the cruise ships docked at the old port on the western side of the island and the passengers got the chance of a donkey ride up the steep narrow path into the capital. The whole Greek experience, no doubt. He

could just imagine the loud Americans, their Nikons swinging around their necks, and the pasty English, oversized and gangly, sitting astride the poor beasts. He was happy to take his seat alongside the backpackers and seasonal workers like himself, quietly enjoying the sunrise from the bus window. He noticed the young Greek man sitting beside him, his Walkman headphones in his ears, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings. Yeah, he thought, everybody hates a tourist, but he couldn't help but be impressed at the sheer magnitude of the drop and the expanse of blue sea coming in and out of view as the bus wound its way up the cliff. Out of habit, he started practicing a few drum beats and fills to the imaginary music in his head, his hands making a slapping sound as they hit his knees. Immediately interested, the young Greek by his side removed his headphones.

'Nice beats, man,' he said with a cockeyed smile and they fell into a conversation. The man's name was Andreas and this was his third season on the island, serving drinks at the Tango Bar in Fira. He was turning twenty in October and was due to commence his national service after the summer was over.

'National service, wow man, that's heavy. Where's the war?'

'Yeah, I guess, but you never know. Gonna have a good summer though,' he said.

He told Andreas he was booked to play at Kira Thira.

'Cool place, man; get some classy ladies there. Especially the Australians. They're what you call confident. It's just down the road from Tango. Got a place to stay yet?' Robbie told him he hadn't organised anything as he was assured it wouldn't be a problem.

'Yeah,' he agreed. 'They bombard you at the bus station like vultures. Look, I know you don't know me, but I get the same room every year, one of those cave places, it's cool, and not just the temperature. It's a double room, why don't you come stay with me? We can share the rent and have more money for the babes.'

‘Great, thanks man,’ Robbie said without hesitation, and they shook hands to seal the deal.

Andreas was right. When the bus came to a halt in downtown Fira, they were immediately accosted while waiting to get their luggage. While Andreas fended off the local *yiayias*, feisty grandmothers in their black dresses and stockings, with *oh-he, oh-he*, Robbie, relieved, took in his surroundings. Twenty-four hours ago he had been trudging down cobbled stones on a grey London summer morning, and now he was walking down dusty lanes of gelato coloured houses with terracotta-potted red geraniums and the continuous blue of sea and sky coming and going from view. The warmth of the now risen sun entered his soul and he could feel his whole body relaxing like an unfamiliar friend. It was as simple as that he realised. You just say yes – yes to everything – *nee, nee*.

‘Hey Robbie, we’re here,’ Andreas said, stopping in front of a pretty blue door, built, just as he had said, into a cliff wall.

Robbie paused for a moment. Somehow the way Andreas pronounced his name took him by surprise. He realised he didn’t have to be Robbie anymore.

‘Rob, it’s Rob actually,’ he said.

‘Oh, sorry, Rob, okay then,’ said Andreas as he produced an ancient talisman-like key from his back pocket and opened the door. The quiet coolness that issued from inside the cave caused Robbie to shiver momentarily as he was still enjoying the warmth of the morning sun, but over the next two months he would learn to appreciate its welcome relief when the Mediterranean sun was at its highest. The cave walls, whitewashed like their outside counterparts, were rough and hewn, and Andreas, being a good foot taller than his new friend, had to stoop to enter. The only furnishings were two single beds placed on either side of the half-circular shaped cave room where it was at its widest, and in between the beds was a wardrobe and washstand where the ceiling was at its highest. The tableau was faintly

illuminated by a glass panel above the doorway. Robbie thought back to the small upstairs bedroom he'd inhabited only the day before. The old toy box he used to climb up on to gaze out on to the street below as a child still sat underneath the window.

'Wow.'

'Yeah, pretty cool eh? I know it's basic, but hey, it's only to sleep in. I shower and eat at the club. You can too, the owners won't mind. They love me.'

Yeah, Robbie thought. He could see how everyone would love Andreas. Tall, dark and handsome, his thick black wavy hair cut into a perfect mullet. He was an Adonis, no question.

'Thanks, man,' he said quietly.

'You alright?'

'Yeah, yeah,' he said shaking the feeling off, but suddenly wishing he was alone. His destination had come too quickly, and too easily, he realised and he wished he was back walking through Brentford on his way to the tube, with everything still ahead.

'Hey, let's get some food,' said Andreas.

'Sounds good' Robbie said, wondering what the hell was wrong with him. He followed Andreas out the little doorway and back into downtown Fira.

They chatted as they walked. Well, Andreas did most of the chatting, asking questions about where he was from. Did he have any sisters? Did he like football? Did he like disco? Robbie set him straight on all counts. He was from West London; the English Football League was the best in Europe; he had a brother, but no sisters; he liked Stevie Wonder but not KC and the Sunshine Band. Andreas responded to all his answers with more questions, only being interrupted as he responded to greeting calls of *ya su, ya su*, from aproned shopkeepers and old men who had taken up their positions for the day outside early opening cafes.

He followed Andreas up a curving whitewashed stone staircase that led to the rooftop of what he discovered was Andreas' place of work with a spectacular view of the caldera. An older man came out to greet them, and they shook hands as he was introduced, while Andreas and the older man embraced. Andreas indicated for him to sit down and said he would be back with some breakfast. Finally alone, he sank onto one of the numerous couches that occupied the rooftop and looked out on to the immense expanse of the Aegean Sea. How do you live in paradise? he asked himself. When Andreas returned with plates of steaming omelettes and bread covered in sesame, and little glasses full of the strongest and sweetest coffee he'd ever tasted, he asked him the same question.

'Yeah, it's pretty tough,' Andreas said. 'No, really, it is. Times have been hard here, but the people just get on with it. When the tourists leave and winter sets in, life still goes on, you know.' Robbie contemplated that thought. Yeah, that was home for everyone, a place where you just got on with it. He had that thought again, about the randomness and meaninglessness of life. Back home in Brentford, he'd often find himself looking around, or staring at his parents and wondering, don't they know none of this means anything? It was only a fleeting thought, though, and it would disappear as quickly as it came, as his tube arrived or he turned back to his book, but it was always there in the background, a worry and a comfort. If everything is meaningless, then nothing really matters. But some things do matter, don't they? Deep in thought, Andreas's chatter about his family and football brought him back to the present, and he felt bad about his earlier jealousy. Sure, he was a little height challenged, and more barrel than bottle, but his intense intellect and quick banter more than made up for it, he was sure.

'... but it's gonna be a great summer Rob, I can feel it,' he heard Andreas say.

'*Nee,*' he said, much to Andreas' delight.

Sitting in a taxi, hurtling down a four-lane freeway towards Athens, Sophie noticed huge familiar billboards advertising Coca-Cola and Johnny Walker, reminding her of the Tullamarine Freeway she had left only two days before. She didn't understand the hieroglyphic slogans, but the images spoke a thousand languages. It was as if the world was one giant supermarket. The airport, all glass and steel and overhead lighting, was recognisable, but the armed guards in their black uniforms wandering around in groups reminded her she definitely wasn't in Australia anymore. She realised she was still clutching her passport and boarding pass and noticed the anagrammatic spelling of her name – Sophie A Miss – on the little white docket and hoped it wasn't an omen. Trying to sound confident, she'd asked the taxi driver if he could recommend a cheap hotel near the Plaka or Syntagma Square, the old part of Athens, and he'd nodded reassuringly as he quickly took her suitcase and loaded it in the boot, brushing off other would-be drivers as he did so. She'd automatically approached the driver of the first cab in the queue, but it seemed there was no ranking here. She'd felt jostled and handled but was relieved to be in the relative safety of the taxi cab, and she'd looked out the rear window, watching the other drivers, still gesticulating and pleading to her, as they drove off. It had happened so quickly. She realised she'd just put her trust in a complete stranger. Where was he taking her? How would she know? It was frightening, but also exhilarating. She sat back, loosened her grip on her passport and placed it back into the zipped pocket of her shoulder bag, took a deep breath and let it go, unable to stop smiling.

The taxi pulled up outside a rather austere looking building; its expensive looking tile, chrome and plate glass was not what she'd expected, but she obediently followed the driver and her bag through the revolving doors into the foyer. He spoke to the concierge who smiled

at her and thanked Alessandro – the taxi driver – in perfect English. She once again felt as if she was being passed around, but when she offered Alessandro a wad of 1,000 drach notes, he took only the top two, bowed and gave her his card and instructions to call when she needed another taxi, and he was gone. She turned to the concierge who was still smiling, apparently amused at her look of bewilderment, a look he'd probably seen many times before.

'So, Miss Sophie is it?' he confirmed after taking her passport, still with the boarding pass inside. 'How long will you be staying?' It was that easy. She explained she was on her way to Santorini – 'ah of course' – and that she would like to stay two nights. 'Yes, give yourself a day to see the sights,' he said, always smiling. 'You are lucky – room 320 has a view of the Temple,' he said, handing over a hotel key and a map of the area. She wanted to enquire how much this view was going to cost her, and as if reading her thoughts, he said 'Yes, you are very lucky – 4,000 drachma for both nights, okay?' She quickly did a calculation and agreed. She was very lucky.

The room was neat and clean, like the hotel and its concierge. She immediately went to the window and gazed upon the Temple of Zeus, towering above the miniscule houses and shops of the Plaka, visible in the falling dusk. The noise from the streets below and adjacent rooms that continued all night didn't bother her as she lay in the crisp cotton-sheeted bed, marvelling at the somehow effortless of it all.

She'd slept well and wondered what all the talk of jet lag had been about. She'd discarded her high-waisted jeans and tight white t-shirt and felt decidedly European, and much more comfortable, in a cotton dress and Roman sandals which she'd bought back in Adelaide and finally felt able to wear. She was talking to the concierge about walking times to the Acropolis and places to eat when she heard a voice over her shoulder exclaim, 'Ooh the Acropolis, can I tag along?' She turned to see a tiny frame silhouetted by a head of curly

reddish-brown hair; a girl with a mouth full of pointy little teeth, wearing a cropped Boy t-shirt and boyfriend jeans, like a Bananarama lookalike.

‘Hi, my name’s Livvy, pleased to meet cha,’ said the apparition. She’d arrived the night before from Santorini, on her way home to London, but just had to stop over to see some more ‘old stuff’, as she called the ancient sites of Greece. Sophie agreed she could come, of course, and the two girls listened intently to Christos’s directions and suggestions. Walking out into the early but warm morning sunshine, a day and night of new sights, sounds and sensations ahead, and with a new-found friend by her side, Sophie again was dumbfounded. You can’t always get what you want? Well why not?

She was exhausted after the day of sightseeing and her feet were aching, not used to new sandals that really gave no support, not to mention the jet lag that had finally got its way. She wished she’d worn her Adidas sneakers instead, but as she stretched her legs under the little restaurant table they were sitting at on the Square, sipping wine and awaiting a hopefully lovely meze tasting plate, she wiggled her toes for relief and noticed how attractive the sandals made her legs look. Livvy was still talking – she never stopped, it seemed – but her enthusiasm was contagious. As Livvy droned on, Sophie tried to recall her impressions of the day: the Acropolis, the Agora, the Temple of Zeus. They were all ‘so old’, Livvy had continuously exclaimed in between pointing out some good looking Greek guy or another girl’s cool sunglasses. Sophie tried to put into words in her mind the feeling of utter insignificance that these sites had brought about.

‘I feel so small,’ she’d said to her new friend, trying to express something close to the truth.

‘Yeah they’re big alright, and so old, but we’ve got old stuff too you know,’ she’d said, and Sophie had let it go.

On the way back to the Square, they’d done some shopping in the old market and she’d bought a beautiful leather drawstring bag, a silver Hellenic looking ring, and a single silver cross to wear in one ear. She’d wanted to buy two, but Livvy had advised her that one was more cool and to make sure she wore it in her left ear, ‘coz that meant she was available,’ apparently. Was she available? She’d never really thought about it, but after Livvy’s stories about her holiday romances, it seemed that was also the thing to do. If you didn’t have a one night stand, it hadn’t been a proper holiday. It didn’t sound very romantic to her and, anyway, she wasn’t on holiday. She was travelling. That was different. The meze plate eventually arrived, a little on the oily side, and the talk turned – well Livvy talked and she listened – to the best night spots and the best beaches in Santorini that she just had to experience.

Sophie tossed and turned all night, and in the morning was back into her jeans, t-shirt and sneakers, ready for the ferry voyage to Santorini. Christos called Allesandro for her and he was on his way as she stood on the pavement waiting and waved goodbye to Livvy, who got into another taxi. She’d been away from home for five days and with each passing day, she could feel herself changing. Or was she just becoming more herself? Someone, Sophie realised, she needed to get to know.

Living and working on the island, Robbie was spared the self-imposed indignation of the label tourist but even so, as Andreas worked in his uncle’s café by day, he had plenty of alone time to explore the island. The locals treated him with quiet acceptance, and the tourists with

curious ambivalence as he moved around the island like a friendly phantom. It was a persona he felt comfortable with and in the first few days as he traipsed from museum to church back to museum again through the ancient streets of Fira, incognito in his black RayBan Wayfarers, Rob the charming loner was born. He hadn't experienced a summer like it. Even at its hottest, London in summer was muted and hazy, but the dry heat of Santorini seemed to tighten him up in all the right places, and he developed a swagger and lightness of step that he never lost. After eventually exhausting his historical interest, he made his way every day to the closest beach to swim. As he entered the lukewarm water, the hairs on his legs sprang up and then relaxed like floating seaweed. He sensed his muscles also relaxing as he immersed himself deeper into the mineral-rich, almost black, buoyant sea. Drumming for three sets most nights were taking their toll, but he loved it, and the sea, he discovered, was a tonic.

He'd been taught well and fell right into the groove of the cool jazz quartet he'd been hired to play with. He was twenty years younger than the rest of the band, and they treated him like a long lost nephew, happy to share their musical experience, and his ride cymbal playing developed a swing he didn't know he had. His favourite time, apart from rehearsing and playing, was sitting around after they'd finished their set with a Mythos beer, listening to stories of Paris and Berlin and the greats the guys had seen. After a few cleansing lagers, they'd get on to some Metaxa, and the stories became more melancholy, about missed chances and lost friends and warnings about musician-loving women. He took it all in, developing a taste for the sweet Greek brandy, and the romance of it cancelled out the warnings. In the early morning as he made his way home to the cave room after a night's playing and a toasting session, the Mythos and Metaxa mixing in his blood stream, he would swell with pride as he remembered an improv that had gone well, or admonish himself for having dropped a stick.

On one such early morning, Andreas's usual muffled snuffling didn't greet him as he quietly turned his rusty key and gently pushed the cave door open. Andreas' summer hadn't gone exactly to plan, and he hoped his friend had found some success. It seemed the girls were more interested in the bronzed and blue-eyed Scandinavians than a couple of black-haired and brown-eyed locals, who had less time and even less money to spread around. Andreas had even considered doing a George Michael, and dying his magnificent mullet a brassy blonde, but Robbie had talked him out of it. Every morning over coffee Andreas would apologise, once again, for the distinct lack of female company from the night before, as if it was his fault for the situation. Robbie would reply with the usual, 'that's okay man', but if he was honest, with the drinking games and high stilettos on show most nights, he was silently relieved.

The crossing had been smooth. The ferry had cruised over the cobalt sea, and, standing on the sun-warmed open deck, Sophie had seen the white domes of Santorini rise up into a perfect blue sky. She'd accepted the first offer of a room from an old woman at the square where the bus had dropped her, and she followed her through a maze of winding and narrow streets until they came to a white-washed house decorated with wall-mounted terracotta pots and bright red geraniums. The whole scene was like moving through a living postcard, or inhabiting a snow dome. Her room had its own entrance, separate from the family's whose house it was, and she had thanked the old woman, Elene, for her hospitality. Although she was only one of many who had stayed here, she felt like a long-lost daughter returned home as Elene warned her in staccato English, 'Man, no.' Sophie had replied with a definite shake of her head and a frown, and Elene was happy.

It was only a short walk into the square every day, where she got her olives, tzatziki and bread, and the local children, on their way to school, loved to pose for pictures. She knew they were probably well practised in this art, but she loved their happy confidence and intelligent smiles. Like professional models, as soon as she raised her camera, they would stop and get into position, each one different every time. She snapped her way through her two weeks on the island: stretches of white sand and blue sea that reminded her of home; a beach of oily black ocean and volcanic powder; a lizard on a rock; a shepherd with his flock; a Feast day parade; and Elene and her family. She captured it all on her little compact camera that her dad had bought her. Many years later, looking at these photographs, it wasn't the images so much that moved her, but remembering that once she had been that girl who had navigated the island like a private eye: so purposeful, so alone.

Robbie's last night on the island came all too quickly. The birthday cake colours of Fira transformed at night into gilded hues and on this night a full moon added a silvery glow. Andreas was happy and humming a Donna Summer tune as they made their way through the now familiar lanes of the old town. Some friends of Andreas's from the mainland, also due for their national service soon, had arrived. They were already enjoying themselves from the look of the glass filled table as he said his goodbyes after a quick introduction and headed towards the Kira Thira club. Andreas insisted he come back to the bar after his gig.

'It's your last night, man. Come party with us.' Although not one for the kind of partying he knew Andreas liked, he said he would call in on his way back to their cave room. He had to catch the day ferry back to Piraeus in the early morning, but the realisation that he would be back in Brentford in less than two days' time brought with it that decision he had made when he first arrived – just say yes – yes to everything.

The gig went especially well that night. The guys gave him plenty of space to show off his burgeoning talent and he got a heartfelt ovation from the small crowd when Niko, the saxophonist, paid tribute to their young drummer and asked the crowd to show their appreciation for his last performance. Wrapped up in his own success, he hadn't noticed the small blonde woman eyeing him from the back of the room. She brazenly came straight up on to the stage where he was still perched at his kit enjoying a beer with the rest of the band, and introduced herself.

'Hi, that was so cool. My name's Megan,' she said, thrusting out a tiny hand.

'You know you're not supposed to be up here,' he said taken aback but shaking her hand anyway.

'Oh sorry, aren't I?' she said and turned to leave.

'I'm sure we can make an exception this time, Rob,' said Nico. 'Want a beer?'

'Yeah, thanks. Is that Mythos? I love it. It reminds me of the pale ale from home.'

'And where's that?' Robbie asked the obvious question.

'Adelaide, Australia.'

Megan lived in Adelaide, but had grown up in the Clare Valley, about a hundred kilometres north of the capital, he very soon found out as they sat on the side of the stage drinking another Mythos together. The band, and the other patrons, already sensing a connection, and their own exclusion, left them alone. She described her childhood home as a place of hot dry summers but cool nights because of its elevation, and crisp bright winters, but autumn was her favourite season. The miles of grape vines would turn yellow, then orange, and finally red, before the leaves fell and were absorbed back into the rich soil. Her grandparents owned a property with a few vines and an old stone homestead and her grandmother was an artist. Her parents ran the local post office. Megan described empty

roads with vines on either side, and eucalypt-covered hills in the distance, and the sound of galahs and kookaburras in the early morning.

‘You sound homesick,’ he said, realising that he too felt a pull he couldn’t quite name.

‘Not yet,’ she replied, ‘but it’s nice to know its all there waiting for me. So what about you? Tell me about home.’ No one had ever really asked him that question since he’d been in Fira. Sure, Andreas and the band asked him about his music; he came from London, after all. He could talk about the bands he’d seen at Ronnie Scott’s, the Marquee Club and the Roundhouse, and the styles he liked, but he couldn’t articulate the way music fed his soul and kept him safe; he felt at home, almost protected, behind the drum kit, wherever he was. But her descriptions of colour and sound and her simple question made him feel that if he started talking he wouldn’t stop. He told her how the days were sixteen hours long in summer and how as a child he saw the watery twilight turn the cobbled stone paths of his street into seas bubbling with silvery fish. He told her about the intense green of Griffin Park, home of the Brentford Bees, and the first time he heard the roar of the crowd after the kick-off whistle blew. He told her about long walks along the Camden Locks and the sound of monkeys laughing when he passed by the Zoo. He told her about watching the snow fall like icing sugar, dusting the roof tops and chimney pots, on a dark winter afternoon from his bedroom window.

‘You sound homesick,’ she said, and he smiled, getting her joke.

‘Yeah, well, I’m heading home tomorrow,’ he said, snapping out of his reverie.

‘Oh, well it was nice to meet you,’ she said and offered her hand again. It was dry and warm, while his was cool and clammy.

‘If you’re ever in Brentford on a Saturday night, look me up, I’ll be at The Griffin,’ he said, mustering some nonchalance. And she was gone, taking with her the golden light that had momentarily shone only on him. He watched her return to the group of friends who had

obviously been waiting, their loud laughter gradually dissipating as they left the club. The sounds of his environment slowly returned and the impression that they had been the only people in the club gave way to familiar muffled chatter and Niko's loud laugh, as he offered him another Mythos and a conciliatory pat on the back. The rest of the band crowded round and toasted his fleeting success with *yamas yamas*. Niko called for the Metaxa and they toasted his playing this time - *yamas yamas*. They kept on like this, toasting each other: to life, to music, to women, to Papandreou, to Panathinaikos, until the Metaxa was gone. When he finally left the club for the last time after much hugging and backslapping and promises to return, to be out in the warm night alone was a relief.

Why did he always do that? Why didn't he give her his address or at least ask if she was heading to London on her travels? For all he knew she was heading back to Australia. But she would have said so if she was interested. Wouldn't she? He remembered what Andreas had said about the confidence of Australian girls. Andreas had finally hooked up with one just the other night. As confident as they come, he'd said, travelling alone. They'd had a great night back at her place. Andreas hadn't elaborated any further and he hadn't asked. Megan wasn't like that. She just liked the music, he decided. It was something that was to baffle him for years: was it him or his playing that attracted people? For him, the two couldn't be separated, but you have to be careful and he remembered the guys from the band's warning about women and musicians. His thoughts were spinning and so was the horizon he noticed as he more stumbled than walked back down the winding lane towards the Tango Bar. He could hear Andreas' favourite disco music pumping as he approached, and he smiled as he thought of the friendly young Greek who had taken him in, and who was to become a soldier shortly. He wished him well in his mind, but he couldn't face another beer or Metaxa, and decided he would grab a few hours' sleep before he got on the ferry. He experienced for the first time the bittersweet pangs of a traveller returning home and spent a

few fitful hours in the coolness of the cave room. The sound of tinkling bells and donkey hooves woke him as they made their way to collect the tourists from the cruise ships and he knew it was time to head for the bus to Athinios and the ferry. Along with some drachs, he left a message for Andreas inviting him to come and visit him in London. Closing the pretty blue door for the last time, he hoisted his sailor rucksack over his shoulder and headed into Fira bus station.

As Sophie walked through the old town of Fira on her last day on the island, her two silver bangles jingled happily on her right wrist. She really had to stop spending her drachmas, but there was something about Greek silver, so molten white, that she couldn't resist. Trying to save drachs, she'd returned to her room most nights with her purchases, but it was her last night and she had decided to shout herself a restaurant meal. She'd passed lots of tavernas on her walks, but she knew the one she wanted to go to. Approaching it from the street, she'd seen the balcony with the Caldera views. It was called The Tango Club.

She changed out of her cargoes, t-shirt and sneakers and put on her cotton dress and sandals, the first time she'd bothered to dress up since arriving. Putting on her makeup in front of the mirror, bopping to the Cure's 'In-between Days' coming from her Walkman headphones, she noticed her dress hanging looser on her tanned frame and she liked what she saw. Her brownish auburn hair, sun-bleached, hung in loose waves just above her shoulders and her blue eyes, rimmed with black kohl, dazzled with dewy deepness. To her surprise, she had become beautiful, and she wanted someone to notice.

His name was Andreas, he told her as she sat on a stool at the empty bar, sipping her Ouzo and Lemonade. 'The place doesn't get going until later,' he said, and she indicated that

she hadn't come to dance, but to eat and experience a famous Santorini sunset, at which he smiled, kind of crooked but nice she noticed, and nodded his approval. 'Best place in Fira for both. Come, bring your drink and I'll set you up.' She obediently followed the tall, black-haired bartender out onto the immense balcony, seemingly floating as it defied gravity jutting out over the Caldera and the Mediterranean below. A few diners, couples mostly, had already taken up their positions, but he found her a table at the edge, and said he'd be back with another Ouzo, no need for a menu as she was going to have the squid wasn't she, and she nodded.

'Thanks Andreas,' Sophie said, his name rolling off her tongue like a chant, so different to the Bobs and Daves of home.

'Hey, what's your name?' he asked.

'It's Sophia,' she said proudly.

'Now that's a beautiful name for sure, it suits you,' and he said he'd be back and to enjoy the sunset. 'Look.' He pointed over her shoulder, and departed. She turned to see a sky so close it seemed she could reach out and touch it.

He returned and flamboyantly placed a beautifully cooked plate of calamari in front of her and hovered as he encouraged her to take a first bite. He smiled his crooked smile as some lemon juice and olive oil, just enough, she noted, dribbled down her chin. She reached for a napkin, but he was quicker and he wiped away the juice with his waiter's towel. It happened so quickly, she didn't know how to react. She felt embarrassed, almost violated, but he did it so gently.

'Meet me later,' he whispered, 'I can get off early,' and she agreed to come back at eleven and to wait for him outside. She heard sniggers from the next table – a group of sun-buffed golden girls – but she didn't care, as Andreas took their order of more drinks and played along with their flirtatious banter. She ate her meal, savouring the tender gelatinous

rings and as the balcony started to fill up with groups of Contiki tourists, to add her own mystery, she left without a final goodbye.

He was waiting on the steps for her when she made her way back to the Tango Club.

‘I didn’t think you’d come,’ he said, almost sadly, and she quietly revelled in her apparent power. She didn’t let on that she had wondered the same thing. They walked together through the busy streets, talking and laughing, as they told each other about themselves. He was fascinated and impressed that she was travelling alone.

‘You Australian girls usually travel in packs,’ he said, teasing. She was equally amazed that a summer job on this beautiful island, just a few hours away from Athens, was just a job to him. She admitted that her family called her Sophie, but she’d decided that it was time to embrace her proper given name and told him of her namesake who had travelled alone, just as she was doing, to the mainland to find a new life.

‘Your name means wisdom,’ he informed her and she let him believe she hadn’t known. He told her his name, Andreas, meant ‘manly’, but his mother still called him ‘mikrouli’. It meant ‘little man’ which he hated, and they both laughed.

‘Do you like Metaxa?’ he asked. Although she’d never tasted it, she nodded and agreed to accompany him back to the cave room that he stayed in.

‘I have a room-mate, but he won’t be home for ages,’ he assured her.

‘Tell me a story, Sophia.’ They were each sitting on a single bed that backed up against the cave walls on opposite sides of the room. Her mind was a blank, trying to come to

terms with what had just happened. They'd been talking and drinking and he'd put his arms around her waist and drawn her close. They'd both noticed her immediate hesitation, but he'd kissed her anyway, a deep long kiss, his tongue searching and probing. When he attempted to put his hand up her dress, she'd pushed him away and fled to the other bed.

'You certainly aren't like the other Australians girls I've met,' he said, reaching for his drink and leaning back against the cave wall. 'All you had to say was no.' He studied her for a while in silence. She felt so foolish and unsophisticated and wanted to scream, at herself, at him, it was so confusing. She wanted him, she really did, but her body took over, or did her mind vacate, she wasn't sure, but she just couldn't. She wanted her drink but couldn't move and was too afraid to ask him to bring it over. He'd gone cold, she could see, as he sat opposite her just staring. 'Tell me a story then,' he'd demanded as if she had to pay for her Metaxa somehow. She looked up, initially confused, but from a place long forgotten, she found her voice and began.

'Once upon a time there was a ghost called Isabella ...'

He sat enthralled as she spoke and after a short time he brought her drink over and sat next to her, still listening, and became, once again, the lonely boy that he actually was. When she finished, he took her hand and kissed it gently.

'You are the ghost, Sophia,' he said, and he kissed her, this time on her cheek and her nose, and she began to cry because she realised he was right. It was as if she moved through life unnoticed like a shadow – never really present, never really there – no matter how hard she tried. She remembered, was it only three weeks ago, frantically waving at her dad, at that moment realising all she wanted was for him to wave back, but he stood, still and unmoving, as the bus had pulled out.

Andreas had walked her back to her room and they'd kissed goodbye. She watched him walk away in the moonlight, his tall skinny frame slightly stooped, his long arms

hanging by his sides, and from the back he looked like an old bear, sad and defeated. So she'd had her holiday romance. She could imagine Livvy saying, 'Did you do it?' and she knew she would never mention her night with Andreas to anyone.

On his way to Fira bus station in the morning twilight, Robbie noticed lights coming towards him, bobbing and flickering. As they got closer, he realised they were candles being held and he moved to the side as a feast day procession passed by. He was momentarily filled with a deep warmth for these people who still had faith in a benevolent God despite their hardships and history. He thought of his parents and their own hardships and found he was actually looking forward to seeing them. He couldn't wait to tell them about a sea that you could float endlessly in and beaches of black volcanic rock, of cave rooms built into the caldera walls and the shimmering heat of a midday sun, of a blue so intense you could burst with its beauty, and of a night sky so black and clear, the stars swirled in the sky like birds in flight. The procession moved by and as he continued on, he saw another procession coming towards him, this one a bit louder than the dignified one that had just passed. It was Andreas and his friends on their way back to the cave room.

'Hey man,' Andreas yelled out, his friends mumbling something in Greek between themselves. 'Where'd you get to?'

'Yeah,' said one of his friends, turning back to the group and continuing to speak loudly in Greek.

'Hey Andreas, sorry man, a bit too much Metaxa last night,' he said. 'I left you a note and some drachs on your bed. Look, thanks for everything, but I gotta get to the bus. Hey, good luck with the soldiering.'

‘A note? Some drachs? You gotta be kidding me, man. I told everyone about you.’

‘Yeah,’ said the same friend, again taking a step towards him. ‘Andreas told us everything about you. How you don’t like disco and play that jazz shit. How you like to be alone, how you don’t hook up with no girls, how you read all the time. This man here,’ and he put his arm around Andreas and pulled him forward. ‘This man here is joinin’ the army, we all are. Do you think we want to? And you couldn’t even be bothered to share a drink with us.’

‘Hey, I’m sorry, I was wasted,’ he said, sensing this was more than just about his no-show. He looked at Andreas and noticed his confidence was all but gone now.

‘Look man, I’m sorry, but I really gotta go. Write to me and we’ll catch up when you come to London.’ Andreas’s friend stepped in front of Andreas and leaned close into Robbie’s face, ‘Andreas ain’t goin to London. Andreas ain’t goin anywhere.’ Robbie noticed a rather large ring on his index finger as he pushed it into his chest.

‘Hey, I was talking to Andreas,’ he said. ‘Take care, man,’ and he stepped around both of them and kept walking. He didn’t look back. He could hear raised voices in staccato Greek fading into the distance as he quickly moved away.

The bus was idling when he got to the station. He loaded his rucksack and took a window seat, slumping deep into its welcome relief, his mind a blank but his heart racing. He couldn’t believe it. One minute he had been full of love for the world, for this island, for its people, for his parents, and the next minute it was as if it had all been for nothing. He got out his *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and started to read, the familiar voice confirming what he already knew; some men were destined for greatness, and others knew that they weren’t and knowing the difference was what really mattered.

Sophie's stomach heaved in time with the ferry's tumultuous rise and fall as it ploughed its way through the summer storm towards Piraeus. Everyone was crowded into the restaurant and bar area as the howling wind and rain battered the outside decks, and without an available seat, with many of her fellow passengers, she was camped on the floor desperately trying to not throw up. Old women in black cried and moaned and she wanted to scream at them to be quiet. To comfort herself, she hung on to the bittersweet melancholy of Andreas' goodbye, working it up into a wistful nostalgia, and drifted off to sleep.

When she opened her eyes, momentarily not realising she'd dozed off, she found that she was lying prone in someone's lap. She looked up and saw the face of an angel, with curly golden hair and cherub lips, herself asleep leaning back against one of the pillars dotted around the food court. She was fully awake now and sat up, ashamed at her lack of manners. She noticed the ferry was steady now, and passengers were sitting at tables and eating breakfast and she realised she was starving. The angel opened her eyes and smiled.

'I'm so sorry,' she whispered to the angel. 'I didn't mean to ... I don't usually ...'

But the angel just grinned. 'That's fine, I would have done it if I could, but you got in first!' Her name was Helen, from Auckland, on her way back to London. Sophie couldn't believe her luck. They both tried to stand, a little shaky and stiff from sitting for so long and they giggled as they grabbed each other for support.

'Let's get some air,' they said in unison and made their way out on to the now dry and warm deck. Passengers were rubbing their eyes and stretching all around them as if they'd all suddenly awoken from a dream, the nightmare of the night before already a distant memory. The sun poured down and a gentle breeze cooled their clammy skins. The ferry's horn signalled to a passing yacht, but it seemed to Sophie as if it was letting out a sigh of relief, happy to have triumphed once again. A call came over the loud speaker – docking in Piraeus

in an hour – and they decided to get some breakfast. The warm flaky roll, scrambled eggs and hot coffee was the best thing she'd ever tasted.

Robbie decided to take the bus to Brentford from Heathrow as, unlike his outward journey, he was in no hurry, but he also wanted, needed, to see and feel his homeland again. He'd only been away two months, but the dewy greenness of fields as they rolled by and the soft powdery blue of the sky were soothing after the kaleidoscopic colours and shimmering heat of Santorini. But he was a born traveller and would forever be looking backwards and forwards, pining for where he'd been, or craving a new landscape, not realising, yet, that it was these moments, the in between, that held the present. He intuitively felt a resistance and a desire to prolong his transient state and joined a mother and child as they alighted the bus at Brentford High Street. The softness of the mother's gentle reassurances and the child's faithful obedience moved him as the bus pulled away and he remembered a time toddling alongside his own mother, his hand in hers, down the High Street. It was the Autumn Brentford Festival and his mother, smiling and nodding to friends in the street, pointed out the floats of the parade to him as they passed by. Wave, Robbie, she'd said. Look, there's Jenny from next door, and Billy. And he'd obediently done what he was told, although he remembered he didn't want to. He didn't like Billy, but he also didn't want to disappoint her. He'd been hustled out of the house that morning because his dad had the hump again. He'd wondered about this hump and how it came and went, and worried if it hurt his dad, but he was happy to be alone with his mum and away from the shouting. They'd stopped while his mother spoke to Jenny's mum and he felt her let go of his hand as she rummaged in her handbag. And that's when it happened. The family story, told numerous times over the years,

of the day when Robbie got lost. He'd been waiting patiently for his mum to finish talking, knowing not to interrupt. They'd just walked by a bike shop and his eye had caught a glimpse of a bright red tricycle in the window. He'd only wanted to have a closer look, so he left the two women, and toddled back towards the shop. Looking at the red tricycle through the window and his own reflection staring back at him, it was as if they were one and he imagined his dad standing proudly beside him, humpless and happy as he pointed out the tricycle's best features. Jostled by passing shopping bags and striding legs, he moved closer towards the window and the sea of Brentford High Street closed about him. The joy of simply looking started to fade as he had no one to share it with and he turned away from the window, now looking for his mother, but the flow of legs and bags passing kept him pinned to the glass, frozen and forgotten. Well that's how it felt, he remembered. He couldn't move. He was suddenly full of fear and panic. He wanted to run back towards where he thought his mother was, to safety, but the High Street had taken him for its own. His mother always described, when retelling the tale to friends and family, that it was as if the sea had parted. She had retraced her steps, dodging the bustling crowd who pushed her towards the outside of the pavement where she had stopped to think about where he could have gone. Maybe he had walked on, not back, she had thought; maybe she should return to where she had been standing and talking. As all the maybes set in, she too found herself frozen, unable to move, when a gap appeared in the relentless wall of bodies and she saw him, his tiny frame, in his best shorts and cardigan, rigid against a shopfront window.

He remembered the feeling of terror and the way his mother admonished him for letting go of her hand and running away which he had felt was unfair as he had no intention of running away; he just wanted to see the bike, and, anyway, she had been the one to let go. The reunion had not gone as he had expected, and, observing his pouting lips, his mother had warned him about having the hump, an affliction which over the years he became proud to

share with his dad. They'd walked back through The Butts on their way home, the parade and the festival forgotten. He remembered how his mother's voice echoed around the incongruous quiet and stately square, an oasis of eighteenth century houses hidden amongst the more modest two up two downs of his part of Brentford, with regales of what life was going to be like from now on.

But life didn't change all that much, he remembered, although his dad didn't get the hump quite so often once he'd started his new job at Heathrow. He still never liked Billy, who became the archetype for all the bullies he would come across over the years: aggressive and ignorant, hiding a fear of anything and anyone different. He remembered running home every day from St Pauls C of E, like a moving target, through the seemingly uninhabited and deserted square that he'd once walked through with his mum, with Billy chasing him all the way. It didn't change either once they both started to go to Acton Comprehensive, although it turned into more leering than actual pursuance. From the other end of Boston Manor tube station, and on the train all the way to Acton, Billy would keep him in his sights. He'd started drum lessons by then, and with his clever wit, he had become popular. Everyone knew Billy was a bully, and when he left school and joined the army no one was surprised or disappointed.

He realised he'd been standing with his rucksack over his shoulder on the High Street for a while and was starting to get odd looks from passers-by. Had he changed that much? His hair was decidedly longer and unkempt and he had grown a beard, but who was he now? He thought of Andreas and his involuntary service, and he thought of Hemingway's question. Is it better to accept the outcome of your own actions, or to rise above a situation forced upon you? In the end, is there any difference? As thoughts of his past, present and future collided, he felt like a visitor in the foreign land of his history, and an observer of the theatre of his living, with a premonition that Brentford no longer held his future. He hitched his rucksack

into a more comfortable position on his shoulder and merged into the human flow of the High Street, knowing it was time, for now, to head home.

It was the greenness of the landscape that Sophie first noticed. As she looked out of the window of the bus taking her and Helen into London, the dewiness of the early morning added a final touch to the glittering emerald fields as they passed her by in quick succession.

‘It’s just so green,’ she exclaimed to Helen sitting opposite her.

‘You should see New Zealand,’ Helen said with the nonchalance of someone who had seen it all before. She’d been looking for a room mate for the Fulham flat she’d shared with a fellow New Zealander who had returned home, and Sophie had immediately agreed when Helen asked her to move in. ‘We’ll get the *Evening Standard* first thing and get you a job,’ Helen said confidently. ‘They love Kiwis and Australians here.’

Sophie found it strange to think you could be liked simply because of where you came from. But then again, she knew the reverse was true. Back home she was just a girl from the wrong side of the tracks, or more precisely, the wrong side of the river, who’d left school at sixteen, the wrong school at that. A flighty friend had suggested she fake her résumé, but that wasn’t her style and, in the end, she was grateful for the telephonist job that she eventually got. She had gone to night school to learn shorthand and bookkeeping, but to no avail. ‘Ah, so you’re from the Port,’ was the usual comment, before the thanks for coming and the inevitable ‘sorry’. She longed to be one of those secretaries that she used to see on the train going to work – pert and flawlessly groomed – but pert and flawless were never adjectives that belonged to her. As she looked out of the bus window, she wondered what the girls from work would be doing now – complaining about the supervisor’s harshness and discussing

what they would wear to the Bay City Rollers concert. She was never a Roller; Leonard Cohen was more her style. ‘Oh, he’s so depressing,’ the girls would exclaim, the ones that had heard of him anyway. She smiled to herself and noticed the green fields had given way to quaint roads full of little shopfronts and bollards and rows of tiny two-storey houses with flower-pot chimneys. She saw a plane flying overhead skimming the roof tops and the incongruity caused her to snap a photo with her ever-present camera.

‘I’d save your film for the sights,’ Helen said. ‘Everything is so expensive here. You wouldn’t want to waste it.’ Sophie nodded and accepted Helen’s advice. It was overwhelming: the wrought iron, the cobble stones, the Hammersmith Bridge in the distance, the Thames. It was just as she had imagined. She couldn’t believe it. She was finally here: in London. Athens and Santorini had been like walking through a tourist brochure; time was limited, and everything had to be documented, but here she felt as if she’d come home and had all the time in the world. She relaxed back into her seat and dutifully returned Helen’s smile, feeling somewhat like a naughty child who had gotten over excited.

‘Here’s the High Street, this is our stop,’ Helen said. Our stop, it had a nice sound to it. ‘There’s the Fulham Broadway. That’s our tube station. We’re just around the corner.’ The Fulham Broadway, the High Street, the words chimed like poetry to Sophie as she trundled behind Helen pulling her cumbersome suitcase with wheels along with her. As Helen strode ahead, her more practical backpack was a beacon that Sophie kept in sight. They passed an old pub called The Jolley Maltster and Sophie stopped for a moment to rest, leaning up against a wrought iron railing.

‘Is this our local?’ she asked Helen jokingly.

‘I don’t drink Sophie,’ she said. ‘I’d avoid it if I were you, especially on Saturday afternoons when Chelsea’s at home. Their ground’s not far from here and the songs they sing – disgusting ...’

Sophie took all of this in: she doesn't drink, she doesn't like football, and she doesn't like singing Englishmen. Sophie wondered what Helen did like, but kept that question to herself.

Helen finally stopped outside a little gate; similar to hundreds of little gates it seemed to Sophie that stretched down the long winding street which was to become her first proper address in London: *24B Waterford Road, Fulham SW6*. Behind the little gate was a path with a single shrub on either side that led to a couple of stone steps and a rather imposing front door. Sophie looked up to see two small second floor windows, like eyes looking down on her. Back home only rich people had two-storey houses.

'Wow, two-storeys,' Sophie said, impressed.

'Don't get excited,' Helen said. 'We're on the top floor, but we've got a small bedroom each, and there's a little living room and kitchen, and a bathroom at the back.'

Dragging her suitcase up the worn carpeted stair case, Sophie stood behind Helen as she opened the door to Flat B and followed her inside. It was like a doll's house – everything in miniature – and reminded Sophie of a little tea set she had as a child. The faded flower-patterned carpet and wallpaper only enhanced, to Sophie at least, its old world charm.

'It's so cute, Helen,' she said.

'Well it gets a bit icy in winter, especially in the bathroom, and the wallpaper starts to peel from the damp,' Helen replied, 'but yeah, I guess it's kind of cosy.'

She showed Sophie her bedroom which consisted of a single bed, bookcase and a single door white wardrobe.

'You're lucky, Stella left her bedding behind. It's washed and it's all yours if you want it.'

Sophie nodded, thanking Helen for everything.

‘You know Sophie, I think we’re gonna get along just fine. Let’s say twenty pounds a week for rent and five pounds worth of coins for the meter, plus food,’ Helen said, and she showed Sophie the metre just outside the flat door. ‘It will be good to have a flat-mate again. Now let’s have a cup of tea.’ Sophie would have preferred coffee, but she didn’t want to appear ungrateful.

Robbie rummaged in his pocket for his house key but was surprised to find the door wasn’t locked. Slinging his rucksack down in the hallway, he was further surprised to find his parents and brother, not at work or school, but sitting around the small kitchen table deep in thought. His mother looked up first with that familiar expression on her face, as if whatever catastrophe had befallen them this time was somehow his fault. The moment passed though and her face softened as she cried out, ‘Oh Robbie,’ and got up from the table to embrace him and welcome him home, and immediately started to fill the kettle for tea. His dad did the same, rising from the table to shake his hand, but his enthusiasm quickly waned, and he sat down again and fell back into the heavy silence that Robbie had stumbled in on. His eighteen-year-old brother, for he realised he would have had his birthday while he was away, sat there with a defiant look on his face and gave him his usual greeting of ‘Alright?’ The tableau was so familiar, it was as if he’d never been away. He wanted to scold them like children as he thought I only turn my back for a minute and look what happens, but his younger brother broke the scene and got up from the table, knocking his chair over as he rose and mumbled, ‘You talk to ‘em,’ and left the kitchen. Robbie obliged and discovered that his brother had been secretly waiting until he turned eighteen, then had left school and had joined the army. He understood his parents’ anguish. His younger brother was good at school, unlike

himself, as his mother had often pointed out, and had done well in his A Levels. He had a head for numbers and his parents were under the impression that he was applying to university.

Robbie knew from experience that his mother's impressions and perspectives were entirely her own, and he was secretly proud of his younger brother for following his own desires. But the army? He'd certainly kept that to himself, although Robbie realised they hadn't had a proper conversation in a while. He'd been so caught up with his music and going away and fending off his own guilt-laden entreaties of when was he going to get a real job from his parents that he just assumed his little brother was toeing the party line, and he'd been a little jealous of his higher ranking in the sibling stakes. He felt somewhat ashamed of the pleasant feeling of not being the one in the firing line this time, but also a little disappointed in having his homecoming thunder stolen. Thinking longingly of his rucksack lying in the hallway, he assumed the role of parent again, said 'I'll talk to him', and went upstairs to find his brother.

Not bothering to knock – it was his room too – he opened the door and after the expanse of his cave room in Santorini, he was taken aback at the smallness of the space. He marvelled that this small room housed two nearly grown men as he looked at his brother lying on his single bed, his feet dangling over the bottom edge. The window that divided the room, once so magical to the child Robbie, was its usual grimy self. He didn't say anything, and lay down on his own bed, his arms folded under his head, his legs crossed, and waited. This was a game he always played. He knew his brother would crack eventually. He always did. He was happy for now to feel his body relaxing, lying on his familiar bed, as he realised he was very tired.

'How was it?' his brother asked. Not good enough.

'Robbie, you awake?'

‘It’s Rob,’ he said, half asleep. Although being back in his childhood room, the name suddenly sounded forced and unfamiliar.

‘Whatever you say, Robbie.’ They were silent again both attempting to absorb this piece of information.

‘That’s not fair. I’m Mike and I will always be Mike. No one is gonna call me Michael, are they?’

‘I can think of a couple of other names to call you,’ he said, fully awake again now, the game and the preliminaries over.

‘You’ve been away for two months. You don’t know what it’s been like here.’

‘Enlighten me.’ His brother described their mum’s relentless overseeing of his college applications, and how he secretly had no intention of going to college because he was sick of school and wanted to get away, like Robbie had done, and how there weren’t any jobs and how he had signed up for the military, and when he told their mum she started to cry and then got angry and then started to cry again, and how he told her it would only be for four years and she cried even more, and how their dad wouldn’t even talk to him, and that’s how it had been day after day.

Robbie told him about Andreas and his friends and reminded him about Billy. He suggested the army wasn’t a place you escaped to because you were sick of studying.

‘Dad did his national service.’

‘Yeah, and do you notice he never talks about it?’ They fell silent again. All he wanted to think about was that Megan girl and his next gig.

‘Rob?’

‘Yeah?’

‘What was it like?’ Better question. What was it like? He noted the past tense. He thought about the cool cave room. He thought about the guys in the band and their gypsy

ways of toasting and reminiscing. He thought about the scrubby landscape he'd explored, and effortlessly floating in pristine almost black water, and he thought about Hemingway and journeys and action.

'Like here, but warmer,' he said, unable, or unwilling, to describe his experiences. Just like his dad, he realised. Not that he would ever compare his Mediterranean sojourn to his dad's army days, but he thought he understood now how some things just can't be shared. What was the point?

'Really?'

'No, you goose. Hey, I owe you a birthday drink. Let's go for a walk to The Griffin.'

'Cool.'

Giggling and whispering like children, Robbie from chronic tiredness and Mike from the joy of having his brother back home, they crept down-stairs past the kitchen where their parents were still sitting silently and made their escape. Robbie eyed his beloved rucksack waiting patiently it seemed as they'd passed by, but the pleasure for now of not having it over his shoulder was a relief, and they fell into step beside each other, stopping occasionally for a brotherly wrestle. The Griffin was one of four pubs on each corner that marked the boundary of Griffin Park. Each family had their preferred local and The Griffin was theirs. Their dad, in happier times, used to take them in for lemonade before a home game and the boys, like all the sons who frequented the pub, first with their fathers and then as young men, were known to the regulars. Opening the door, Robbie breathed in the familiar odour of lager and cigarettes and recognised the quiet hum of voices and laughter as they made their way to the bar and staked out their territory on a couple of bar stools.

'What'll it be, boys?'

'A pint of Fullers,' they said in unison and laughed.

‘Happy birthday Michael,’ he said, holding up his glass and noticing for the first time the heartbreaking fluff on his little brother’s chin.

‘Cheers, Rob,’ Mike replied and took a long, and legal this time, gulp of his pint.

On an empty stomach and lack of sleep, Robbie felt the heavy ale immediately work its magic and with loosened tongues they reminisced about the past and talked about their futures as the empty glasses mounted up in front of them, the drinks mostly shouted by the regulars who joined in the storytelling. When they discovered Mike had joined the forces, more pints were shouted, and it was the regulars’ turn to regale them with tales of fathers and uncles who had saved their beloved England. Robbie listened, staring deep into his ale, while Mike enjoyed the pats on the back and the well wishes like the boy that he still was. Legal to drink, legal to kill and be killed, it seemed so absurd to Robbie. He thought of his dad and the way his mum bossed him around these days. Where had the fight gone? Did that hump just become too heavy to carry? Was he weak? Or was it a strength to know when you’re beaten? For the first time since Robbie had left Santorini, he remembered what Andreas’s buddy had said, and the look of sad resignation in Andreas’s eyes. Robbie hadn’t felt threatened, but it was the shame of his inaction, all the same, that angered him. His thoughts, vague and emotional as they mixed with the alcohol and lack of sleep, swirled in his mind and he couldn’t help himself.

‘It’s a mug’s game, the army. Who’s the enemy when there isn’t one to fight?’ Robbie said, suddenly joining in the conversation. Little had been mentioned of lost limbs or lost lives, and the distanced reticence of these fathers and uncles to really talk about what they had seen and what they had sacrificed angered him further. Mike looked at his older brother and noticed his forced smile. The sudden silence after the camaraderie of before confused him.

‘Your dad wouldn’t like hearin’ you talk like that, son,’ said old Mr Giles. ‘We all did our bit. Those that didn’t join up still suffered for their country, young man,’ he said, almost saluting. Robbie’d heard about old Jack Giles and his war-time black marketeering.

‘Every man for himself is what I’d heard,’ Robbie replied, immediately regretting it. Mike looked at him in disbelief and the whole bar full of old soldiers seemed to turn their backs. And then someone laughed. It was Jimmy the barman.

‘Spoken like a true philosopher, Robbie. Picked up a bit of Plato on your travels, eh?’ Everyone joined in then, laughing at Robbie and his funny ways. No harm done. He was just a kid. What did he really know? Jimmy winked as he caught Robbie’s eye and the talk moved on to The Bees and their prospects for the coming season.

The session eventually burned itself out as the older drinkers headed home for their cooked lunch and Jimmy called ‘time gentlemen’ as afternoon closing was near. Robbie and Mike were the only ones left. When Mike went to visit the men’s, Jimmy stopped wiping glasses and came down to talk to him.

‘So, what does your old man think about Mike joinin’ the army?’

‘He’s in shock. They both are. Not happy, to say the least.’

‘Yeah, I figured as much. Look, I know someone who owns a club in the West End, looking for an ‘apprentice’ so to speak. Do you think Mike would be interested?’

‘What kind of club?’

‘Well, let’s just say they like to do things their way, but the entertainment is always top-notch.’ From the fat to the fire, he thought, but it sounded safer for his little brother than fending off bullies and over-zealous drill sergeants.

‘Look, I’ll put in a good word for him. Come back tonight if you can and I’ll give you the address.’

And so instead of decking himself out in government issue khakis, Mike, with the hesitant blessing of his parents, donned a uniform of black pants, white shirt and black bow tie, and embarked on a career a little closer to home but sometimes just as dangerous, as a runner and eventually concierge of a West End gentlemen's club. Jimmy had some other good news for him. There'd been a phone call. From a girl called Megan. The message she'd left was short, but clear: *Back in London on the 15th – see you at the Griffin – 7pm – Megan.*

'A woman who knows what she wants; a blessing and a curse I'd say,' Jimmy had said as he'd handed over the pub lotto ticket that contained the scrawled message. Robbie couldn't believe it. He was going to see the beautiful, the smart, the perfect Megan again. His fragile ego tapped on the door of his mind and whispered *what does she want and why does she want you?* But through the fog of hormones, he didn't hear. His ego could wait. It wasn't going anywhere.

When she walked into the Griffin, her golden tan putting his already fading attempt to shame, he immediately felt her glow shining on him like a spotlight as he sat quietly at the bar. He turned, instinctively following Jimmy and the rest of The Griffin's gazes, it seemed, as she confidently walked up to him and thrust out that tiny hand of hers, which he took and didn't want to let go.

'Hi,' was all she said, as if his waiting for her at the pub was an everyday occurrence.

'Hi,' he replied, almost choking on the words he wanted to say, but somehow keeping his cool.

'Do you want to go for a walk? It's so beautiful out,' she asked, and he realised that was exactly what he wanted, to get away from the stares and the sniggers and the inevitable flirting of the regulars.

'Yes,' he said. It was as simple as that.

They did a lot of walking in the beginning, hanging on to those last days and nights of summer, following the cardinal points of London. They walked around Kew Gardens, and along the Brentford riverbank, or through the wild West End at night when he had an occasional gig. They walked along the locks and around the markets of Camden, and picnicked on the Heath, or followed the Embankment into the East End. As the days grew shorter, and the nights longer, Megan suggested he move in with her as he'd been spending more time at the Greenwich flat that she shared with an Australian friend than at home, and he didn't hesitate. He said a final goodbye to the old toy box and his childhood bedroom, which, since Mike had also vacated, preferring a room at the club to the late night commute, his mum had immediately turned into her sewing room.

It had been such a small ad in the *Evening Standard*, it was a wonder Sophie hadn't missed it. Sitting there amongst the numerous pages of two-line wanted ads that she would trawl through most nights, it was the location that caught her eye: – *Secretary – Advertising Agency, Chelsea SW3 – Telephone 01 35 3911*.

'It's not that far from Fulham, I could easily catch a bus up the Fulham Road or the tube from the Broadway to South Ken,' Sophie said without looking up. If she had she would have noticed Helen's agitation at her flatmate's growing independence, but Sophie had been in London for almost two months and the supposedly easy to get employment had so far eluded her. Her money was running out.

After getting her a bank account and showing her the way to the local 'offy' for bread and milk, Sophie had soon discovered Helen didn't like to venture out much, but Sophie's enthusiasm finally wore her down and they'd spent a day together in Greenwich.

‘Why Greenwich?’ Helen had complained as they’d wandered through the park towards the observatory, but Sophie couldn’t explain her obsessive compulsion to straddle the meridian. As Helen watched, Sophie put her feet on either side.

‘Look Helen, I’ve got one foot in the past and one in the future,’ she said, unable to contain her excitement. ‘You know, if you keep going east, you’ll end up in the west eventually. It does my head in,’ Sophie laughed.

‘Well, in the present, I need a cup of tea,’ Helen said.

After that, Sophie had enjoyed her days alone, wandering around Bloomsbury where her favourite characters and their creators had once lived. She also visited the National Gallery and Portrait Gallery in Trafalgar Square where she just had to have a copy of the famous photograph of Virginia, and spent a lovely day in Hyde Park where she told an unimpressed Helen later that the squirrels were tame, and one had eaten right out of her hands. Helen wasn’t interested in art galleries and certainly not in the exorbitant entry fees, and had warned Sophie numerous times about wasting her money. Sophie had quietly accepted, but not really adhered to the advice, and now she was down to her last five pounds.

‘I did warn you Sophie,’ Helen said. ‘But of course you can still stay here, I’m not like that.’

Sitting on the tube, heading for South Kensington and her first proper interview, Sophie had wondered what ‘that’ was, but put it out of her mind as the train hurtled through the dark tunnel. Disembarking at South Kensington with her resume, now professionally displayed in a hard cover presentation folder that she’d got from Harrods, sitting snugly in an equally new black leather satchel that she’d picked up from the Portobello Road, she blended into the procession of businessmen and office workers who streamed along the bathroom like tiled passage ways of the tube station and out into the hazy morning summer sunshine. It was only a short walk past Onslow Square and across the Brompton Road to

Bury Walk. She stopped at No 3, gathered herself, and, noticing the 'please enter' sign, pushed open a heavy white enamel painted front door.

'Allo, you must be Sophia,' said a girl not much older than Sophie, getting up from behind a desk stacked with folders and pamphlets. She was wearing a pale blue and pink Liberty print floral dress and Sophie suddenly understood what the term 'English Rose' meant. She felt slightly withered and brittle with her leftover holiday tan, and black two-piece skirt and jacket suit that she'd borrowed from Helen.

'Bruce will be with you in a sec, luv,' said the girl as she cleared some papers from a chair on the other side of her desk. 'Ere, have a seat.' Sophie sat down and wondered at the chaos around her: other desks piled high with folders or strewn with papers; boxes and postal tubes stacked against walls; a funny contraption that she'd never seen before that rang like a telephone but then produced official looking paper documents. She loved it all.

'Welcome,' came a booming voice and a large outstretched palm as the girl introduced her.

'This 'ere, Bruce, is Sophia, she's from Awwstralia,' she said proudly, as if she'd found her especially for him. Bruce was a red-haired, rotund Sydneysider who had come to London in the late 60s with a talent for marketing, a penchant for the good life, and a love of Keats and Shakespeare. All this he told her with great glee as they sat opposite each other in his surprisingly neat office. He had quickly glanced over her resume in its stylish cover and noted only the Harrods logo and her favourite pastime of reading.

'Ah, so which one was it brought you to London?' he asked. Although somewhat embarrassed, she understood and admitted that it was *For Love Alone* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

'Ah, a modernist, excellent,' he said, and that was the extent of the formalities. 'We've just landed the FTSE 100 account!' Bruce beamed. 'Would you like to join our little agency?'

‘Yes,’ said Sophie emphatically, and not only because she was broke.

‘Bloody marvellous’, Bruce exclaimed, and so began Sophie’s new career as a real secretary and general girl about town.

After Livvy’s ‘man at all costs’ mantra and Helen’s ‘it’s just you and me and endless cups of tea’ lifestyle, Alison, the ‘English Rose’, turned out to be the best friend Sophie had always wanted: she read, she had great taste in music, and she loved to shop. That first day she’d taken Sophie to the Kings Road, just a short walk from the office, and showed her Vivienne Westwood’s World’s End, and the original BOY shop. She even owned an original Westwood muslin top like the one Johnny Rotten used to wear. ‘You must come out to the pub for a drink,’ Alison had said.

Sophie started seeing less and less of Helen as her new social life kept them apart. Even so, it came as a shock when Helen confronted her one morning.

‘This can’t go on,’ Helen said as they were about to say their goodbyes at the corner, Sophie heading for the Fulham Broadway tube station and Helen to the Fulham Road to catch the bus.

‘What do you mean?’ Sophie asked innocently.

‘You’re never home. I do all the shopping, and the housework. It’s not fair.’ Sophie immediately knew she was right. But she worked sometimes from eight in the morning to six or seven at night. The FTSE 100 account was a big one. And then there were drinks after work and catching up with Ali and the girls on the weekends.

‘I’m sorry, Helen. It’s just that you always do it. I thought you liked to. And really, I’m hardly ever home to eat, but I pay you for half the food?’

‘That may well be, but it’s just not fair. You’re never home, and when you are, you’re usually sleeping or recovering from the night before. I thought we were going to be good together, but it’s just not working out.’

‘So what are you saying Helen? Do you want me to move out?’

‘No, I don’t want you to move out, silly,’ Helen said taking Sophie’s hand. ‘I want you to spend more time with me. Let’s do the shopping together. We can even do the housework together, whistle while we work kind of thing, it’ll be fun. You drink too much. You don’t look after yourself properly. You live on crispbread and rice bars. I could look after you if you’d let me. I thought that’s what you wanted. Remember when we met – on the ferry? I’ve never pressured you, but it’s not fair.’

Sophie stared down at Helen’s hand still firmly gripping her own and realised how innocent she really had been.

‘Look Helen, I didn’t come to the other side of the world just to do housework and grocery shop. I’ve got to go, and you’ll miss your bus. Let’s talk about it tonight,’ Sophie said.

Helen couldn’t argue and took off towards the Fulham Road and her bus, calling out ‘okay’ as she almost skipped away. Sophie knew she needed to find somewhere else to live, and the break from Helen was completed when Alison immediately insisted she move into her flat in Ladbroke Grove. That night, after telling Helen her news, Sophie had the fire dream again.

She’d had the first dream as a small child. Her bed was in flames, but she couldn’t move or speak. It was frightening, but it had felt, even then, vaguely familiar. The second time was as a teenager, at her Nanna’s. In this dream, the whole house was on fire, but Sophie was locked in her room, and although she couldn’t escape, she felt strangely safe. In her single bed at Helen’s as she soundly slept, flames licked and leapt around her, and she awoke to a bright blue day full of birdsong and beauty.

Sophie had moved house before, but she couldn’t help but smile as she sat in the back of the black cab, her worldly possessions crammed into her now bulging suit case.

‘Where to luv?’ asked the driver and after giving him the address, Sophie relaxed as the cab headed up the Fulham Road towards a new life in West London.

They were an odd lot at the agency: six of them in all, including herself and Alison. After the regimented and decidedly feminine atmosphere of the Post Office, she wasn’t used to the endless friendly banter and fatherly treatment that she and Alison received, but she liked it. ‘What are you reading?’ Bruce would often ask her, always taking an interest in her literary education. She’d never told anyone – it wasn’t even on her resume – that she’d had a previous job as a receptionist before the Post Office. She’d been sacked for reading on the job. She remembered how amazed she’d been when the boss called her in and gave her the bad news. ‘But the phone doesn’t ring very often,’ her sixteen year old self had protested to no avail. Of course she understood now that it was unprofessional, and would never open a book unless she was on her lunch break. When Bruce discovered she was reading *Remembrance of Things Past*, he exclaimed ‘Ah Proust,’ elongating the *ou* vowel sound which made her cringe because she realised she’d been pronouncing the author’s name incorrectly.

Bruce’s second in command was Alistair with a hyphenated surname and a connection, to her astonishment, back in Adelaide where his great-uncle, by marriage, owned a leather coat-making enterprise. He was as big and as full of himself as his name suggested, but nonetheless likeable. He and Bruce were drinking buddies and often indulged in what Sophie discovered was part of a day’s work in advertising: the liquid lunch. Then there were the two creatives – Mike and John – who she discovered were responsible for the chaos that had greeted her that first day. Mike was a talkative but softly spoken, tall and gangly

Yorkshireman whose limbs seemed to slip and slither over chairs and on desks. John was small, compact and hard, with piercing blue eyes, and spoke only when he needed to. They were a team and seemed to move through the office as if they were attached. They also kept their own hours and when the inspiration took hold, it was Sophie and Alison's job to be on hand to type out creative proposals or source props for their mock-ups. What she enjoyed most was the way they included the two girls in their endless think tanks. Alison had a good eye for colour and layout, which was Mike's domain, and Sophie was becoming John's go to girl when he was stuck for a word. He would lean over behind her and almost whisper in her ear a request to read what he'd just written, or give her a wink when Bruce praised his copy, knowing that she had something to do with its success.

'So what's up with you and John?' Ali asked her one day. They were sitting in Hounslow Square, having their lunch. Sophie had discovered pate baps and was enjoying the taste of the creamy liver paste and iceberg lettuce combination as they sat under their favourite plane tree in some rare autumn sunshine.

'What do you mean?' she answered, realising to herself as much as Alison that she was hiding something.

'Yeah, he's debonair and all that, and pretty fit, but ... I dunno ... he's kinda sleazy.'

'You think so? I think he's kinda sad.'

'Oh Sophie, you got it bad, girl.'

'I don't know what you mean,' she said, smiling.

When he finally asked her out, he said he would pick her up from the flat on Sunday. After buzzing his arrival, Sophie bounded down the stairs and out the front door, and discovered John astride a Yamaha with a spare helmet for her.

'Let's go back to my place,' he suggested once she had settled in behind him and gotten used to his way of riding. 'You've been a pillion before,' he yelled as she leaned with

him around corners, heading for his flat not far away in Shepherd's Bush. Turning right from Ladbroke Grove, they roared down Holland Park Avenue passed rows of porticoed villas, and a little afraid, Sophie wrapped her arms around his compact waist a little tighter as he navigated the Holland Park Roundabout on to Shepherds Bush Green and then left on to Shepherds Bush Road.

He lived above a shop on the Shepherds Bush Road which had a back stairs entrance, 'For the privacy,' he suggested. Not unexpectedly, his flat had a masculine feel to it: black leather couch, serious sound system and shelves full of books, record albums and videos. As he grabbed a couple of Coronas out of the fridge, he asked her if she liked jazz and before she could reply that yes, she did, he put on Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* and instructed her to listen while he made some lunch and disappeared into a small galley kitchen off the lounge room. She knew a bit about jazz: Billie Holiday, Lester Young, and Charlie Parker, but this Miles Davis was a revelation. She sipped her Corona and listened as instructed.

John eventually returned with two plates of steaming seafood linguine and they sat cross legged on the floor around a glass-topped coffee table, eating, talking, and listening to the music that he also fed her; after Miles came the Cocteau Twins and This Mortal Coil, neither of which she was familiar with but instantly loved, and when he took her to bed for the afternoon, spears of light piercing through the blinds above the futon, and the Cocteau Twins playing in the next room, she felt like a traveller who had finally reached her destination.

They rose in the early evening. It was still light and John asked her if she would like to go for another short ride. He wanted to show her something. Along with his spare helmet, he lent her a leather jacket as the mild autumn day had turned crisp. Like everything he suggested, she readily agreed, experiencing for the first time the freedom that complete trust brings.

‘It’s not far now,’ he called out above the still busy Sunday evening traffic as they hurtled down the Fulham Palace Road and the familiar London mayhem of flats, houses and shops all crammed in together. She noticed the sudden quiet as they turned left on to a leafy terrace-lined street and came to a stop outside a red but blackened brick and wrought iron gated entrance way that opened on to an avenue of trees and headstones. ‘How lovely,’ she said smiling as he led her into the cemetery and they walked hand in hand amongst greying and faded angels and obelisks, and read the worn dedications to the multitudes of lost husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Leaving the avenues of remembrance behind, they padded softly over a carpet of red and gold fallen leaves and came upon a field still dotted with late blooming wild flowers and he spread his jacket down for her with the sounds of finches, wrens and starlings calling out in their early evening feasting.

‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘It’s wonderful.’

‘Yeah, I discovered it years ago, not long after I arrived in London. I think it’s the peace I like the most, plus all those names and dates, all those lives. Reminds me that life is to be lived, but when it’s gone, well it’s gone, like love. Helps to let go, you know?’

‘I guess. I’ve never really thought about it like that.’ She remembered her dad being so distraught after his mother had died. It was the only time she’d ever seen him cry. ‘It’s right to grieve though, isn’t it? I mean people expect it, don’t they? And anyway, how can you just stop loving someone?’

‘It takes practice, that’s for sure,’ he said, adding an ‘only joking’ at the surprised look on her face.

‘So who have you lost, John?’

‘Me, I think,’ he said, laughing at his own joke. ‘Well, it’s been fun, but we’ve both got an early start in the morning. I better get you home.’ She was a little confused at his sudden change in mood. She’d been enjoying the melancholy atmosphere and conversation,

but the thought of putting her arms around him again and speeding through the streets of her increasingly beloved London was enough for now. He dropped her off with a see you tomorrow and a light brush of a kiss on her lips, told her to hang on to the helmet and jacket, and sped off with a final wave.

‘So, how’d it go?’ Alison asked her as she came in. Good question, she thought, but proceeded to tell her about the music and the food, and the loving and the cemetery. ‘Well isn’t he a bit of a smoothie,’ Alison said, still not convinced, and Sophie neglected to mention his change of mood. She went to bed with an image in her mind; when he got out of bed that afternoon, she had caught sight of him through the open bathroom door, pissing in the basin. He gave her a smile when he had finished, like he knew she had been watching him. ‘Your turn,’ he’d said and she’d obediently gotten up. He flicked her nipple as he passed her and she laughed, but closed the bathroom door.

And so the pattern was set. He flirted with her as usual at work, and then would tell her he would pick her up, always on a Sunday, and take her out. They went to the Camden Markets for Sunday lunch, to Soho for Yum Cha or to play pool at the Richmond. He was amorous and romantic on these occasions, and she fell in love with him over and over again. As they walked along Shaftsbury Avenue, he let her wear his fedora. At the markets, he bought her an African necklace made of ivory and red beads, and at the Richmond he was genuinely impressed with her pool skills and seemed almost proud to be with her. But after sex, he would change. He would curl up in a foetal position, his back towards her, or sprint to the bathroom to rinse off, suggesting she do the same. But every time he dropped her off and said see you tomorrow, she couldn’t wait to see him again, putting his behaviour down to the sadness that she knew was there.

She still went out with Alison and the girls on Friday nights, and John would often grill her about these nights out. Where did she go? Who did she meet? He wasn’t jealous, he

said, just curious. Did she fancy any of them? Why? Why not? She found herself describing the likely lads who had approached her with their comic banter, and proudly recounted the hurt look in one's eyes when she'd accepted all the drinks he'd bought her but at evening's end had given him the 'you must be joking' look. She'd learned all this from Alison and her friends. 'String them along for the drinks' was the plan and she'd become good at it: the look, the smile, and finally the dismissal. 'Wow, you're a professional,' John had said, and she'd beamed under the spotlight of his approval. One Sunday, after the usual questioning, his love making became rough. 'You like it, don't you?' he whispered in her ear as he rammed into her. She couldn't speak, frozen, let him do as he pleased. When he dropped her off later that night, he told her it was over.

'Why?' she pleaded. 'What have I done?'

'I need a woman, Sophie, but you're still a child. The way you play with these boys, it's fucking cruel.'

'But I ... I love you,' she whimpered, and then the anger took hold. She threw the helmet and jacket at him and screamed, 'You ... you fucking bastard.'

'Very eloquent,' was all he said, and she watched him speed off.

She told Alison that night that she'd dumped him.

'Hoorah, you go girl,' Alison said, and Sophie almost believed that she had.

Sophie knew she would have to leave the Bury Walk agency. She could see no other way out, and started looking for another job immediately. John acted as if nothing had happened, and as Alison remained with Bruce and Mike after Sophie left, eventually it seemed that nothing had. She buried the hurt and cemented it over. Like a dam wall, she

became smooth and hard. Bruce was sorry to see her go, but understood when she told him that she wanted to get more experience while she was in London. With a lovely reference from Bruce, she very soon got a new job as a personal assistant to the Managing Director of a bigger agency in Covent Garden.

The agency was housed in a three-storey building in Drury Lane with an affiliate agency in Cardiff. Reception was on the ground floor, which housed what she now knew to be the fax machine, with her area, account service, on the second. The creative team had the third floor, which she only had to nervously visit to use the photocopier. She'd had enough of those creative types. Eric was an old school gentleman who had been in advertising for most of his working life and liked to have a pot of tea and a biscuit every afternoon. A far cry from the chaos of Bury Walk, she enjoyed Eric's and the agency's routines: strictly nine to five, billings once a month, new business approaches once a week and current client updates fortnightly. If it was a slow day, Eric would 'let her go' early and she would wander around Covent Garden before heading home to Ladbrooke Grove. She started to enjoy this alone time and remembered her wanderings when she had first arrived. Autumn had turned to winter and she experienced her first snow falls. On her winter walks padding around Covent Garden, she'd discovered St Paul's Church and its lovely garden where she'd sit enjoying the powdery snow, the snow making animal shapes as it dusted the plants. If it started to rain, she would take herself to the Curzon Cinema on Shaftesbury Avenue to catch an early film. She also discovered an adult education night school just around the corner from Drury Lane and she enrolled in a course on Romanticism and then Realism, revering the newly bought textbooks, the first she'd ever bought herself. She loved sitting in the large auditorium listening to the lecturer and then drinking awful coffee alone in the Institute cafeteria afterwards. Alison said she was becoming 'arty farty' but was happy to have her

‘Awwstralian’ friend back again and the nights out hoping to ‘pull’ became the norm, at which she was moderately successful.

There was Ben from Acton who turned out to be an ex-crim, Chris from Notting Hill who was into IT and French cinema, and then Tim from Camden who was a stockbroker, drove a red Sunbeam Sports and was into tattoos – not the sailor kind, but eastern influenced – dragons mostly. He talked her into getting one: a small serpent on her left shoulder. The tattoo was permanent, but Tim wasn’t. He said although he liked her preppy persona and the way she always carried some Penguin paperback around, he preferred Oriental women. She told Alison she was done ‘pulling’.

Greenwich reminded Robbie of a posh Portsmouth with its royal and maritime heritage and waterfront docklands. Everything was so, well, nice here. He missed the West and its mixture of locals and immigrants and its pub on every corner atmosphere. Along with the rise of shoulder pads and big hair, it was the age of the wine bar. These upmarket establishments that didn’t even give you a proper glass full were sprouting up everywhere, even in his beloved West London, he had to admit. What was the world coming to? He worked nights and Megan worked days, so they didn’t see that much of each other anymore. Her friend had moved out not long after he had moved in, which changed the casual nature of their relationship, not to mention the expense. He felt like a house husband of sorts. Her income from her project management job with a real estate developer was much more than the paltry sums he earned from gigging, but she didn’t seem to mind. That’s what he loved about her. She understood him and knew that he wasn’t the conforming type, and she seemed to love that about him. In the early days he had loved showing her around and she came to every gig

he played, but these days, after making the commute from the city to Greenwich, she wasn't always in the mood to make the trip back in. She had an enclave of Australian buddies who lived in Greenwich, which is how she came to be living there, and she hung out with them on the nights he was working. When he got home, usually late, she was often not around, staying over, she said, at her girlfriend's house because she didn't like being alone.

Looking out of their top floor flat window on to the quiet suburban street below, something he was doing a lot of lately, he wondered at how quickly they had succumbed to the daily grind. Even his music was becoming pedestrian: the same old standards, the same old crowd. Jazz and blues, once played all over London, were being edged out by a new British sound and it was only punters with a taste for more sophisticated music, acquired along with their wine knowledge, it seemed to Robbie, who were his audience now. Time and music moved so quickly these days, with fads and fashions coming in and going out, he already felt like a has-been. He'd voted Labour, of course, but thanks to the Falklands he'd realised it was still Thatcher's Britain, and to reward her subjects, the Iron Lady was about to introduce a poll tax. That's the way Margaret, he thought, make the most in need pay for the poor mansion owners who complained about a lack of on-street parking. The every man for himself eighties was in full swing, and he felt if he didn't keep moving, he'd be left behind.

'Shit, Rob,' he checked himself. 'It could be worse.' He'd finally moved out of his upstairs bedroom with the single bed that he thought he would never be able to leave. Not on the money he earned anyway. Meeting Megan was the best thing that ever happened to him. She made him see his home in a new way, as if she'd brought the Antipodean and Grecian sun with her. That light she had shone on him the first time they'd met wasn't just a holiday tan. She warmed him in places he hadn't known were frozen, but she also loved to share the light around. He liked her friends; that wasn't the issue. But they all craved her brightness and enthusiasm and, if he was honest, he didn't like to share it. He hadn't realised how

possessive he could be, not that he could ever let her know. He was Rob, the cool English musician. That was the persona she fell in love with and he had to keep the anxious, frightened, attention-seeking Robbie to himself. He knew she admired his self-possession and philosophical outlook, but sometimes, just sometimes, on quiet days like this, with time to think, he felt a familiar tightness in his stomach that his rational mind could not explain.

Christmas came, and Sophie received a letter from her mum who wrote very formally in her neat capital letter handwriting that they were well and enclosed a photo of her little niece in their newly renovated kitchen. To her surprise, Sophie also received a letter from Johnnie. He apologised for the way he had treated her and hoped they could be friends again. He wanted to know all about London and asked her to write to him. He'd enclosed a mix tape of their favourite music: U2, Dire Straits, and INXS, which Alison dismissed as too commercial, but she secretly listened to on her Walkman at night alone in her single bed.

All the orphans, as they called themselves, were going to meet up for Christmas at their flat. Alison and Gill's parents both lived in Northamptonshire, Fiona's in Glasgow (could she bring her younger brother?), Jo came from Surrey and she brought her friend Stephen, a ginger-haired, Doc-Marten- and-scarf-wearing bovver boy who was actually very quiet and sweet. The girls cooked a roast, and they all washed it down with some Holstein Pils. The boys did the dishes and they played Trivial Pursuit for hours until one by one, everyone had gone to sleep. Alison shared with Gill, Fiona and her brother got Sophie's bed, while she got the couch in the lounge room and Stephen got the floor. It was snowing outside and it was the best Christmas Sophie had ever had. Lying there, listening to This Mortal Coil playing softly ('You don't mind do you, Stephen?' – 'Nah, you're alright luv') she lay there,

confused but happy, and thought about Livvy and Andreas; Helen and John; Ben, Chris and Tim; and, finally Johnnie. She drifted off to sleep with the warmth and glow of the gas heater still on and the sound of Stephen's muffled snores, as seismic plates shifted and continents crept closer, and the hardness in her heart began to crack.

As winter set in, she never knew it could be so cold. The once powdery snow became slippery underfoot, and she was astonished at the sight of a fountain, frozen in mid-stream, and the glacial shimmer of the icy Serpentine in Hyde Park. She'd bought herself some lace up Docs and jettisoned her old duffle coat, bought from home, for a grey and black chequered great coat with padded shoulders that she wore over an also newly acquired mohair sweater, and leggings. A beret festooned with brooches and badges, a long grey scarf and black leather gloves lined with fur completed her winter look. She got used to the layering up for outdoors and the discarding of layers in the interminable but welcome central heating of London buildings in winter. They even had coat check booths in the nightclubs, which reminded her of old Hollywood movies, she told Johnnie in a return letter. They didn't mention what had happened before. She started to enjoy describing to him her experiences and receiving his impressions. Since meeting Alison and working, she'd stopped being a tourist and had become a Londoner. She hadn't even visited the Tower, and she moved around the city, walking or on the Tube, sometimes not even aware of her surroundings, her head in a book or lost in her own thoughts. But she had been on a day trip to Brighton with Alison and her sense of wonder had returned when she gazed upon The Pavilion: its domes and minarets, opulence and extravagance, and she described all this to him, noticing a growing pleasure in having to recreate, through words, what she had seen. The Brighton seaside was

carnavalesque, but seedy and dilapidated with rows of sad boarding houses. The once grand Grand Hotel was still covered with scaffolds from the IRA bombing. The sea was, on the day she went, steely and grey like an undulating blanket, and the beach of small smooth pebbles reminded her of the bottom of an aquarium. The green-and-white striped deck chairs that they hired out looked like peppermints scattered about, and the pier had a jolly menace about it, like a Punch and Judy booth. In turn, Johnnie described South Port, his favourite beach, on a day when it was working: the lines of waves coming in glassy with a gentle off shore blowing, the sun radiating like a flower and the sky Venetian glass. Like a yarn spinning, the thread was growing stronger with each layer as the letters winged their way back and forth across the globe.

Weekday nights at home were long, and she'd taken up her usual winter pastime of knitting, much to Alison's amusement. Just for something to knit, she decided to do a jumper for Johnnie: a blue ribbed v-neck. 'It's just for something to do,' she insisted in response to Alison's raised eyebrows. The jumper, the winter, and the letters progressed until spring arrived, and then summer, when Sophie realised as she was sewing up the last of the jumper pieces, she'd been away for over a year. She'd seen the seasons change and experienced a cold that was piercing and bone-chilling and felt the soft caress of snowflakes on her face. There had been endless summer days draped in a golden haze, crispy autumn afternoons, and relentless rain that shone like diamonds under Victorian street lamps. She'd met sad men and innocent boys, worldly girls and frightened women, but she hadn't found love.

When his latest letter arrived, she felt something small and sharp-edged lodged in the corner of the tissue paper thin aerogramme envelope. It was a ring: gold with diamonds and sapphires. She slipped it on to her left hand ring finger in a silent ceremony. Her decision wasn't hard in the end, once she'd made it. It was as if she'd been acting in a play and the

curtain had come down; the story was over, the epiphany experienced. Maybe she hadn't even made the decision herself at all. Maybe that's why it ultimately seemed so easy.

For some reason unknown to himself, Robbie wasn't surprised when she told him. He didn't know what was worse: the fact that she wanted to return to Australia or the fact that she was going to have a baby. He'd accepted that she didn't like using contraception, but with his good timing he thought he'd perfected the withdrawal method. Not that sex had been uppermost in either of their minds lately, it seemed. Her job with the real estate developer was as busy as ever, but now included site inspections and weekends away. It seemed the whole of England was redeveloping. He'd moved away from jazz and had joined a blues-inspired cover band and was playing most nights. There'd been a renaissance from across the Atlantic and he enjoyed, along with the ever growing audiences, rediscovering Ginger Baker and Mick Fleetwood. The jazz swing that he'd perfected transitioned nicely to the muddy groove of the blues. Things were good. He could even pay for his share of the rent now and they were (well, he was anyway) talking about moving back to West London, where the developers hadn't got a foothold. Megan wasn't keen – she preferred high-rises to two-up-two downs – but that didn't matter now. The thought fleetingly crossed his mind that this situation wasn't an accident, and in an attempt to banish it, he replaced it with another. 'Marry me,' he said.

They all came to Heathrow to see Sophie off: Alison, Gill, Jo, and Scottish Fi, who gave her a champagne cork with a pound coin pressed into it, for luck. Eric from the agency had given her a beautiful Royal Doulton porcelain dish, and the office staff, much to her delight, had presented her with the requested Paddington Bear, to keep her company on the long flight home. With Paddington in one arm, and her Greek leather drawstring bag over her shoulder, when her flight was called, she simply smiled, turned, and walked away, raising her hand in a final goodbye. She didn't look back.

After the thirty-six hours' confinement of a long haul flight where there was no such thing as day or night, Robbie carefully leaned over a slowly waking Megan, her almost full-term belly tight as a drum against his chest, and sliding the window shade up, he gazed upon the sheer expanse of turquoise sea and cream sand that was the Adelaide coastline in spring. He thought of the last time he'd flown. Returning from Athens to London, he'd been lucky enough to have a window seat and, as the plane had descended into Heathrow, he remembered looking down on to the chaotic sprawl that was West London and the Thames, snake-like, coiled and constant. This time, looking down on a landscape of unfamiliar colours and textures, he was unable to shake off a baffling sense of penance, and he wondered if he would ever see London and Brentford again.

After the fleeting euphoria of Sophie's homecoming, the Department of Social Security in Port Adelaide was the last place she thought she'd find herself. Her dad, realising that she'd

returned with only a couple of pound coins and a Singapore dollar to her name, along with a tattoo, what looked like an engagement ring on her finger, and Johnnie at the airport to meet her, suggested she waste no time in getting a job and a place of her own. Her mum, used to playing a more subtle game, and not wanting to lose the daughter who had only just returned home, suggested they go for a walk to the beach, and, as they walked, pointed out houses for sale, and mentioned how well Johnnie was doing. That night, she'd watched the news as reports came through of the stock market crash all over the world. With three years to go, the decadent eighties were suddenly coming to an end. As she waited in the queue, she turned the ring on her finger. It didn't quite fit, and it was starting to tarnish. She heard her name being called and with an unexpected sense of capitulation, sat down opposite the DSS Officer, suddenly very tired.

‘It’s dreadful to think that it will go on being repeated for ever, he – and me! What’s there to stop it?’ (Christina Stead)

Part Three

Homeless

(Adelaide, South Australia, 2001)

Robbie had started gigging at the Worldsend not long after he'd arrived in Adelaide, and Hindley Street had reminded him of a very little Soho. There was something about the seediness: the all-night chemists, the bomber-jacketed bouncers keeping watch, and the groups of likely lads and garrulous girls on the prowl. He'd teamed up with a second generation Adelaide-born blues guitarist, and with only two of them, he'd finally got the chance to shine. There'd been talk of recording an album and a tour. He'd been idolised on The Street, and the girls from the Crazy Horse had loved his accent.

One early morning in deep winter, his taxi had come to a stop outside the dark and quiet maisonette that he called home. He stumbled around in the cold and the half light, finding blankets and a pillow waiting for him on the lounge room couch which received him comfortably due to the many nights he'd spent there, and he'd drifted off to sleep. He hadn't noticed the packed suitcases that were sitting quietly in the hallway.

Sophie felt like a child doing the dishes. The rubber gloves, a size too big, protected the eczema on her hands that was gradually getting worse. Her view through the large windows over the sink was heartbreakingly perfect. The expanse of the well-cared-for couch grass lawn sparkled with green goodness. The flower beds that ran around the perimeter of the back yard were nicely overgrown, flowering creepers and low growing ground covers trailed over garden rocks. The pitched roof pergola of forest green and cream that shaded the kitchen windows was, to her, a wonder of engineering, considering Johnnie was a landscape gardener by trade.

She sobbed inconsolably into the washing up water. The pains in her stomach that were getting stronger every day started up again. The peristaltic push and pull engulfed her as

she thought of the beautiful, comfortable home they had created together. She was certain now. She was going to leave it.

‘We need only to remember that we are human, to forget our preoccupation with distances between continent and continent, the measurement of physical miles, and remember the unbearable closeness of one human being to his neighbour.’ (Janet Frame)

Part Four

Harbour

(Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia, 2018)

His old hatchback carrying him along the undulating and still empty highway towards Pt Elliot could barely make the speed limit. The winter sun had burnt off the clouds and misty rain, and in his little red car bouncing along, with the green hills and blue sea and sky, he felt as if he were part of a child's painting. He remembered a similar feeling, sitting in the back seat of his parents' Morris Minor with his brother as they towed their wooden caravan, heading for Portsmouth to visit his grandfather, Robert. Before turning off to Southsea and his parents' cottage, his dad would drive them to the naval harbour and then on to Camber Quay, where his grandfather had been a trawlerman, as if to check that they were still there. He'd point out the numerous landmarks that he remembered as a boy. This happened every year, but every year it seemed just as exciting, seeing the harbour for the first time and hearing his dad reminisce about the old days. 'Your Grandfather Robert saw the Dunkirk boats leave, you know. France is just out there,' he'd say, as if they hadn't heard him say it every year. Grandfather Robert had assumed his dad would follow in his footsteps and make a life for himself on the boats, but it had been the sixties and London had beckoned. 'Yep, it's so close, just over there.' His mum would complain that she needed a cup of tea and the reminiscing would be over. He'd catch his dad's winking eye in the rear view mirror.

Caught up in his own reminiscing, Robbie braked as, out of nowhere, a little white cube car turned right off the highway at the Pt Elliot Caravan Park entrance, almost in front of him. He honked the horn as it crunched over the gravel approach. 'Bloody tourists,' he muttered like a true local, and took a left at the Historic Horseshoe Bay sign. Just like his dad, he had to get a glimpse of the sea and its vast horizon before getting down to business, and, of course, the historic bit he couldn't resist. The Norfolk pines that edged the foreshore were now as familiar to him as the High Street bollards used to be back home. Wherever there was some sea and sand, a picnic bench and possibly a kiosk and a toilet block, you would find a row of Norfolk Pines, he mused. Gigantic fruits and animals and Norfolk Pines would be his

answer to the inevitable question he would be asked by his little brother, if he ever got back to London. So, what's it like? His disdain was only half-hearted, though, as the full expanse of the bay came into view with its ancient rock formations, like bookends, sitting on either side. 'The Antarctic's out there, Dad,' he whispered.

He cruised along the curve of the horseshoe until he had to veer right, up a slight incline past sandstone cottages and a couple of newer two-storey holiday apartments until he reached the main street of Port Elliot, aptly named, for him at least, The Strand. If he knew that only a few streets away were a Tottenham Court Road and even an Oxford Street, his delight would have been complete. He parked at the top and looked back down on a streetscape which could have come right out of a Depression Era photograph. Single-storey stone-fronted establishments lined both sides of the street except for the two pubs: one halfway along and the other in the distance where The Strand met the Victor Harbor Rd, offering accommodation in their balconied second-storeys. He imagined flimsily-clad women beckoning from above and suit and hatted men spilling out after the six o'clock swill, but the four-wheel drives and BMWs contaminated the image. He decided on a strategy of down one side and up the other.

His eye was drawn to a group of shops on the right and decided if he took the right side first, he could reward himself with a cold one on the way back. He liked to have a plan, and anyway, he assured himself, it wasn't so early anymore.

Retro crates containing organic fruit and vegetables sat atop trestle tables that lined the footpath and once again he was reminded of home and the high street fruit and vegetable markets. He was beginning to like this little village, and he wondered if they had a local football team he could follow. Before entering the shop, he stood back and scanned the windows, looking for competition. There were numerous posters advertising yoga classes and wellness retreats, but nothing musical to speak of. The familiar sound of a high-pitched shop

bell rang out as he opened the door, and like a scene from *Open All Hours*, he delightedly thought, he burst upon two men, one older, behind the counter, and a younger customer, deep in conversation. They didn't look up and he waited patiently for them to finish. He tried not to eavesdrop, but when the name Zildjian came up, he couldn't believe it, and as usual, he couldn't help himself.

'Yeah, the Zildjians are the best if you're looking for that smoky, dark sound, and the wash is minimal,' Robbie said with a polite smile.

'Is that so?' said the older man behind the counter, his stocky arms crossed protectively in front of him.

'That's what I've heard,' said the younger customer, turning around. 'I was just asking Bill here. He's got a Paiste ride he's trying to offload ...'

'Hey, I'm not offloading son, just offering ...'

'Yeah, well, thanks for the tip man, that's the sound I'm looking for.'

'You in a band?' Robbie asked.

'Yeah, covers mainly, but without a mixing desk, my sound just gets lost.'

'Zildjian it is then, you can beat the hell out of 'em.' He stuck out his hand and said, 'Rob's the name. I'm a drum teacher, just moved to Goolwa from Adelaide,' and he offered him one of his handwritten cards. 'First lesson's free, for players, you know.'

'Really? No drum teachers down this way ... well ... yeah, sorry, Bill,' he said with a sheepish smile to the burly shop-owner. 'Bill's showed me a few fills and chops exercises, but a real percussion teacher, lessons and all, that would be cool.'

'It's all about the practice, son, you know that. I wouldn't be getting too excited if I were you. Lessons aren't cheap,' Bill said.

'Yeah, I know,' the young customer said, hanging his head. 'Hey, we're playing at the Anchorage tonight in Victor. Why don't you come along?'

‘I don’t think ... Rob is it? ... I don’t think Rob would be interested in listening to you guys stumble your way through ‘Stairway to Heaven’.’

‘Now that’s a bit harsh, Bill, you know we nail that. It’s our encore,’ he said proudly.

‘Sounds good,’ Robbie said. ‘Get a good crowd?’

‘Yeah, the footy boys love us, and the older ladies, you know, they love a good singalong on a Friday night. Ezra’s the name, by the way.’

‘Well, Ezra, maybe see you tonight, and we’ll make a time for a lesson.’

‘Cool ... see you tonight, Bill? Bill loves the older ladies, don’t you, mate.’

‘Other way round, son, other way round. Now on ya bike, I got business to attend to with Rob here.’ They both watched Ezra depart, actually on a bike, and both were reminded of a time when everything was still new, and the future was still exciting.

‘Nice kid.’

‘Yeah. Comes from a Pentacostal family. They’re crazy bastards, but they keep their kids in check, I’ll give ‘em that,’ Bill said. ‘So, Rob, it’s a long way to come from Goolwa for some organic carrots, or is there something else I can help you with?’

‘You’re on the ball, no question, Bill,’ he said, turning on the charm. And so the sparring began. Robbie reached into his back pocket and proudly offered Bill another of his cards which Bill accepted, immediately turning it over as if unsatisfied, and Robbie noting that in Bill’s huge hands, it looked like the size of a business card.

‘Handwritten, eh, not very professional, but the hand job’s kinda organic,’ Bill said grinning.

‘Yeah, well, it should suit your little establishment here then,’ said Robbie. ‘There’s a free lesson in it for you if you stick it in your window.’

‘Know all I need to know about drummin,’ Bill said. ‘And don’t need no charity.’

‘Really? From my experience, you never know when either could come in handy,’ Robbie immediately shot back. Both men went silent, assessing their next moves, when the shop doorbell chimed again, and a blonde woman entered.

‘Well, Bill, appreciate your time, and thanks for the chat,’ Robbie said, sensing their conversation was over.

‘Yeah, leave it with me, Rob. I’ll find a suitable space. Hey, good luck,’ Bill called out as Robbie left, the doorbell muffling Bill’s whispered, ‘you’ll need it,’ as he put Robbie’s card under the counter and turned to serve ‘an actual bloody customer’.

That went well, Robbie thought. A possible new student already and an intro into the music scene down here. Yes, all in all, not a bad outcome. Bill’s prickliness didn’t bother him. He’d seen that type before. Asking them about themselves always breaks the ice, and he could tell he’d won him over in the end. He carried on down the street, remembering to stop at the dinky little railway line crossing, whistling as he walked in the winter sunshine. His next stop was a second-hand book and vinyl record shop, another good sign. The myth of the dumb drummer was just that. He could talk books and vinyl with the best of them. He scanned the shop window for any competition, not really expecting to find any from what the young lad had said. No, nothing. But a couple of posters for line dancing and rock and roll classes caught his eye. He started thinking about the idea of providing live music for the punters. The opportunities seemed endless, and then he noticed it, in the bottom right hand corner, the same little ageing card that he’d seen in the fish and chip shop window in Goolwa. Once again, it seemed odd and incongruous, small and other worldly, next to the A4 black and white posters. It rattled him, for some reason, seeing it there, as if it was following him. Or was he following it? He experienced a fleeting feeling of being watched and he shuddered momentarily. The door was open and he stepped over the dusty timber threshold, the musty odour of old books mingling with the pronounced aroma of over-brewed coffee.

Like a school teacher sitting behind a desk at the head of the class, his bifocals perched on the end of his pointy nose, the shop owner made Robbie wait until he had finished a rather important section of the book he was reading. The image brought back memories for Robbie of standing to attention, waiting for the headmaster to dole out some unfair punishment. It was all unfair, he remembered, but he couldn't help it then, and now, it seemed, feeling guilty and somewhat nervous. He had a problem with authority, the school Career Guidance Counsellor had told him, to which Robbie had replied that he thought it was the school fascists who had the problem, and the counsellor stamped his form with 'unclear direction'.

'Yes, young man, can I help you?' said the old sage in a tone that was more accusatory than benevolent. What's with these grumpy old bastards? he thought, but conjuring up his well-worn charm for the umpteenth time, said with a smile, 'Just admiring your cool set-up here, what with the books and records, it's retro heaven.'

'It's contemporary in my eyes. Is there anything in particular you're looking for?'

Robbie considered this question for a moment. What indeed? He certainly didn't need any more novels or vinyl. He had his favourites, re-read and re-listened, but to humour the old gent he asked, 'Do you have any Miles Davis?'

'Mmm, don't get much call for jazz down this way. It's more Australian rock classics and best of compilations. I keep the jazz at home, purely for my own consumption, you understand?' Robbie noted the wink which came from a milky blue eye and did the math. He looked to be roughly in his late seventies, not geriatric yet, but worn. He would have been in his twenties at the height of the sixties. Robbie was intrigued.

'Yeah? bebop or cool?'

‘Oh both, young man, both. One to get you up and one to bring you back down.’ The obvious reference didn’t require a wink this time, and Robbie enjoyed a genuine belly laugh, not believing his luck.

‘Cool,’ Robbie said. ‘It’s like the planets are aligning or something. Rob’s the name,’ he said.

‘Cliff,’ said the owner. ‘Well, it’s always good to find a kindred spirit, that’s for sure. If you’re interested in that kind of thing, I know someone who practices?’

‘You don’t mean that sign in your window, do you? I’ve seen it before, down in Goolwa.

‘Ah, that would be Thea’s sign.’

‘That’s where I’m living by the way, in Goolwa, on a houseboat.’

‘Would that be Benny’s old boat?’

‘Yeah, apparently. That’s the second time his name has been mentioned to me today and it’s not even lunch time. I’m not sure I want to know about Benny, to be honest. Please tell me he didn’t die at home. It’s kinda creepy.’

‘I wish I could, but ... everybody dies, son ... and he just went ... with a little help from his friends. I’ll tell you about Benny another time ... when you’re more inclined.’

‘Sorry, I got time. Tell me about Benny. I want to know.’

‘Well ... Benny had that little brother syndrome. Felt he could never match it with his older brother. Sorry, I’ll start again. Benny came from a well-to-do family down here. In the fishing business, they were. Made a packet, and built a big house in Goolwa. Both brothers went to the city to the university, and Benny’s older brother got high up behind the scenes in politics and such. Benny had more of an artistic bent, but he was smart and studied Chemistry and Physics all the same. This was a long time ago, remember; in the seventies. To cut the story short, Benny used his knowledge for more recreational pursuits. He made acid tabs and

sold them to all and sundry, including visiting bands like The Stones, can you believe it? But he got caught eventually and spent some time in jail. Plus he did a lot of personal experimenting, if you get my drift, and what with a love of all things mind-altering, he pretty much fried himself. Came home to live with his dad – his mother had died before all this happened, but it wasn't a happy home – two blokes so far apart from each other in temperament, intellect and experience – but Benny loved the river, loved to fish, so his dad gave him the houseboat and a part-time job. This was still in the days when you could make a good living out of fishing. Benny lived on that houseboat for thirty years. When their dad passed away, Benny's brother tried to sell it out from under him. Things had gone pear-shaped with his fishing business and political career, and he wanted to get into river tourism – always with the big ideas, that one – but a few of us got together and saved old Benny's Boat – that's what it's always been called. No one else has lived there, except you.'

'Wow, now that's some story. So, he didn't die alone then, that's good.'

'Yeah, Thea and her mate, she runs a New Age shop in Goolwa, got all candles and incense and stuff, to cleanse and purify.'

'I met her this morning. She's the one who mentioned Benny.'

'It's a small world, as they say.'

'Why doesn't Thea have her card in her window? I would have thought she'd get more business that way than from the fish and chip shop?'

'Well, you saw it, didn't you? said Cliff with a knowing smile. 'You know the story of the Fisher King, don't you?' Robbie knew the movie, and said as much. 'Well Benny was a pretty good fisherman,' Cliff said, pausing for effect, or a reaction. When none was forthcoming, he continued. 'Anyway, I was DJ. We played all his old favourites; he died listening to The Grateful's *American Beauty*. We made a pact, the three of us, to do the same

when our time comes, although I guess one of us is gonna miss out. Unless you might be interested?’

‘Whoa, we’ve only just met, Cliff,’ he said, genuinely confronted.

‘Just joshing with you son, just joshing.’

Robbie felt an urgent need for some space and a beer, so he produced one of his handwritten cards and asked Cliff if he would put it up in his window. Cliff immediately took it, got out some Blu Tack and stuck it right next to Thea’s yellowing one. ‘There, music and healing together, got a certain kind of synchronicity, don’t you think?’ Cliff said. ‘You’re looking a little pale son, you alright?’

He did feel kind of sweaty, and his stomach was playing up again.

‘Yeah, fine Cliff, fine. Listen it’s been lovely to meet you, and thanks for the sign, and the story. I’ll see you round.’

‘You sure will, son.’ Robbie let that comment go; it was all a bit too intense. He stepped back out into the street, grateful suddenly for the SUVs and family Toyotas that brought back a sense of reality to his morning.

He headed on down The Strand, minus the whistling, past a couple of empty glass-fronted shops that still contained their melamine shelving, all mixed sizes and squares like a Harvey Norman showroom, waiting for some out-of-towner to reinvent themselves, no doubt, but lacking the old-fashioned charm of Bill’s and Cliff’s shops. He passed the white picket fence and rose garden entrance of a church with a clock tower for a steeple, and he swore he could have been back home in one of those little prepositional villages, like Henley-on-Thames or Grange-over-Sands or Barrow-in-Furness even. He’d never been to these places, but had always loved the names and imagined what they were like.

He also swore it was that blonde he’d briefly noticed in Bill’s shop earlier just standing on the gravel path of the church, looking up at the clock face as if she couldn’t

believe the time, or she was trying to work it out. He had an overwhelming desire to just slip up behind her and whisper 10.39 in her ear, but decided against it and walked on by, as the song goes. The two men, Bill and Cliff, both came out of their respective doorways and looked down The Strand and Robbie's ambling figure, as it suddenly turned back, crossed over the road, and entered the Pt Elliot pub. They caught each other's eye, but didn't speak, and returned to their respective establishments.

Robbie was sitting at a corner table near a long and wide low window opposite the quiet bar of the Pt Elliot Hotel. It was 10.45am by the time he'd taken his seat with a pint of Pale. The place was empty except for the young bartender who'd served him, and as it was still early, had come over and was standing, bar cloth in hand, staring out of the window that gave a view of the shops opposite, and the church.

'So, you've met Bert and Ernie, then?'

'Sorry?' Robbie said.

'Get a good view from here. I like to watch all the comings and goings. You seem to have made an impression.'

'Alright mate, I'm not really in the mood for mysteries,' Robbie said. Like a child who thought he couldn't be seen if he couldn't see you, he felt he moved through the world anonymously. He'd had a feeling he was being watched, but he thought it was more metaphysical.

'Eli's the name. And you?'

'Rob. Now what's all this cloak and dagger stuff? It's creeping me out.'

'Sorry mate, just watching it all. It's been pretty busy for a Friday morning.'

'Well, it isn't Rundle Mall, that's for sure. I've only seen two people on the street, and one of them was me.' He'd seen plenty of parked cars, but where their owners were was

anybody's guess. He'd notice that, in these little towns: lots of cars, but no people. It was another mystery he couldn't fathom.

'So you're not from round here, then?' This conversation was starting to wear a bit thin, but he told Eli about his history, and Eli reciprocated with his observations of the morning so far as he pushed his matted straw-like hair out of his eyes and turned his skinny frame towards Robbie, the dishcloth still in his hand which was now casually resting on his hip.

'Well, technically, their names are Bill and Cliff, but I guess you know that already,' he said. Robbie acknowledged this fact with a yeah, yeah, yeah.

'And you met my little brother, Ezra?'

'I met Ezra, yeah, the drummer. I see the family resemblance. I'm a drummer, too, as a matter of fact. Professional player and teacher,' and he produced another of his calling cards and handed it to Eli. 'Bill and Cliff have put them up in their windows for me. Care to do the same?'

'Haven't you heard of Facebook?'

'More like Mouthbook, if you ask me.'

'Sorry, mate, it's not up to me, I'm just the dishy really. The boss don't like signs cluttering up his nice clean window here. But I'll take one for myself, if you don't mind.'

Robbie handed one over, which Eli folded up and put in his back pocket.

'So old Bill's gonna help you out, is he?'

'That's what he said.'

'Old Bill's not one for helping out usually, if you get my drift. He was never one for charity. Let's just say he thinks the world has it in for him. He looks after the shop when the owners need him, to supplement his pension. He thinks he's doing them a favour, but it's the

other way round. Ezra would kill for some part-time work, but Bill's not budging.' Robbie took this new information in, not really surprised. He could tell a big-noter when he met one.

'So what's Cliff's story, then?'

'Well, I'm not at liberty to divulge all the gory details. I ain't no gossip, you know. He's a, what they call, spiritual kind of guy. So Bill and Cliff don't talk to each other, but I saw them both come out of their little empires and watch you move on, like they couldn't believe you'd lobbed here in Pt Elliot on this particular Friday. Or they were wondering where that hot milf disappeared to. Well, maybe not Cliff. He told me once after a few beers that he's beyond the physical realm of desire, and has transcended, whatever that means.'

It was all a bit too much for Robbie. He'd spent years with people back in the city and not known this much detail about them. Were people just more forthcoming down here, or was he asking the right questions? It was important to ask the right questions. One of his standard lines when he wanted to appear mysterious was to let them know they needed to ask the right questions, to get the right answers. It was a good one, took the wind out of their sails that's for sure. The ones that liked to question, that is. He'd lost focus again, but Eli brought him round.

'She stood in that church yard, just looking up at the clock. Did you see her? Pretty filthy, hey, brother?'

'Yeah ... I mean no ... I mean ... what?' Robbie sculled the rest of his Pale and decided he'd had enough of being a door-to-door salesman for the day. Maybe he might put a couple of signs up on the more anonymous supermarket notice boards where he didn't have to engage in any more conversation.

'Seeya round, Eli,' he said from over his shoulder as he headed for the exit.

'Not if I see you first. I know where you live, ha ha.'

He'd only wanted a quiet beer, and some time to collect his thoughts. It was like a bloody Bermuda triangle around here. He felt as if he'd been told too much, and at the same time somehow not enough. He was not really on at this time of the day, anyway. After a gig and the adrenalin rush, he could even scare himself, but for now, as he unlocked his car door and got in, and thought about all he'd heard, he knew he needed a little Rob time. The winter sun had disappeared, and a light rain was starting to fall again. He liked it. Not aggressive and pelting, but soft and dusting, like a gentle touch or a soft breath. The once bright and friendly street took on a different veneer, washed like a watercolour, blurred and obscure. He clocked the time as he drove past the church – 11.15am – too early for lunch, but since when did he eat breakfast, or lunch, for that matter? And since when did he start worrying so much about the time? He remembered his Grandfather Robert measuring his days around cups of tea: morning, late morning, lunch, after lunch, early afternoon, late afternoon, dinner, night – and do it all again the next day. In fact, he'd had his first taste of the buttery drink with his grandfather. It had never occurred to his parents that a ten-year-old might like to taste the drink that was their daily ritual, but his grandfather – everyone had gone somewhere – offered him a cup one quiet holiday afternoon.

'I'll be mother,' said his grandfather with a smile, and ten-year-old Robbie giggled, imagining him wearing a house dress and carrying a feather duster as that was what all mothers looked like in his experience. The pretty blue and white cups, with birds and bridges, and matching teapot, so different to the set of brightly coloured ones that his parents used (his dad always got the blue cup, and his mum the green), gave the ritual a new solemnity for Robbie as he was now taking part instead of being a bystander. He watched as his grandfather added the milk which turned the decidedly unappetising almost black liquid into a pinky-brown caramel.

‘So, young man, tell me something,’ said his grandfather, sipping his tea almost daintily with his big seaman’s hands, not like his usual ferocious slurping, Robbie noticed. Unfortunately, he wasn’t prepared for this part of the ritual and as he always did when his mother (usually) had accused him of something, he fell silent, unable to form words or thoughts. His grandfather tried again. ‘So how do you like your tea?’ Now this was better, not vague, (What have you done?) or precarious (You may as well tell me, I already know). He could answer this one.

‘It tastes like warm melted butter on a toast soldier,’ he declared, much to his grandfather’s amusement.

‘Yes, it does, it actually does,’ his grandfather said. ‘Now it is my turn to tell you something. This is called the art of conversation.’ Well, of course, thought Robbie, I’m not stupid, although he didn’t think talking was much of an art in his experience. ‘Do you like peaches, Robbie?’ He’d never had one. Apples and oranges, sure, but a peach, not that he could remember, and he was certain he would have remembered.

‘Yes,’ he said obligingly.

‘They’re messy, though, aren’t they?’

‘Yes,’ he agreed.

‘But the mess is worth it, wouldn’t you say?’ He was in trouble now. Should he keep lying, or own up?

‘Yes ... definitely,’ he said, hoping that would put an end to this topic so they could move on to something he actually had experienced like continuously having to run away from Billy the Bully, or his dad’s humps.

‘Life will give you a peach occasionally,’ his grandfather said wisely. Good, he thought. He might even ask his mum for one, when she was in a good mood, of course. ‘And my advice is to always accept it Robbie, no matter how messy they are because the mess is

worth it,' his grandfather said. His eyes had gone funny, Robbie noticed, kind of watery, and he wondered if his grandfather's tea was too hot. His certainly was. Of course, he thought. Who wouldn't take a peach?

The thought of a nice palate-cleansing cup of tea was on his mind as he drove down the highway, heading back to Goolwa. He knew his grandfather, now long gone, had been trying to tell him something on that quiet afternoon, but Robbie had tasted peaches and he found they weren't to his liking. Too mushy and indeed too messy.

Sophie had only taken her eyes off the road for a moment. The prickly itch on her little finger had been bothering her since she'd left Victor Harbor; the bubbly rash from years ago had never really gone away, and she'd taken her hand off the wheel to satisfy the overwhelming desire to scratch it, noticing the celebratory nail polish she'd put on for her getaway was already starting to chip. She glanced up and spotted the caravan park turn-off, confident that the highway was still clear, and took a sharp right not seeing the little red car bumping along towards her. That was close, she whispered to herself, and wished the driver, hopefully not a local, a belated sorry as she came to a gravelly halt outside the park office.

She'd booked for a month with an option to renew, and was assured by the smirking gum-chewing teenager in charge of the front office that her caravan, such as it was, was ready and waiting. Her mother's friend had kindly, and gratefully, moved it from its backyard home and towed it down for her. As it was the off season, she'd secured a beach-front site and was looking forward to going to sleep and waking with the sound of the sea, putting thoughts of tsunamis and cyclones, for the moment, aside, just as the counsellor had suggested. I think you've got more chance of dying of boredom, her mother's friend had laughed when Sophie had told her of her plans, but to Sophie, a beach-front existence for a quarter of the price of

an apartment was inspired, and that was what she was after, inspiration. Her desire to write a novel was initially met with astonishment and then with quiet deference by her family. After struggling to get started and admonishing her mother's attempts to write it for her, nobody now spoke of it. She had imagined this new existence and here it was, just as she had done all her life; she just had to turn that imagination into writing. She felt as if she'd always led a double life; the one that others saw and the one only she knew, and sometimes it was hard to differentiate. She was confident that she had all the traits of a writer, which to Sophie were selfishness, solitariness, and circumspection. But it was her idealistic romanticism that got her into trouble. If she was honest, she secretly longed for a man who would clean, shop, cook the dinner and do the dishes, and let her sleep, comforted and safe, and do all this without expecting sex. Luckily she had excoriated that delusion once and for all. At least now she could clean and cook only when it suited it her. She thought of her old friend Alison in London – never married, no children – and her comment when Sophie had written to tell her that another inappropriate relationship had bit the dust. 'Hurrah,' Alison had written back in her best Sloane Ranger imitation. Hurrah, indeed, but it rang hollow and empty when Sophie said it. All these thoughts had come to Sophie as she drove from the park office to her caravan – Site 7 – her lucky number. She pulled up on the short grass next to her new home.

The two-tone blue and cream 1959 Sunliner, that she had fallen in love with in the photo that her mum had shown her was a little worse for wear, she had to admit. It sat a little lower to the ground than she remembered, and the door needed a bit of adjustment to open. Inside, a couple of the original pale blue cupboard doors had been replaced with chip-board, and the kitchen carpet was a little damp and spongy underfoot. After some effort, she pushed out the front and side windows to let some air in and squeezed herself into the space between the bench seat and the table, taking a moment to breathe. She couldn't hear the sea due to a blustery southerly that had started up and she felt the little shell that was her new home start

to shudder and shake. She put her elbows on the table, for that was the only place they would fit, continuing to breathe deeply as her therapist had instructed, but the lump in her throat was making it difficult. She realised she'd been pushing her emotions down for so long, trying to stay positive and upbeat, but she felt them rising up, and with her head in her hands, she finally allowed herself to weep. She wept for her own privilege. She wept for the men she couldn't love. She wept for her lost innocence. She wept for her own rigidity which had once seemed a strength but now seemed fragile and brittle.

After a while, her sobbing and the swirling wind started to die down, and she thought she heard someone knocking on her almost unhinged front door. She extracted herself from behind the table and wiped her eyes, wondering if it was just the wind, and opened it. She was confronted with the figure of what at first seemed like a bag lady. She was rather large, but it was hard to tell if it was her or the bulky layers of skirts, jumpers and jackets that she was wearing. Her hair, like blonde dried grass, was bunched up on the top of her head, with dark roots showing through.

'Hi,' said the bag lady. 'My name is Thea. I live in the caravan next door. I couldn't help but notice you arriving. Are you okay?' Her voice was strong and sonorous and a little masculine.

'Hi Thea,' said Sophie, regaining her composure. 'Come in out of the wind, I'll just close these windows.' As Thea stepped up and into the Sunliner, it listed slightly to one side and Thea giggled as Sophie almost stumbled, squeezing past her to close the front window. 'Sit down,' she said and immediately regretted the invitation as she wedged herself once again into the bench seat and closed the side window. Thea smiled and said, 'Thank you,' as she too, to Sophie's amazement, folded herself into the seat opposite. The sudden disappearance of the howling wind compressed the musty smelling air in around them. 'Now isn't this cosy,' Thea said.

‘I guess that’s one way to describe it,’ Sophie said as tears welled up again.

‘Oh dear,’ said Thea, and took Sophie’s once manicured hands into her own nail-bitten and weathered paw-like grip. This act released another torrent as Sophie looked down at their clasped embrace. Her once beautiful fingers, so long and fine, were now scaly and red. Her eye was drawn to a rather large black faced ring with some kind of silver angular design and the letter G on it that encircled Thea’s stumpy middle finger. The image reminded her of her dad’s hands, like leather mitts, and the black and gold ring he used to wear.

‘What’s your name, love?’ Thea asked somewhat professionally.

‘Oh, sorry ... Sophie ... I mean Sophia ... it’s Sophia.’

‘Well Sophia, what seems to be the problem?’ Like one of those reversed slow motion scenes in a film, Sophie could feel her shattered disguise slowly reforming and suddenly felt Thea’s genuine concern as an intrusion. She hadn’t planned on being neighbourly so soon.

‘Oh, it’s nothing ... just missing my kids.’

‘How old are they?’

‘Oh, they’re adults really, but you know how it is.’

‘Yes, of course, they’re always your kids, no matter how old they grow,’ Thea agreed.

Sophie wasn’t missing them at all, and felt guilty for lying, and for not missing them, and for not asking the obligatory question, but she was embarrassed, and wanted to get her equilibrium back. She was also a bit angry that she couldn’t even have a good cry without being interrupted, and released her hands from Thea’s grip.

‘Listen, Thea,’ said Sophie. ‘Thanks for looking in on me, but I’ve only just arrived and I need to get myself sorted.’

‘Of course,’ said Thea, not flinching. ‘What can I help you with? We can pull up this carpet, I’ve got a rug you might like, and all those cupboards need is a coat of paint,’ said Thea eagerly. Oh God, thought Sophie, a doer, please, not another doer.

‘You know, I think I’d just like to go for a walk, stretch my legs, get some supplies,’ Sophie said innocently.

‘Yes, good idea, a nice walk does wonders,’ Thea nodded happily, but as Sophie eased herself out of the cramped bench seat, Thea made no sign of following.

‘Can I get you anything while I’m out?’ Sophie asked, hoping this might stir some movement.

‘No thanks,’ Thea said. She smiled happily, as if they’d known each other for years.

‘You go for your walk and I’ll see what I can do here, before you move your stuff in. I like to help,’ Thea said. Sophie realised she couldn’t argue and if she was honest, she didn’t really want to.

‘You know, I would really love that. Whatever you can do to spruce it up would be wonderful,’ she said sincerely this time.

‘Great, off you go then. There’s a nice organic fruit and veggie shop on The Strand. We can have a good chat when you get back.’

So off she went, leaving her new life, it seemed, in the hands of a complete stranger. Good one, Sophia. You’ve only been away a week and you’re already dependent on someone. She vowed to buy something for Thea, flowers maybe, so they would be square. God, she *was* turning into her mother. She’d watched many times in embarrassment as her mum and her mum’s best friend sparred over who would pay for the coffee. In the end, Sophie would step in, like an umpire, and sort it out. But she wasn’t like her mother, was she? Her mother had buried two husbands and looked after them both unselfishly; whereas she’d had two men who had loved her deeply in their own ways, but it hadn’t been enough. No, she wasn’t like her mother at all.

She made her way past Thea’s caravan, which didn’t look in any better condition than her own, she noted, and the signs pointing to Historic Horseshoe Bay and the township of Pt

Elliot. It was good to be moving. She could feel her head clearing. The winter sun warmed her like putting on a favourite woollen jumper, and the dreaded southerly wind had dropped off. She climbed the stairs up to the promenade and looked out over the familiar bay. Almost golden, Verdigris burnished by the winter sun, the bay brimmed with memories lapping the surface, spilling over the edge, and into her consciousness.

She thought of her youngest son and a conversation they'd had while sitting on this very beach on a winter's day. He was so small and delicate back then, with a shot of blonde hair, always smiling and curious. They were both a little afraid of the pummelling waves, and, while his brother and dad were in the surf, he was playing with his little cars in the sand, making roads and tunnels, lost in a world of his own imagination. Just as quickly, as he would always do, his focus changed and he came back and plonked down beside her, snuggling in with her under the beach blanket.

'Do you know your element is air,' she said to this little perfect bundle, so warm and close, as if he was still part of her.

'What is an element?'

'It is your essence. It is who you are.'

'I move around a lot,' he said, and she smiled, amazed at the astuteness of children.

'My element is the earth,' she said, and he pondered this a moment.

'You don't move around much. You're always here.'

'That's right, I am, and I always will be,' she said, hugging him a little closer.

'What do you think dad is?' she asked.

'He's like the sun. But at night, the sun goes away,' he said, a little sadly.

'Yes, that's right, but the sun can't help being the sun, can it? What is the last element?'

‘Water! Jack is like water. He loves the water, but I am the air, and I make him angry sometimes.’

‘Yes you do, but you know, when you blow up your storm, he can’t help but follow you, that’s why he gets angry.’

He started giggling, amused at something.

‘You and Jack make puddles. Dad can dry them up, and I can blow them away. But puddles are fun.’

‘Yes, darling, puddles are fun.’

She sensed this was the end of the conversation as he crawled out from under the blanket and returned to his cars.

By the next year they were a threesome.

It was the hottest summer she’d ever known it. They’d bobbed around in the coolness of the bay at twilight, and explored the coastal walks in the dark with torches, like a band of smugglers, giggling and singing sea shanties, and looking for penguins. They’d eaten hot chips from the kiosk in paper cones and washed them down with raspberry spiders. She’d made mousetraps and pancakes for dinner and chocolate milkshakes for breakfast. That first holiday was the beginning of the good years. She’d been content with her little band of three. But they grew up, and she grew restless again.

She met him on the beach. It was another hot summer. The boys, who were by this time confident swimmers and understood the currents, were out in the surf. She was reading *The Invisible Man* for her Master’s thesis, but occasionally tore herself away from the suspense to check on them. Not that she could have done much if they had been in trouble, but the habit remained; keep them within eye distance. She’d taken up smoking again and had just lit her cigarette when she felt a shadow move across her, blocking the sun. The shadow spoke.

‘I couldn’t borrow one, could I?’

His voice was deep and confident, but soft. He was tall and lean with tanned and well-shaped forearms. His checked cotton shirt was crisp and ironed, and hung comfortably over cargo green chinos. Leather sandals, dark aviator glasses, and a perfectly groomed three-day growth completed the look. She offered him one from the packet and her lighter and, after thanking her and taking a very deep drag, holding the cigarette between thumb and forefinger, he asked the inevitable question.

‘May I sit down?’

They talked about music and families, about books and photography, about surfing and nature. Meet me at the clock tower at midnight, he suggested, and she agreed. Leaving the boys sleeping soundly, her motherly eye distracted for the first time, she walked out into the warm night air, like a schoolgirl on a secret first date.

A good lie contains a semblance of truth, and a good liar believes their own fabrications. That he was divorced was the first lie he told her. Well, we may as well be, he’d said when she’d questioned him. That he’d been used and abused by women all his life was the second which, she discovered, to him meant a ceasing of sexual relations. She’d stopped counting after the third because she knew he would only tell her what she wanted to hear, so she stopped questioning. After so many years of relentless analysis, of herself and others, she decided she didn’t need to know. His past was his past. She would trust and not judge. The boys didn’t like him, but she was smitten. Whether the large inheritance and the suicide attempt were true she would never know, and, of course, it was the not knowing that got to her in the end. She’d tried understanding and accepting, like her mum had advised, but the paranoia invaded her mind and eventually her body.

The hungry can’t feed the hungry she told him one day, half out of desperation and half to see his reaction. He simply vanished, just as suddenly as he’d appeared. Apparently,

it's called ghosting a friend told her, classic narcissist behaviour. What were you thinking? But how can you explain to someone that he had become her mirror? They were so alike in so many ways. She believed if she rejected him, she rejected herself. When she finally did, the mirror had cracked, and she understood now what picking up the pieces really meant. What pieces do you pick up and will they fit?

She turned away from the bay and its memories, now a leaden bronze under passing winter clouds, and headed up towards The Strand. The township of Pt Elliot was as familiar to her as the bay, and The Strand had changed little in her eyes over the years, but the organic shop was a relatively new addition. She guiltily had to admit she wasn't really into paying a hefty price for fruit and vegetables back in the city, but it looked so sweet with its crates of brightly coloured produce, and from the open window she could smell the lovely aroma of good, fresh, coffee. And the flowers, she mustn't forget the flowers. As she entered the shop, an old-fashioned bell signalled her arrival, and she looked around for signs of floral displays and extra-large take away coffee cups. She saw neither, as the fruiterer – is that what they're called? – finished with another customer who, by the looks of his empty hands, wasn't into organic prices either.

'Sorry for keeping you waiting,' said the fruiterer, one of those non-descript men in their seventies who wore high-waisted jeans with a belt and a collared shirt under a crew neck sweater, not a hipster beard in sight, although the customer who had just left, she noted, had a reasonable Johnny Depp-like Van Dyke going on. Same height as well, and black rimmed glasses. Stop it, Sophia. Focus.

'Hi, no problem, just looking around,' said Sophie nonchalantly. She was good at nonchalance. 'I was wondering if you had any organic flowers, if there is such a thing?' she asked, as much to herself as the fruiterer.

‘Sorry love, it’s all fruit and veggies I’m afraid, but that’s not a bad idea. I’ll run it past the boss,’ he said with a laugh. ‘Anything else I can help you with?’

‘I’ll just have a large take away skim cap then, please.’

‘No can do on that count either, sorry.’

‘Really? But I can smell coffee, really good coffee,’ she said, genuinely perplexed.

‘Yeah, we make the best coffee in Pt Elliot, except I’m not the one who makes it.

Come back around 12 and the owner will fix you up, on the house,’ he said as if he’d rehearsed it.

‘Oh, okay,’ she automatically replied, but *oh* didn’t really cut it, and it was definitely not okay.

‘Can I interest you in something else? The carrots are especially sweet at the moment. Do you bake? Carrot cake is my personal favourite,’ he said in that similar tone that sounded like he was reading lines.

‘Umm ... what ...,’ Sophie thought out loud, trying to take it all in. ‘Sorry, I was just after a coffee and some flowers really. I’ll take you up on that coffee rain check though. My name’s Sophia if you want to make a note.’

‘Now that’s a lovely name,’ he said as he grabbed a dainty little pencil and note pad on the counter with his rather large working man’s hands, and jotted her name down. There seemed to be quite a list.

‘Yeah, thanks,’ she smiled sweetly. ‘I’ll be back, as they say,’ she said and turned to go.

‘My name’s Bill,’ he called out as she left, a little desperately, Sophie thought.

‘Seeya, Bill,’ she said without turning around, as she escaped out onto the relative safety of the street.

Maybe he was just trying to be friendly. That is a possibility, Sophia. Maybe he was just lonely. What's a man like him doing stuck in a shop like that? With those big hands, no wonder he couldn't make the coffee. They were meant for something else entirely. Not every man, turning on the charm, is after something. She did like baking, actually, and thoughts of her home-made cakes, organic of course, sitting on Bill's counter gave her that feeling, fleeting these days but still there, of optimism, of possibility. Could she really make a go of it here?

She was heading back along the promenade, excited to see what Thea had achieved, clutching her IGA bag containing some weekend staples, and a bunch of Easter Lilies. That's all they had, really, except for some boring chrysanthemums, and she knew they would last a while. She hoped Thea liked them. She felt a little guilty, but she assured herself she would stop by the organic shop another time and buy up a storm, plus she couldn't wait to taste their coffee. The one she got was a little disappointing. The café she'd chosen was all modern chrome and minimalism, but not an aroma to be had.

The morning swimmers were making steady progress across the bay, now a steely blue, and it had started to rain. She lifted the fur-trimmed hood of her grey knitted jumper over her head and quickened her pace, hoping her little caravan was water-tight. She imagined how it could be: write in the morning, walk to the Strand for coffee, bake or cook in the afternoon, and read in the evening. It was going to be perfect. She'd passed the clock tower on the way to the IGA, and she'd stopped and stared at the clock face, remembering that first kiss and the smell of his cologne. He had become a series of tableaux, she realised: the beach, the clock tower, her balcony, her bedroom, arranged like still life paintings, happy moments frozen in timeless clarity. She thought of a line from *The Hours*, something about realising that happiness was momentary. The tears and the tantrums, the silences and the frustrations were more difficult to conjure, but lay like a film of dust across her mind. His last

words to her replayed over and over – at least I found out who you really are. But had he? Did he know something she didn't? She'd gotten the feeling she was being watched and realised she must have looked like a mad woman, standing there and staring up at that clock face. Enough, she told herself, enough.

She passed the rocky outcrop that stood in the middle of the bay, like a sleeping dragon, the boys used to say, and they'd named it Dragon Rock. They discussed how he'd got there, and why he was sleeping. Her youngest said he was waiting to be awoken by a magic surfer, him of course, and the oldest imagined he stood guard over a mystical land that lay under the water. It had become a ritual whenever they arrived to say hello to the dragon and wish him well. Their more pragmatic father had told them he'd swum out to it as a boy and it was covered in bird shit. The boys never made the swim. It had been their idea when she'd first started wanting to write. Write a story about the dragon, they'd both encouraged. And that's what she was going to do. Well, not really about the dragon, but about what it represents to the people of the town. They all use it for their own purposes and its happy to oblige, but some want more, and its ire will be stirred. She couldn't wait to get started. Almost happily, she could have said, she bounced down the stairs off the promenade and headed into the caravan park.

When she knocked on the door of Thea's caravan and as the door opened, the smell of sandalwood incense overwhelmed her. Crystals of all shapes and colours hung from every vantage point, and metal chimes pealed as Thea welcomed her inside. She thought sadly of her bare melamine and vinyl as she gazed upon Thea's bench and table set-up, similar to hers in size, but the table was covered in a crimson crushed velvet cover and the seats housed comfy cushions of a similar fabric with angular embroidered designs in hues of emerald and rose quartz; a glass bowl full of more crystals and stones with a rainbow coloured pillar candle in its centre sat in the middle of the table, like a shrine. The style carried through to

the brightly painted kitchen cupboards, leadlight votive burners, and another piece of crushed velvet, tangerine this time, that served as a bed cover at the opposite end of the caravan visible behind shimmering gauzy amethyst curtains. Richly coloured Le Creuset pots adorned shelves above the tiny cooking range, and books, leaning in pairs and threes and stacks of four or more, filled every available space. Incredibly, all this clutter seemed to make the space larger, larger than life, and she thought of her empty shell next door.

‘Wow, how long have you lived here?’ she said, like a teenager easily impressed.

‘Forever,’ said Thea, and Sophie almost believed her.

‘These are for you,’ Sophie said as she presented Thea with her offering, rather insignificant, it seemed to her, in the circumstances. ‘As a thank you for ... well, for caring, I guess. It was a bit of a shock. I was just overwhelmed ...’

‘Ah Easter Lilies, they’re lovely. Thank you, Sophia. You know they represent the resurrection?’ Sophie hadn’t known that, but if she’d thought about it, it was obvious. She suddenly remembered someone calling them death lilies once, and she felt slightly embarrassed. She should have got the chrysanthemums.

‘They’re my favourite,’ Thea assured her as she took a pretty green glass jug off a shelf and busied herself with water and arrangement. ‘I hope you like what I’ve done next door. I had a few things lying around that needed a new home. But, please, sit down and let’s have some tea.’ She brought over a tray from the draining board containing two cups, pink with delicate flowers, with matching saucers, and a tea-pot, already steaming with a herby brew. ‘I hope you like camomile. It’s very relaxing,’ she said, and filled both cups with a straw-coloured liquid that smelled of apples.

‘It reminds me of Soho,’ Sophie said as she sipped her tea. ‘I used to go there for their cheap Chinese banquets when I lived in London and there was always Jasmine tea. They smell

very similar.’ Sophie suddenly hoped she didn’t sound like one of those touristy types, the ones that say *oh when I was ... blah blah blah*. ‘It was a long time ago.’

‘Ah, so you’re a traveller,’ said Thea as she reached behind her and took a large pack of cards off another shelf. They were too big to be playing cards, about the size of a large mobile phone. ‘Let’s see what brought you here,’ she said as she handed the deck to Sophie and asked her to shuffle them. Sophie loved card games. She and the kids played ‘Switch’ on the holidays and they even placed bets with lollies. Her oldest always ate his betting pot and the youngest always won them all. They still do, she realised, but with different stakes. What did she do? She never got ahead, really, but she always had enough to bet, and some left to eat. ‘I’ve never had a Tarot reading before,’ she said, as she handed the deck back to Thea who crisply took three cards off the top and spread them out on the velvet covered table.

‘This is a simple three card reading,’ Thea explained. ‘They represent past, present, and future. I’ll read the past first,’ she said pointing to the top card which contained an image of a man and a woman holding hands. Sophie couldn’t believe it.

‘This is The Lovers card. You’ve had some choices to make, Sophia,’ Thea said. Well, of course, thought Sophie. She knows I’ve just arrived to live in a caravan – alone – big choice. ‘The middle card represents the present. It’s the Death card.’ Oh great, thought Sophie. ‘It doesn’t mean what you think,’ Thea said, obviously noticing the shocked look on her face. ‘It can mean painful endings, and permanent changes, of course, but it doesn’t mean you’re going to die, even though it may feel like it at the moment.’ Sophie sipped her tea, not altogether convinced. She really must stop smoking. ‘The third card is the future.’ The biggy thought Sophie, and prepared herself. ‘And it is The Fool.’

‘That figures.’

‘Don’t be so negative. It’s not all bad, either,’ Thea said, laughing. ‘It represents adventure and risk, and possibly new beginnings if you’re prepared to let go.’ God, what more did she have to give up?

‘It’s all a bit obvious, isn’t it?’ she said. ‘I mean, a woman on her own, menopausal, and wondering what is going to become of her, well, it’s just a bit clichéd, don’t you think?’

‘Sometimes things are so obvious we don’t notice them,’ said Thea. ‘Of course, these things happen all the time, but when they’re happening to us, well that’s different, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, you’re right,’ said Sophie. ‘It’s like I tell myself to stop complaining, but then sometimes I’m so full of rage, I want to howl at the moon.’

‘It’s good to howl at the moon once in while. Other wolves may hear you.’

‘But they might be the wrong ones, and then they’re always at your door,’ said Sophie, staring into her tea-cup.

‘It’s never the wrong one.’

‘Thea, you’re so ... I don’t know ... philosophical. Have you found God or something?’ Sophie said, laughing.

‘I didn’t find him, he found me,’ Thea said. ‘If you are patient, he will find you too. It’s all written, you know, from birth to death, it’s all written.’

‘Really?’ said Sophie, sensing this conversation was heading in a direction she couldn’t follow. ‘Well, I hope he’s got good grammar,’ she said, and drained her camomile tea. She sensed the old fight or flight, and she didn’t want to fight. Thea could believe what she wanted. She wasn’t going to judge. ‘Look, Thea, thanks for the tea, and the reading. I’ll keep my eye out for a fool.’ And a run a mile, she thought.

It seemed different now. Robbie thought he'd made the houseboat his own, but knowing Benny's story made him feel like an intruder. What had Linda said about empty spaces being lonely? Was it simply its cheapness that had drawn him here? He wasn't sure where to put these thoughts. He didn't have a compartment for the abstract. It simply was or it wasn't, but the morning's events had unsettled him. The houseboat had come basically equipped with cutlery, plates and pots which he'd been happy to keep, and apart from his phone, car and bike, his coffee maker, drum kit, books, records, stereo, and clothes, he'd brought nothing else with him. The reality was that he owned nothing else, but he comforted himself with the pride that he'd never been materialistic. As he sipped his welcome mug of tea (was this Benny's mug?) he looked around, and briefly wondered what Benny did with himself here, all alone, for thirty years. He knew what to do with that thought, and filed it away in the 'not to be opened again' section. People are born, they live and make choices, and die, nothing magic in that. And anyway, he hadn't been alone. People had loved him and looked out for him, it seemed. He remembered Cliff's remark about the Fisher King and put it down to a bookworm's predilection for playing with words, or confusing fiction for fact. He used to be like that. He'd fancied himself as a Hemingway anti-hero, sacrificial to the end, and look where that had got him. Maybe that had been Benny's problem. He raised their mug in salute.

After the pint, and now the tea, and the early morning, he realised he was exhausted. He could see through the galley kitchen window the still falling and hypnotic light rain dusting the tepid river, and the ship's bed hidden away behind louvered café doors beckoned. These attempts at afternoon naps were becoming a habit, but he wanted to be on his game tonight, and he needed to quiet his mind for a bit. He squeezed past the unopened drum cases – they could wait – and lay down, arms folded across his chest, as was his custom these days, and stared up at the panelled ceiling, counting the grooves and awaiting the hoped-for

oblivion. As he counted, he kept coming back to a slat immediately above his eyeline whose colour and groove didn't match the others. It was raised and looked as if a section had been cut and replaced. He tried to ignore it, but his clinical mind wouldn't allow it. It was an anomaly in the pattern and the irregularity was irksome. Had there been a leak in the roof at one time? It seemed solid enough. There was no moisture that he could see, but he had to check, otherwise he knew sleep would evade him once again. Although not overly tall, as he stood on the hard mattress, he could touch the ceiling and was surprised when the little piece of panel popped out upon his touch. Something hard and flat had been laid over the gap and when he pushed it with his fingertips, this too fell onto the bed below. He looked down at his feet and saw a thin hard cover book lying cover side up, its dust jacket faded and stained, and curling at the edges. The title was clear, though, black against the brown paper cover: *Let Us Compare Mythologies* it said, as if Leonard Cohen himself was inviting him to do so. He picked it up, held it in his palm, and opened the cover. There was a hand-written inscription on the flyleaf: *To Benny, with love*. He opened a page with its corner turned, and saw a poem: 'Song of Patience' with phrases underlined in red: '*... Oh I will tell him to love you carefully; to honour you with shells and bottles ... he will come to know how beautiful it is to be loved by a mad woman ...*' He read the poem in full, with its warnings, laments, and endings: the timeless story of love. He wasn't really into poetry, unless it was an AAB blues lyric, but he could appreciate the imagery in Benny's favourite lines. He'd never been loved by a mad woman, but was beginning to think he'd missed out. The question then crossed his mind if the underlining was Benny's. Maybe the lines had been highlighted by the anonymous giver as a special message. He would never know, and it was none of his business, but the epistle had fallen at his feet, like an omen he couldn't ignore. He thought of the blonde in the church yard, and the falling rain, and the angle of her head as she looked up at the clock tower. Was she a mad woman?

Peering into shop front windows had become a pastime, it seemed, and here he was, nose so close to the window glass of Linda's shop with his warm breath colliding against the cold winter air creating a familiar film of condensation that if he was still a boy he would have drawn his initials, but as an older man only fogged up his glasses. The sign said 'Closed', and he wondered if it was just a decoy, like so many other signs and omens he'd experienced earlier that morning, but there was no movement in the congested shop; Linda's racks of coloured dresses were crammed into any available spaces like a crowd of patient onlookers. Sleep had been intermittent after his initial dozing, and he'd given up, instead reading Benny's poetry book. He wasn't really a Leonard Cohen fan, but the poems were ambiguous enough to feel as if Leonard was speaking to him, just as the title had invited him to, and he wanted, needed almost, to ask Linda more about Benny. His stomach was definitely speaking to him and he crossed over the road to the now open fish and chip shop. As he parted the strip door curtain, undulating gently in the winter breeze, he stared down his beady-eyed nemesis still quietly gesticulating on the back wall above the counter and ordered a medium chips from the ruddy looking cook, barely tall enough to see over the glass-fronted servery and the bottles of tomato sauce and vinegar.

'You lookin' for Linda?' asked the proprietor as he handed over the newspaper parcel, open at one end, and indicated the condiments available and for Robbie to help himself.

'Yeah,' said Robbie, splashing vinegar all over the steaming and salted chips, his mouth preparing for the crunch, and wondering, once again, why his movements were so interesting to these omniscient shopkeepers.

‘I figured you weren’t lookin’ for a kaftan,’ the cook said, laughing as Robbie bit into a reasonably well-cooked chip. ‘She’s closed up for the day. Got her friend from Pt Elliot up and they’re off to do their women’s business, as they like to call it,’ he said, still chuckling.

‘Right, thanks,’ Robbie said, placing a five dollar note on the counter and turning to leave, but the chip cooker continued.

‘Yeah, they think we don’t know, but they been seen, prayin’ and wavin’ their arms in the air out at the Murray Mouth lookout. Prayin’ for rain, we reckon, and it’s worked,’ he said as Robbie turned back around. ‘They commune with the spirits, so Linda says, but no one knows if they talk back,’ he said laughing again, knowing he now had Robbie’s attention.

‘Did you know Benny?’ Robbie asked while chewing a mouthful of potato.

‘Yeah, course, right little coven they were. Still are, I guess, with Cliff from the book shop. Benny used to supply me with fish; he was a good fisherman, Benny. They practically jumped into his boat when the run was on at the Mouth. Don’t tell anyone but the butterfish comes frozen these days.’

‘What about Bill?’

‘Christ no, Bill’s not into that. Split ‘em up, it did, that stuff. Not to mention, Bill never got on with his brother Benny. Always thought Benny was the favourite, so when he got the houseboat while Bill lost thousands in the GFC, well he wasn’t happy.’

‘Benny’s his brother? Split who up?’ Robbie said nearly choking on a chip.

‘Bill and Thea. I thought you must have known them, seeing you knew Benny.’

‘I met Bill this morning, and Cliff and Linda, but I haven’t met the elusive Thea. I live in Benny’s houseboat, and I saw her sign in your window.’

‘Oh right. Well, you best be gettin’ on then, don’t want to keep you,’ he said without explanation and Robbie somehow found himself once again out on the street. The rain had

returned, thanks to Linda and Thea possibly, making his now soggy chips a little soggier, and his crustacean friend was still waving to him from behind the glass window.

Sophie had her laptop open on the bench seat table, sipping a glass of red wine, and blowing smoke out of the open window. She'd showered – the amenities block wasn't that far away – and dressed – her new black and red poncho over black jeans and boots – and was enjoying a drink and surveying her new home. Thea's improvements consisted of a cut-to-measure worn Persian-style rug, a couple of incense burners, and some pretty white contact with blue flowers that she'd covered the bare cupboards in. Between the rug and the incense, the musty smell was beginning to fade, and with her books shelved and some photos placed about, it was looking a little more homely. She'd fancied herself as a photographer in one of her earlier incarnations, and she used to snap anything that caught her eye. The photos she'd chosen were one of the boys in shadow as they climbed over rocks above Green Bay, silhouetted against a twilight sky. The others were from her time in Greece and London, so long ago now that it was almost becoming mythic. There was a photo of Santorini and the little house she'd stayed in, all blue and sherbet, and another of a group of school children. There were two others – London in winter: a churchyard covered in snow – and her favourite of a plane in a summer sky, winging its way into Heathrow over Brentford, skimming roofs and flower-pot chimneys.

She'd been scrolling down her Facebook page for the last hour. It had become another bad habit since she'd joined a reading group for uni. She was what they call a *lurker*. She didn't know when it had started. She was a keen member at first, but somewhere along the line she'd stopped 'liking', not because she didn't like it but because she felt pressured. If she didn't like one friend's post, she couldn't like another, and if she didn't post a heartfelt 'best

wishes' for another friend, how could she post one for someone else? It was all very confusing and she'd stopped participating altogether, and then felt guilty for it. But she kept on looking. She couldn't stop. Like passing a road accident or watching a happy couple in love, she just couldn't look away. She'd tried online dating very briefly. She had been enjoying an initial get to know each other conversation when she was suddenly abused – YOU WHITE BITCHES ARE ALL THE SAME! – when she admitted she hadn't thought about dating a different race. She hadn't thought about it for the simple reason that she hadn't thought about him in racial terms, but he certainly had thought about her in that way. She'd immediately deleted her profile and had never gone back. She remembered her mother's friend's experiences of online dating at eighty – late night phone calls of 'What are you wearing? I'm wearing nothing,' or 'I'm still married, but she's an invalid,' – and she shuddered. She thought about how she'd met the great mistakes of her life: a brazen kiss on the lips, a simple hello. Okay, there was a pattern. She was a sucker for a confident man. And yes, the confidence had turned out to be a smokescreen, but they made a better story than liking someone's profile. Or did they? Maybe it was not how you met but how you stayed together that was important. She imagined the conversation in nursing homes in a generation's time. All the male residents would have tattooed sleeves, like uniforms, and all the women would have little butterflies or bluebirds on their inner wrists and forearms. No more, 'Oh it was in the war when we met', or 'That time I spied him at a dance'. It would be 'I just swiped right and there he was.' Love at first shag. She'd been a teenager in the seventies and she knew the damage that free love could do. When you'd grown up conditioned to the mantra that sex equals love, it turned out to be an unforgiving experiment and she refused to be a lab rat anymore. She never could work out if her father's 'You're only here coz I love your mother' was a poignant truth or an act of cruelty.

Her grandmother had tried a different approach.

They were sitting in the sunroom that looked out on to her immaculate garden, the smell of freesias wafting in through an open window. They were both crocheting around the edges of the little boxes her grandmother had taught her to make from greeting cards with Perspex covers. The pale lavender cotton they were using to bind the borders reminded Sophie of lolly cachous, or the powdery smell of a budgie's feathers. She was a quiet child, but her grandmother noticed a solitary tear glistening in her blue eyes.

'What's wrong, Sophie,' she asked. 'Have you dropped a stitch, dear?'

'My daddy loves my mummy more than me,' she said as another tear dropped on to her-downy-ten-year old-cheek. Her grandmother thought for a moment and in her brutally honest way said, 'That's probably true. Remember, when you are older and a man tells you he loves you, for he will because you are so beautiful, to not let him love you too much. No more tears now. Let's have a look at your crochet.'

She'd craved to be loved like her mother but her grandmother's warning had obviously made an impression, so as an adult she oscillated between excess and celibacy. She said yes when she meant no, and no when she meant yes. You're frigid, you're a slut, you're too much, you're not enough. What hope did she have? It was all too confusing, and she put it into that compartment in her mind that housed these confusions. It was getting full.

She logged off Facebook, lit another cigarette, and opened a blank tab. She'd read somewhere that Google isn't research, but how could this not be research, she thought, after typing in Thea and Tarot, and in 0.48 seconds she got 348,000 results. She scrolled through countless sites offering the history and current interpretations of a Tarot deck actually called Thea's Tarot based on a Titan daughter. In Greek Mythology, she read, Thea was the goddess of Light and gave birth to the Sun, the Moon, and the Dawn. Nice. A newspaper headline in the *Victor Times* from 2001 caught her eye: *'Prominent Fleurieu Fishing Family lose son in tragic drowning accident – Bill and Thea Dawson confirmed last night that their son,*

Nathaniel, 18 years of age, had drowned at Green Bay earlier today. The family has asked for privacy. She felt like an intruder and closed her laptop, as if erasing all knowledge was as simple as that.

Robbie could feel eyes burning into the back of his head as he stood at the boat-shaped bar of the Anchorage Hotel. It really was shaped like a boat, with rigging and everything.

Grandfather Robert would have loved it. He leaned against the warm walnut wood, polished to perfection like hard caramel, and, not to be intimidated, after receiving his welcome pint he turned, staring down his fellow drinkers, and surveyed the set-up. He was surprised to see patrons deep in conversation, seemingly oblivious to his being there. Well, two can play that game, and he leaned against the bar nonchalantly, pint in hand. The band were to play in the far corner, away from the bar, leaving room for dancing, and allowing patrons to comfortably sit at their tables or lounge chairs, far enough away from the music to still carry on conversations or to easily get another drink. He started to relax in the accustomed surroundings – bar, band, beer – and looked around for a familiar face. Opposite the bar and beyond the initial tables and lounges, he noticed a separate room with an open doorway and bordered windows of contrasting brick which seemed to be some kind of green room, and there they were, Ezra and Eli, Bill, and a couple of others, priming themselves for the night's entertainment. Just as he recognised them, Bill must have done the same, and he raised his glass with one hand and indicated to Robbie to join them with the other. Robbie raised his own glass and confidently made his way over. It was a green room, after all.

‘Hey, if it isn’t Rob from Goolwa,’ Bill said ‘My old home-town. They let anyone in these days.’ Jesus, can’t he give the macho stuff a rest for just a moment, Robbie thought.

‘Adelaide, actually, well Brentford to be precise, via the Greek Islands,’ Robbie replied wearily. ‘You done much travelling, Bill?’ Ezra and Eli laughed, he wasn’t sure at whose expense, as Bill suggested travelling was for types who didn’t know where they belonged, and hadn’t he heard about Brexit?

‘Anyway, Bill, nice to see you as always, just wanna have a little chat with Ezra here, if that’s alright,’ he said, turning his back on Bill and indicating to Ezra to join him at a table away from the drinkers.

‘Bill’s not gonna like that,’ Ezra laughed a little anxiously.

‘I get the impression Bill doesn’t like a lot of things,’ he said.

‘Yeah, I guess. He’s done it tough, though, lost a lot of money a few years back apparently, and a couple of other things happened, but he don’t like to talk about it.’

‘So I heard, but half the population gets divorced, and money is hard to come by at the best of times. At least he had both to lose.’ Rob followed Ezra’s momentary glance towards Bill and Eli, who were watching intently from the other side of the room, feeling for the teenager who was looking decidedly uncomfortable.

‘He seems to look out for you, though, like a father almost,’ Robbie said, thinking of his own son and recognising that confused allegiances look.

‘Yeah, he does,’ Ezra said brightening. ‘He really does. My folks can get a bit ... well ... difficult sometimes. They don’t like me drummin’, well, not playin’ this music anyway.’

‘Tell me about it,’ said Robbie, ‘but you gotta do what you gotta do, right?’

‘Right,’ said Ezra. ‘You know Bill lost ...’ Ezra paused.

‘Yeah I know, but as I said ...’

‘Anyway,’ said Ezra. ‘What did you want to talk to me about?’

‘Yeah, sorry, enough about Bill, right? So what’s the set list for tonight?’ Robbie said, and Ezra regaled him with song names and his favourite parts which usually involved drum

solos with crash cymbal fills. Rob advised him to go easy on the solos and to remember that the party starts after you've finished playing, as Eli came over with another pint for his little brother.

'Thanks Eli,' Robbie said, reaching for the pint and placing it next to his almost empty one. 'I think you can do without that one, don't you?' he said to Ezra.

'Hey buddy, got yourself a manager,' Eli said as he looked at Ezra questioningly.

'Rob's right, Eli, wanna be sharp tonight,' Ezra said. 'Anyway, we're on,' and joined two other similarly dressed teenagers, their black jeans, t-shirts and flannies screaming 'we're the band', and headed for the stage. Eli, unusually silent, his clownish expression momentarily faded, looked like a chastised kid, hurt but defiant. During the brief second that it took Eli to regain his composure, Robbie recognised the bullied child and felt a pang of empathy.

'Enjoy, it's on the house, gotta keep the tourists happy,' Eli said to Robbie, his bluster and swagger restored, but with a look that said *you saw me*, which from experience Robbie knew wasn't a good sign.

'Thanks again, Eli,' he said, trying to sound sincere. 'Just looking out for a young musician, no harm intended.'

'Yeah well, he's doin' fine, just fine, but thanks for your concern,' said Eli, equally genuine.

'What's goin' on here, girls?' said Bill, interrupting. 'You're not squabbling, I hope.' Almost gagging on the testosterone in the air, Robbie was relieved when a familiar drum beat and riff cut in – 'Suzie Q' – as they all paused and let the hard edged simplicity of Creedence fill the room.

‘Hey, Eli, the line dancers are here,’ said Bill like an excited schoolboy. ‘C’mon Rob, you gotta see this,’ Bill said. Robbie reluctantly, but he had to admit, curiously, followed Bill and Eli back towards the bar.

He’d seen this view many times, a bird’s eye so to speak, from his seat behind the kit. A sight not many get to experience, and if they only knew what he could see: the predatory looks on the male drinkers, usually lined up at the bar or around the periphery of the dance floor; the eager and hopeful female dancers doing the side step with little fists clenched, their handbags piled on the floor between them like some kind of ritual, but also keenly aware of being watched and evaluated; the drunken manoeuvrings during the last song; the winners and the losers. But these women were good, and they knew it. With perfect syncopation, they hovered across the dance floor like a well-oiled wave of boots, bums and breasts. As Ezra and the band, having warmed up with Creedence, launched into George Thorogood’s cover of ‘One Bourbon ...’ the line dancers re-formed to partner each other for the boogie.

‘Don’t mind a bit of girl-on-girl action,’ Bill said. Eli giggled and agreed. ‘What about you, Rob?’

‘Thea know about that?’ he said, immediately regretting making it personal when he saw the hurt and surprise in Bill’s eyes, but Christ, this guy never stops.

‘What’s that? How do you know ...,’ said Bill, immediately looking at Eli, who had stopped giggling.

‘Oh, you know, small town ...’ Robbie said.

‘Oh I know alright,’ said Bill, like his protégé beside him, the hurt turning to defensive anger. ‘Oh, I know, you townies come down here and think you know everything. That’s my houseboat you’re livin’ in. By rights, you should be payin’ me rent.’ Rob could see Bill’s clenched fist, white-knuckled, and his curling forearm, all sinew and veins, raised and ready. In the moment it took for him to realise what was going to happen, he raised his own

hand, palm facing outward, as Bill let fly, knocking him backwards, his glasses falling to the ground. He didn't see Bill put his hands up as if to say, yeah I know, to the bartender and storm out, leaving Eli to help him to his feet.

'You alright, mate?' said Eli, returning his glasses, and indicating to the bartender that the show was over. Ezra, the band, and the dancers didn't miss a beat, and after the initial shock, patrons returned to their drinks as if it was a usual occurrence.

'Yeah, it was an old man's punch,' he said, adjusting his glasses and taking a long gulp of his beer.

'You know, Rob, you may be pretty cool with your accent and all that, but fuck man ... you're a wanker.'

'I didn't throw the punch. Bill's got some serious anger management issues. You both have been baiting me all night.'

'Yeah well, just a bit of fun. Thought you'd be able to take it. What with all your experience, didn't think a couple of natives could get under your skin.'

'Under my skin? You've got to be joking. Anyway, shouldn't you go and see where Bill's got to, seeing you're his minder. I'm a bit confused, I thought you didn't like Bill? Does your mother know you hang out with bullies? Not very Christian of you.'

'See, there you go again, talkin' shit you know nothin' about. I hang out with him coz it's the Christian thing to do. He's sufferin', man. Turn the other cheek and all that. You should try it.'

'I think my cheek's been turned enough for one night.' He downed his beer, noticing they were going down a little too well and knew it was time to leave. 'I'm off.'

'Hey, aren't you stayin' for the grand finale? The boys go off, and so do the dancers. It's a scream watching 'em line dance to the Zepps. Ezra will be disappointed.' Disappointing young drummers was akin to a crime, but he needed to clear his mind.

‘Look, I just need some air,’ he said, as he pushed past Eli.

‘Keep ya eyes on the road, as they say,’ Eli said as he let Robbie go.

Ezra and the band were doing a fair rendition of *Roadhouse Blues*, as it happened, and he allowed Eli the last word. He seemed to need it. He gave Ezra a nod and a thumb’s up as their eyes met briefly and pointed to the men’s which was thankfully next to an exit door. After a frothy emptying in the unoccupied bathroom, he pushed open the side door and stepped out into a clear, dry, night; the reverberation from Ezra’s bass drum lingered and then disappeared as the closing door settled shut.

Like a glass moon flower nodding on a steel stem, a space age street-light illuminated his way down a side lane until he reached the front of the old building. He crossed the empty road onto the tree-lined esplanade; Norfolk Pines of course. The real moon, full and friendly, shone over a black mirror sea, his slightly laboured breathing and the velvety tread of his Converse hi-tops the only sound as he endeavoured to walk himself into sobriety.

What just happened? He’d been threatened before, many times, but never actually hit. There’s two types of punters: the ones who want to befriend you and the ones that want to kill you. Goes with the territory. But Bill’s anger was something new. He vaguely remembered that time on Santorini with Andreas and his mates. He was actually pretty scared, but of course didn’t show it. He still remembered the hairy fat finger being pushed into his chest, and the black-faced ring that the guy wore, but he’d sensed it was all front, or was it just his own bravado; the evolutionary instinct to protect your territory? It was certainly tiring, this game of bluff and puff; he’d been at it all night, and possibly all his life, it seemed. But Bill’s hurt eyes reminded him, he realised at that moment, of his dad’s when his mum had been particularly scathing over nothing. But he’d kept it together, his dad, and would walk away, he knew now, to protect her, which enraged her even more. Couldn’t his mum see how hard his dad tried? He’d never raised a finger to Megan, but then, he hadn’t tried that hard either.

He would simply sit and smile at her tirades and comfort himself that he was the better person. What do you want from me? she'd scream. Nothing, he'd reply and mean it, but not in the way she understood. He didn't want her to feel obliged, or did he simply not want the responsibility? He did what he always did with these confusing thoughts and wondered how anyone could know another. It was simpler and safer to be alone. He was his own man; that was his legacy, and he thought of the epitaph he would leave the world: here lies Rob, his own man. But it sounded shallow and flat, like a muted cymbal – no reverberation, dull and dead.

As his mind cleared with every step, so too his confusion; his ego, like a loving but biased mother, assured him, once again, of his own importance, but a faint voice still lingered, calling, calling, from a distance: see me, feel me, hear me, it said, like a high pitched whine from somewhere deep and mysterious. He tried to shut it out, but realised, as he came to a sudden halt, that the sound was emanating from somewhere outside of his own mind, and he stopped to listen.

The sound seemed to move through him, ghost-like. What does sound feel like? He should know. The sounds he played were heavy and dark, like mud and mire. They came up through the floor, like grasping tentacles pulling him down. This sound felt like that moment when his young son first took his hand: the quiet intensity of contentment. The high pitch was still there, but something was underneath it: a sweet moan which entered his abdomen and rose up into his chest, then up through his neck and jaw, his cheeks, and finally his eyes, as he realised he was crying. It was as if the very vibration had released something inside of him, and he instinctively turned towards the black sea in an effort to receive more, but it was gone as suddenly as it had appeared, leaving only his weeping eyes and a strange sensation in his belly.

‘Don’t get that too often,’ a gentle voice came from behind him, familiar yet different somehow. He turned, suddenly aware of his own vulnerability, and saw it was Bill, of all people, standing there. He turned back towards the sea, not ready for or even wanting another confrontation, removed his glasses and wiped his eyes, and felt his insides settle into their more usual tightness.

‘Yeah, I remember the first time I heard ‘em. I couldn’t believe it. Me and ... well ... anyway ... we heard ‘em singin’. Told everyone, but no one would believe us, not even ... but we heard ‘em alright, just like that.’ Robbie turned back around to face Bill.

‘What do you mean, them?’

‘The whales, of course, they sing. It’s the males that do it, singin’ to their mates, and to the lady whales apparently. You’re a lucky one. Pretty special eh?’

‘Yeah ... wow ... pretty special ...’

‘Look, Rob, I’m sorry to intrude. You look like you been havin’ your own quiet moment. This place can do that to ya. I watched you leave, and I been followin’ ya, wanted to apologise for what happened, and then ... well I heard it too ... kind a puts things into perspective. Just wanted to say sorry ... I got me reasons for reactin’ like I did, but that’s no excuse, I know.’

He wasn’t sure he was ready for a contrite Bill, but he begrudgingly remembered Eli’s words and stuck out his hand.

‘Apology accepted,’ he said as he and Bill shook hands. He smiled as he noticed Bill’s overly firm handshake. He might be contrite, but he was letting him know he wasn’t a pushover. Or was it simply habit? He’d obviously been hurt enough over the years to warrant a pretty high level of masculine camouflage, but Robbie squeezed back all the same, and anyhow, he’d made the gesture, so he was already in the box seat.

‘Look Bill, I’m sorry too,’ he said. ‘It’s just that on my travels today I’ve heard some things, things I don’t really need to know about, but I heard them just the same, and it just slipped out. Why didn’t you tell me Benny was your brother?’

‘None of your business, or mine for that matter, who they rent the houseboat to,’ Bill said. ‘And anyway, you’re a bloke, you should know you don’t get personal when blokes are talkin’ ... well, about bloke stuff ...’ Robbie knew he was right in principle, but he wasn’t sure he agreed with it all the same.

‘So, who owns the houseboat? I got it through a real estate agent,’ he said. ‘I met Linda this morning and she seemed to know something about it.’

‘Yeah, well, she would, wouldn’t she? She’s part owner with Cliff from the bookshop. I know you met him coz I watched you go into his shop, and Thea, as you know, is my ex-wife. It’s a long story, but I guess you know most of it if you been talking to Cliff for very long. I’m just wonderin’ what else he told you about?’

Bill took out a packet of Winfield Blue and lit one up. It smelled good, conversationally good, and Robbie gestured they should sit down on a bench to continue their little chat.

‘Want one?’ Bill said as he offered the pack.

‘Desperately,’ Robbie said, but declined the offer.

‘Yeah, one day I’m gonna stop too, but not this one,’ Bill said, as he took a long drag, keeping the smoke in his lungs for an eternity it seemed to Robbie, before he exhaled contented.

‘So, I’m just curious what Cliff told ya. I got nothin’ to hide, mind you. He’s just a bloody gossip, and a liar. I wouldn’t believe everythin’ he says,’ Bill said, settling in.

‘Oh, not much, just that you were a money-grubbing capitalist, and tried to sell Benny’s birthright out from under him.’

‘Ha, oh that ... we coulda been partners, he could have come lived with me while we rented that boat out, but ... well ... Benny gets attached ... to people, to things ... could never understand that side of him. Probably for the best, anyway, my bright ideas usually coincide with some kind of catastrophe ... remember the GFC? Well, that coincided with the worst drought for a hundred years. I wasn’t the only one that went under. Still, Thea, Linda, and that Cliff sold me down the river, pardon the pun ... and now Benny’s gone, and they got my houseboat ... it don’t seem fair. What else he tell you?’

‘Cliff? That’s pretty much it ... it was the guy in the fish ‘n’ chip shop in Goolwa who let on about Thea ... he got the jitters when I told him I was new in town,’ Robbie said, laughing along with Bill, remembering the guy’s nervousness as if he’d seen his own demise.

‘He, he ... yeah ... well I still got some clout in that town. We were a family to be reckoned with once, but ... well ... things change,’ Bill said staring off into the night sky and crushing his butt under an old R M Williams boot. The two men fell silent, pondering their own recollections of family and change, two words that could conjure a lifetime.

‘So, what brought you to Australia, Rob, if you don’t mind me askin? Seems you’re a long way from home,’ Bill said, finally breaking the silence.

‘A woman.’

‘Really? Don’t you know about the ten-kilometre rule?’

‘The what?’

‘Sorry, just a joke. So you still together?’

‘Not in the biblical sense. We’re still friends. Got a son between us, keeps us connected.’

‘That’s nice ... bein’ friends ... and your son ...?’

‘He’s a musician, much to his mother’s disgust.’

‘Benny was into the music, coulda done anything, Benny ...’

‘Sounds like he did, from what I hear from Cliff.’

‘So, he told you about his little business, did he? Told ya Cliff was a gossip. Yeah, Benny had a colourful life alright. I just mean, he kinda wasted his talent.’ Wasted was another word that set the two men to silence again, its connotation of obliteration suddenly becoming a little more apt than they both would like to admit.

‘She ... we ... had a son,’ Bill whispered. Robbie didn’t get the incongruous tense at first and was about to reply with the usual questions, but the ‘had’ finally made it up through his synapses and he paused.

‘Had?’ he said finally, as gently as he could.

‘Yeah ... Nathaniel ... drowned ... he couldn’t swim ... was afraid of water until ... well ... he ... it was an accident, it was an accident, it was an ...’

‘Hey,’ said Rob, and put his arm around the big man’s shoulder as Bill leaned into him, sobbing big man’s tears.

Sophie knew she was knocking them back a bit too fast, but it was that or sit out in the prison quadrangle that they imaginatively called the smokers’ lounge, for another hour. Although she felt as if she led a solitary life, with her most important conversations being with the reflexive pronoun, she realised she was never really alone; there were the boys, the students, her colleagues, her mother. But as she sat at a table for two just next to the stage, tracing the outline of her wineglass stem while counting the number of bottles behind the boat-shaped bar as a distraction tool, she registered the fact that she was indeed, and in more ways than one, on her own.

Okay, that’s enough. She knew what would happen next if she didn’t get a grip. The flight response had certainly replaced the fight these days. It was so much easier to run, and,

anyway, wasn't the flight a kind of safety mechanism. She'd wished she'd engaged it a bit more often when she was younger, but, in a way, she'd always taken the safe route in the end, and look where that had got her. When to stay and when to go? It was always a tough one, and so for the most part she left it up to others to decide, although she had to admit that she made it easy for them. Stop. Stop. The bottles were starting to blur as the cortisol did its thing, settling behind her eyes like the fog she'd driven through on the Mt Compass Road.

'Hey, you came,' said a familiar voice to her left as she turned to see the housekeeper from this morning, hardly recognisable, red-faced and sweating, wearing blue jeans, a check shirt and some hideous boots. 'You've missed the first set,' she said as if it was the end of the world. She remembered a time when she too used to get that excited over music, but every song seemed to have a memory and a moment attached to it, and she found they were best avoided.

'Are you okay?' the housekeeper asked.

'Sorry?'

'Are you okay? You seem a little ... lost?'

'Sorry, just ... nothing. So what's with the get-up, I hardly recognised you,' Sophie said in her best I'm keeping it all together, voice.

'I belong to the Fleurieu Line Dancing Association. We all do,' she said, pointing to a once empty table now full of fellow flannel shirted boot-scooters on the opposite side of the dance floor. 'Come and join us.' Sophie took them all in. Is that how it happens? One day you decide to cut your hair and wear men's clothes and all is forgiven? The gulf between her and them seemed much wider than the vacant dance floor, which she was now crossing, drink in hand, but grateful, if she was really honest with herself, for the invitation.

'Everyone, this is ... '

'Sophia,' Sophie said, as she clocked the usual response to her given name.

‘You Italian?’ asked the boot-scooter who moved down a seat to let her and the housekeeper sit down.

‘It was my great grandmother’s name,’ she said proudly, not discounting the Italian heritage but not confirming it either, leaving the Tassie part out for the moment.

‘That’s a bit exotic. Mine’s was Dulcie,’ laughed another boot-scooter sitting opposite her which led to a discussion from around the table on the most sexless names for women over the years.

‘What about Madge?’ one laughed to which all were in agreeance.

‘Or Sadie?’ another suggested. Sophie thought Sadie was quite a lovely name, short for Sarah, with a tinge of the torturous about it, but she smiled and concurred. The conversation, thankfully, splintered off into smaller factions, the initial excitement over Sophie’s exoticism waning as more important topics for discussion were obviously found.

‘So ...’ Sophie began, but was interrupted by the housekeeper.

‘Marilyn,’ she said. ‘But friends call me Em.’

‘So ... Marilyn ... did you go to school here?’ asked Sophie, vaguely remembering the first rule of social conversation: ask a question.

‘Yeah. I’ve lived in Victor all my life. Most of us in the group went to school together, can you believe it? Cheryl’s from Yankalilla, but we don’t hold that against her,’ Marilyn laughed and pointed to the woman opposite who had enquired about Sophie’s heritage. Sophie wondered what could possibly make someone so continuously happy.

‘That must be lovely,’ Sophie said convincingly as she thought about the long list of girls and women she’d been friends with over the years and their eventual pointed silence. She was beginning to think it may be something to do with her. For some reason, she thought of Thea and that first image of her standing there outside her caravan, a jumbled jolly mess.

‘Say, Marilyn, do you know Thea from the caravan park in Pt Elliot?’

‘Thea? Oh yes. We don’t see her much these days. She’s done it tough, but you can only do so much,’ Marilyn said as Sophie noted the defensiveness in her inflection.

‘Yes, I heard about what happened to her son,’ Sophie said. Well it was almost the truth. ‘Did you go to school together then?’ she asked hopefully, keen to know what the young Thea was like.

‘Yeah, we did,’ Marilyn said.

Jackpot. Sophie waited for Marilyn to continue, but realised she was going to have to work a little harder. Okay then.

‘It must be hard when a friend can’t be helped,’ Sophie said, remembering the second rule of the art of conversation: people love to talk about themselves.

‘Yeah, it is. Well, to be honest ...’

Here we go, Sophie thought.

‘... she never was one for caring what others thought. Always been her own person, so when it happened, she’d already ... well ... had a new friendship group then. We girls tried, but she sent us packing ... both of them ... her and that big-noting Bill of hers. He was here before. You just missed him ... got into a scrap with some townie it looked like, not the first time.’

Third rule: silence creates space, but you have to be patient. Sophie fingered her wine glass stem. It was her go-to action when she wanted, or needed, to appear lost in thought. She noticed her glass was almost empty.

‘She ...’

Bingo.

‘... was what you might call ... friendly ... if you get my drift. All the boys found her extremely ... friendly. She put a few girls out, that’s for sure, and they let her know. But that was a long time ago. We were kids, really.’

Fourth rule: agree and validate for ease and flow of conversation. That was always a hard one. What's more painful: the hurt or the memory of the hurt? She had been only eleven. It was her best friend's older sister's idea to talk to the boys, but her parents got told and she was never allowed to sleep over again. That was the first time. There were others. There was a pattern: Helen, then John in London, her sister-in-law, the mothers from school. She didn't care.

'Yes, if only I knew then, as they say.' That's all she could come up with, but Marilyn seemed satisfied.

'Yeah, and anyway, it didn't seem to bother her, like I said, what others thought of her.' Agreed and validated, Marilyn was accosted by the loud women on her left as the band and the line dancers took their places for the second set.

'Watch and learn,' said Marilyn. 'Join in when you're ready.'

Sophie smiled her smile which meant *you've got to be kidding*, but appeared to others as a polite if somewhat desperate *thank you*. No, of course it didn't bother her, she felt like saying. Instead, she downed the dregs of her glass, barely able to hide her rage. Sweet, kind, generous Thea. She ached for her, or was it for herself? With her four-glass confidence, Sophie cruised over to a spare bar stool, effortlessly climbed atop, and ordered a double Jameson and Dry. The music started, a sweet little Black Sabbath number, and as instructed, she watched and learned.

As she sat at the bar, her casual stem-fingering turning into nonchalant varnish rubbing (the walnut veneer was superb and she couldn't resist) she watched Marilyn and the others effortlessly scooting their boots across the dance floor, and marvelled at their perfect precision, remembering her own failed attempts at following choreography. She loved to dance, to move, to let her body do as it pleased, which meant sometimes learned steps were jettisoned. She laughed at memories of the salsa classes, the jazz ballet classes, the ballroom

dancing classes with her ex (*you're supposed to follow me*) as she and the music ultimately found their own way to come together. The dance of love, the dance of life. Hers usually involved a solo performance. But as she watched and learned, the music and the Jameson also came together, and when Marilyn gestured for her to join the line, she momentarily forgot her inability to keep in step, and eagerly accepted the invitation.

'Just follow me,' Marilyn whispered, mistaking Sophie's giggled response for comprehension as she squeezed into line. 'It's just like the Bus Stop,' Marilyn assured her, as if that was going to help. Sophie painfully remembered a drinks-after-work disaster, although she did like the rolling turns, she remembered, possibly a little too much. 'We take off on the right,' Marilyn yelled this time, as the music had started, thankfully with a reasonably long intro so she could get her bearings. This didn't sound like any Bus Stop that Sophie recognised, although it was vaguely familiar, possibly Stevie Wonder; she used to be good at picking songs and artists, but her recall wasn't what it used to be ... Focus, Sophia. 'Grapevine right and hold, grapevine left and hold, repeat ... okay?' said Marilyn, but Sophie was still trying to identify the name and artist, like on 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire', the clock ticking down ... she had it, but it disappeared ... no ... tick, tick, tick, tick, wait ... Eddie ... tick, tick, tick, tick ... Led Zeppelin, it's Led Zeppelin, that song with the chorus ... talk about love, I think ... yeah ...

'Oops,' Sophie exclaimed as Marilyn bumped into her, and although not technically a grapevine, she did move a few steps to her right and after another go at it, back left, right again and left, she was getting the hang of it ... 'do do, do di do di do, do do, do di do di do ...' Sophie hummed as the verse reached its climax, grape-vining like a demon. She instinctively knew it changed tack at the bridge, she was a child of the seventies, after all, but this didn't coincide in her mind with the change of direction, and once again, Marilyn

bumped into her as she prepared for another grapevine back left instead of right to repeat it all. This is more like Nutbush, Sophie decided, and needed to avail Marilyn of her insight.

‘This is more like Nutbush,’ she screamed into Marilyn’s ear, but Marilyn and the rest of the line were already on the move again, and they bumped heads instead, once again leaving Sophie shuffling to catch up.

‘Nutbush, it’s Nutbush, I know Nutbush,’ Sophie mouthed to Marilyn through a smile, but Marilyn seemed to ignore her, she thought, obviously not adept at lip reading, which was okay because a lot of people aren’t, and she wasn’t really either ... Focus, Sophia. Before she knew it, they were on the move once again, but she anticipated the turn this time, and like a true Nutbush aficionado, she added a little jump to her turn, much to Marilyn’s chagrin, she noticed, and apart from Marilyn’s continual consternation whenever Sophie jumped and turned, the line dance progressed relatively mistake free with Sophie taking a well earned bow on the final down beat, nicely reverberating just like on the original. Sophie offered thunderous applause to the band and especially the young drummer, noticing that she was the only one left clapping as Marilyn and the other line dancers left the dance floor.

Luckily, or so it seemed to her at the time, the first strains of ‘Stairway to Heaven’ saved Sophie from an embarrassing, should I stay or should I go moment of hesitation, and instead of following Marilyn ... Em ... over to the safety of the table, she remained on the dance floor. As she knew all the words, she started to sing along with the frontman, or boy really. He gave her a quizzical smirk which Sophie took as a kind of come-on and well, the rest, as they say, is history. As the song increased in its growing intensity, Sophie began to channel her sixteen-year-old self: waist-length brunette hair (some would call it mousy brown), velour scoop necked dress (she would call it velvet), barefooted and sufficiently inebriated on Jelly Beans and Fluffy Ducks, giving the performance of her life on an empty dance floor in an obscure little night club in downtown Adelaide in 1976 called ‘Countdown’,

with an underfloor lighting system nicely strobing, while she undulated and coiled and undulated again to the Zeppelin classic. Only from the relative safety of the boat-shaped bar in an obscure South Coast hotel in 2018, to Em and the other line dancers, she looked like an overweight and desperate has-been, experiencing some kind of mid-life crisis. Luckily, Sophie didn't realise this at the time. It was only when she woke up in the morning, unable to specifically recall how she got home to her little caravan, that remnants of events came and went in between the spasms of a pounding headache.

Once Sophie's eyes finally adjusted to being open, she tentatively raised herself up in her alcove bed to an almost sitting position and noticed her bag and keys sitting on the kitchenette table at the other end of the caravan. Thank God was her initial response but then came the realisation that she'd driven, and while being equally grateful that she had gotten home without injuring herself or anyone else, the euphoria of actually knowing where her keys were gave way to absolute self-disgust, paling only in comparison to the night, only recently, where she'd spent nearly two hours walking city streets trying to find her car. She wasn't sure what was more embarrassing: the ride home in the taxi, or having to call another one in the morning to go and find her car. This was not a good start, but she assured herself that it was a one-off, simple holiday euphoria, everything was still new. She'd settle down when she got into a routine, and, anyway, Fridays were always party nights. Every day had its persona and Saturdays were busy days, depending on how the night before went of course. Sundays were quiet and careful. Mondays she found were positive; all her big changes started on Mondays. Tuesdays and Wednesdays were a little dodgy: either the positivity was continuing, or she'd lost it already, and Thursdays, well it was nearly Friday after all, like the Thursday night before Good Friday, only every week. She knew from experience that with water, paracetamol, coffee, eggs and toast with vegemite, and juice, specifically in that order, she would be up and running in no time. Always the optimist, Sophie comforted herself that

maybe today was the day she would stop smoking because the thought of one made her want to vomit, but she knew, also from experience, that by lunchtime she'd probably have one.

Every thought hurt her head in varying places and she wondered if you could map a headache, like those medical diagrams of the human brain she'd seen on the Internet to see specifically what kinds of brain cells were dying and where. But then again, would she want to know, and would it make any difference if she did? You can't worry about what you don't know, she reminded herself, unless that becomes a worry in itself. Well, she knew what that felt like. She'd heard that's what happens with dementia too, and had witnessed it with her nanna. The initial confusion, and then the stubborn defiance, gave way eventually to child-like acceptance. Her own mother, her nanna's daughter, spoon-fed her ice-cream and popped dainty chocolates into her open bird-like mouth, ignoring her occasional tantrums and accusations. She did all this surely and steadfastly, with love. Sophie wondered if she would be capable of the same, and if anyone would even want to pop dainty chocolates into her own hungry mouth, and if she would even want them to, and whether she would have the choice if she didn't. A knock at the door broke the cycle of thought-worry-thought, and the pounding on the front left side of her skull was screaming for pain relief.

'Just a minute,' she called out in a feeble, almost awake voice, scrambling for some clothes that were strewn on the floor. The knocking repeated itself, a little more urgently. 'Coming. Hang on,' she croaked, pulling her jeans on inside out with her still half-zipped-up from yesterday grey woollen hoodie over the top. She opened the door to a dull cloudy day, and a smiling Thea, holding a tray with a pot of plunger coffee, and some delicious looking croissants. She also saw, over Thea's left shoulder, her car parked diagonally across her parking space just outside the caravan door. Thea could have taken a seat on the hood if she had wanted, but she politely ignored it.

‘Good morning Sophia. Thought you might like some breakfast,’ she said, almost in a whisper. Okay, so it wasn’t eggs and juice, but she could have second breakfast (or was it brunch?) later. She really had to do something about this headache though.

‘Good morning, Thea,’ she said, trying to sound as if she’d been up for hours, although her dishevelled appearance surely was giving the game away, and also trying not to stare at the tray of goodies on offer. ‘Come in. This is kind of you. Is this gonna happen every morning?’ she enquired, almost not joking. She pushed the door open a little further and stepped back to allow Thea to get in the doorway, place the tray on the table and squeeze herself in after it.

‘Just grabbing my vitamins and I’ll be with you,’ Sophie said as she hunched over the sink and filled her wine glass from yesterday with water, while rifling through the plastic bag on the sink that contained, indeed, some vitamins, but also paracetamol. Trying to hide the pack but also to punch the little buggers out of their soft foil beds without Thea realising she wasn’t taking her Vitamin B, Sophie noted that she must remember to take them later.

‘Sorry if I’ve interrupted you. You seem to be in the middle of something,’ Thea said a little disappointedly, and through the headache haze Sophie knew it would be rude to not invite her to stay; she’d brought the bloody breakfast, after all, so after quickly downing a glass of water with a distinct taste of wine and almost gagging on a couple of the chalky white paracetamol tablets, she squeezed in opposite Thea, happy to be finally still.

‘Don’t be silly, just a little disorganised this morning,’ she said, still eyeing the coffee and croissants.

‘Help yourself,’ Thea said, as she upturned two lovely white Italian coffee cups and poured the coffee, giving Sophie milk and sugar without asking, as if she knew that’s exactly what she needed. As Sophie bit into a warmed but not overly crisped croissant, she could

almost feel the fat and sugar hit her bloodstream. She savoured the flaky decadence, wondering if cheese immediately goes to the butt then where do croissant calories end up?

‘Thanks for all this,’ Sophie said through a mouthful. Thea simply smiled as she daintily put small pieces of croissant into her mouth.

‘It really is so kind of you, what with yesterday, and all this,’ Sophie said waving her upturned palm around like a game show hostess showing off prizes on offer as Thea gave her another smile. Sophie tried again.

‘Are these croissants from the organic shop?’

Thea shook her head, avoiding Sophie’s gaze, choosing to look out the window instead. Sophie finally got it and followed Thea’s lead. Eventually her mind started to slow, and Sophie realised she didn’t have to make polite conversation, and although her head was still throbbing, instead of fighting it, she could just let it be. She stole a glance at Thea who seemed to be hardly chewing, but letting the buttery pastry slowly melt as she continued her meditation on the view out of Sophie’s caravan window. Sophie absorbed Thea’s calmness like a sponge, and almost questioned her need to breathe as the two women sat staring out of the window as if in a trance.

‘Better?’ Thea finally spoke.

‘Better,’ Sophie agreed. She’d read about this surrendering, but until now it had only been an abstract concept. Could it be that simple?

‘I like your photos,’ Thea said as she got up and made the very short journey over to the cupboard next to the sink where Sophie had arranged them on top with careful casualness.

‘There’s a pattern you know ... in the colours,’ Thea said. ‘Can you see it?’ Sophie hadn’t thought about it before. Maybe it was just because she’d looked at them so often that they’d become ... well ... simply objects. She joined Thea to stand in front of the images, and as if in an art gallery, she really looked at them, possibly for the first time.

‘See, the muted blue in that sky with the plane and the flowerpots matches this one with the silhouetted figures on the rocks, and the terra cotta of the flower-pot chimneys matches the colours in this one with the children. Look, can you see?’ Thea said. ‘But the blue, the blue sky in this one,’ she said pointing to the photograph in the middle of the arrangement of white-washed houses on a hot Mediterranean summer day, ‘this one connects them, doesn’t it,’ Thea said.

‘Yes, yes it does,’ Sophie said astounded that she hadn’t seen it before. It was her life in pictures, and not a man or a selfie amongst them, only landscapes and children.

‘That’s in London,’ she said, indicating the one with the plane and the flowerpots, ‘and that one of the boys, my boys, on the rocks is here, at Green Bay,’ Sophie said, immediately regretting the mention of Green Bay and boys.

‘Yes, I recognised it,’ was all Thea said.

‘And that one, well it’s pretty iconic isn’t it,’ Sophie said pointing to the one of Santorini. ‘It’s in the Greek Islands. I travelled there when I was young. It’s actually quite similar to here, Mediterranean climate and all that.’

‘There’s no sea in that one, only a plane,’ Thea said, seemingly ignoring Sophie’s commentary on the weather in Greece. ‘It’s the odd one out, if you think about it. Do you know that aeroplane means *sky wanderer*?’

Was that a rhetorical question? Did she just ask herself one? What’s going on?

‘It’s as if it belongs to another life, to another story,’ Thea continued.

‘You’re right again. It was a lifetime ago,’ Sophie said, as much to herself as to Thea, who had removed it from the display and, to Sophie’s surprise, rearranged the remaining photographs. Sophie wanted to protest, but she didn’t have the energy, and anyway it was only a photograph. She could put it back later.

‘There,’ said Thea. ‘Can I have this?’ The question caught Sophie off guard. How could she say no? She’d been so kind. Could she say no? A voice from somewhere behind the fog of pain and paracetamol reminded her that she could simply make another copy.

‘Um ... of course ... but ...’

‘Thank you, Sophia,’ Thea said reverently, but then quickly slipped it into the side pocket of her voluminous skirt as Sophie looked on a little horrified. She felt like a child who’d been distracted only to have a troublesome plaster ripped off, with the relief justifying the initial shock.

‘I thought you’d rather have the one of Green Bay,’ Sophie said in child-like retaliation, aghast at her own insensitivity, but unable to stop. The lie was on her lips before she knew it.

‘I met Marilyn last night, at the Anchorage ... she told me what happened. I’m so sorry, Thea ... I just can’t imagine ...’

‘Of course you can, you’re a writer aren’t you?’ said Thea cutting through Sophie’s rehearsed platitudes. ‘It was an accident. He slipped,’ she said.

‘But how ...?’ Sophie tried again.

‘He always loved the water but was so afraid of it when he was younger, so I got him baptised, an adult baptism ... down at the river mouth ... and his fear just disappeared. He loved Green Bay ... your boys do too, I can see ... I think he was a little too enthralled that day, got too close to the rocks, and stumbled,’ she said.

Sophie thought of the numerous times her boys had clambered, like mountain goats, over the granite boulders of Green Bay. They even had their favourites, and every year they would exclaim, ‘There’s the elephant’s bum,’ or ‘Look, it’s the old man’s nose,’ but the rocks would be there for another hundred thousand years, while everyone Sophie knew would be long gone. Not devoid of some pragmatism herself, Sophie knew this on an abstract level, but

the reality, when she had time on her hands, could become somewhat troublesome. Did Thea just say adult baptism?

‘Do you like writing?’ Thea asked. Well, that came from nowhere Sophie thought. She hadn’t really thought about it. She was just reasonably good at it.

‘To be honest, I like reading more,’ said Sophie, ‘but the more I read, the more I want to write. I wanted to be Virginia Woolf as a teenager, or Stevie Nicks, but I was told early on I couldn’t sing. No one’s told me yet I can’t write.’

‘But you like music,’ Thea said, more like a statement than a question.

‘Yeah, of course,’ Sophie said.

‘Why?’

Sophie paused. Why indeed? She used to know.

‘It lifts me up ... cuts me to the bone ... turns me on, and ... frees my soul,’ Sophie almost sang as lyrics from a long-forgotten song filled her mind.

‘Sing me a song, Sophia,’ Thea commanded as if she was a mind reader. The command sounded familiar.

‘No ... really ... well ... okay,’ Sophie said, surprised at her own desperate desire to oblige. ‘Day after day I’m more confused ...’ she began tentatively ... ‘Yet I look for the light in the pourin’ rain ... you know that’s a game that I hate to lose, but I’m feelin the strain, ain’t it a shame ...’ and she was off, ‘ ... oh give me the beat, boys, to free my soul ... I wanna get lost ...’ but she couldn’t continue.

‘There, there, honey,’ Thea said as she got up and wrapped her strong arms around Sophie like a friendly bear. ‘There, there.’

She sounded almost manly on the phone, and not what Robbie expected, but readily agreed to see him. It was Saturday and she had a small tent set up at the Port Elliot markets that were held once a fortnight at the duck pond behind the main street.

‘I don’t usually make appointments. People just wander in, but for you, Rob I will make an exception,’ she said, and they agreed to meet at two.

‘A good time for self-reflection,’ she said. The energy is usually quite strong in between meals.’ As he pushed *end call* and fingered the dustjacket on the mysterious book of poems he’d found, Robbie wasn’t quite sure if Thea was joking. He’d slept surprisingly well considering the bellyful he’d had, which usually woke him in the early hours, looking for more. He felt strangely rearranged inside, and the strained panic in his guts that normally started his day was pleasantly absent. His long black settled nicely without any obvious gurgling and he could even stomach some breakfast. He munched on a piece of wholemeal toast with peanut butter and looked out the kitchen window, the river shining in the winter sun like polished concrete. He’d never had a man cry in his arms before. He felt sort of cleansed in some way, or purged even, but wasn’t sure how or why.

He parked down a side street off The Strand, opposite a rather large body of water complete with wetlands and bulrushes, which apparently was the duck pond. Numerous tents and stalls, some selling plants, some brightly coloured clothing, were set up on a flat piece of ground near a rotunda and amenities block, and people – families with children, and couples, both young and old – were casually strolling from stall to stall, eating and drinking. He’d seen it all before, but on this sunny Saturday afternoon, as he meandered along looking for Thea’s tent, he was just one of the crowd, and that was fine.

There was a medieval air about the place which he supposed was normal for a market, and as he wandered around he couldn’t help imagining Bill as King John, Cliff as the Sherriff of Nottingham, Eli as a skulking court jester, Ezra as Much the Miller’s son, Linda as the

jolly pie maker Mrs Miggins, and, of course, Thea as Lady Eleanor. He wondered where he would fit into this tapestry, and as he walked past a low wooden sign that named the park, he suddenly saw himself in stocks, the village fool, and shuddered, regretting all those hours of watching *Robin Hood* on television as a kid. All the same, he couldn't shake the feeling since he'd arrived on the Peninsula that everyone he'd met was playing some kind of part, but he didn't have a script. And if he wasn't Robin Hood, then who was?

At the end of a row of stalls, Thea's tent, which was more like a three-sided gazebo with diaphanous entrance curtains loomed on his left. Outside the entrance, on a hinged sandwich board, a vintage pointing finger assertively indicated to enter. He paused for a moment, checked the time on his phone – two o'clock on the dot – and brushed the flimsy curtains aside, as if expecting to catch Thea out in some form of devil worshipping. Instead, he saw, to his surprise, Lady Eleanor in the flesh – the motherly smile, the high forehead, the blue eyes and pale complexion – queenly and resplendent in layers of coloured crushed velvet sitting behind a cloth covered card table.

'Welcome, Rob,' she said, and indicated for him to take the red velvet upholstered seat opposite her.

'Hi,' he said, and stuck out his hand.

'Best not mix energies yet,' Thea said, and ignored his gesture. 'So, what can I do for you?'

'I thought you'd already know that?' he said.

'Ah, yes, well I'm not that kind of psychic. But I think you're only joking?'

'Yeah, I was. Actually it's not my future, or my past, I'm worried about,' he said. 'It's Benny's.'

'Benny's past is history, and his future's ... well ... uncertain ... but I think you already know that too,' she said. 'Are you sure you don't want a reading?'

‘I live in his houseboat. You’re my landlord,’ he said, ignoring Thea’s question.

‘I know. I saw Linda yesterday. She told me you were from London. I think I have something you might like,’ she said, and reached down into a bag lying at her feet and handed him a framed photograph of London chimney pots and a plane in the sky. He took the photograph and for the second time in less than twenty-four hours, uncontrollable tears welled. What was happening to him? He remembered what Bill had said, about this place and what it could do to a person. He thought it was simply colloquial pride, the beauty of the landscape, but he was beginning to wonder.

‘How? ... where? ... It’s Brentford, I know it. The plane gives it away. That’s where I come from. That’s where I was born,’ he said.

‘Don’t worry, it’s not black magic or anything,’ Thea said, as if sensing his concern. ‘When Linda told me about you, and then you called to make the appointment, well I just thought that you’d appreciate it. It’s a lovely photo, I think ... melancholy ... but comfortable ... like home, I guess.’

‘Yes, thank you, that’s very kind of you,’ he said.

‘So, Rob, what is it about Benny that you want to know?’ Thea asked. He reached into the backpack that he’d brought with him and produced Benny’s book of poems and placed it on the table in front of her.

‘Leonard Cohen. He was a poet before he became a recording star. My son ... he loves ... loved him. Is this yours?’ she asked as she picked it up and held it in both hands like a prayer book.

‘Not technically. I found it ... on the house-boat. ‘There’s an inscription inside the cover,’ he said. ‘But with no signature. I thought it might be yours?’

Thea opened the cover and caught her breath. In between muffled sobs the night before, Bill had told Rob of Thea’s love for his brother, and he’d wanted her to confess that it

was she who had given it to Benny. But he could see now, in the way she cradled the book of poems like some kind of treasure, that she had suffered enough. They both had.

‘May I have this?’ Thea asked.

‘Yes, of course’ he replied, realising he wasn’t part of this particular story and never had been.

‘There now,’ she said, suddenly recovered. ‘An exchange of sorts, in more ways than one,’ and slipped the book into her bag. ‘I’m sorry to rush you, but I can see there’s someone waiting for a reading,’ she said pointing to the entrance and the silhouette of a female shape outlined through the curtain.

‘Sure,’ said Robbie as he got out his wallet.

‘No charge,’ Thea said. ‘See you then.’

‘Yeah, thanks ... I think,’ he said and stood up, a bit unsteady, but lighter somehow. He parted the curtains once more, a little gentler this time, and smiled at the woman eagerly waiting.

‘Is she good?’ the woman asked as they exchanged places, but he didn’t answer.

Sophie decided to take the town walk. With her puffy eyes nicely hidden behind her new Carla Zampatti sunglasses, she didn’t need to see the bay in all its glory today. It was getting on in the afternoon as she’d gone back to bed after Thea left, but she needed to get out of that caravan. Once she’d climbed the stairs from the caravan park, she took the first right which took her to a quiet street which ran behind the ‘casa del’- whatever’ two-storeys that lined the foreshore, bordered with quaint railway cottages with gardens of roses, lilacs, and daisies. She crossed at the steam train junction and took a short cut through the Civic Park with its

copse of coastal banksias and towering gums, public barbecue and weathered wooden table and bench, empty of course. Emerging from the shadowy coolness of the park, she followed a lane edged on either side with corrugated iron fences almost falling over with the weight of powdery-blue plumbago and creamy honeysuckle creepers, and wondered who lived in all these seemingly unoccupied dwellings. She'd read somewhere that Barbara Hanrahan, one of her favourite authors, had owned a cottage here, and she fantasised that it could be one of these. She imagined her lying in a deck chair reading, wearing a black polo neck and slacks, jasmine tea in an oriental-looking cup and saucer at her side, a black cat sunning itself nearby, and Jo working on a sculpture in the garden. Or was it actually herself she could see in this perfect image? With her oversized glasses and black sweater, she could almost feel the contentment of the scene that she imagined, but the reality was there was no Jo, no garden, and no black cat, not on her horizon, and anyway, she'd realised from experience that you had to be careful what you wished for. She thought of the dusty bookshop on The Strand that she'd passed the other day. Was it only yesterday? She wasn't one for yellowing paperbacks and had never, on all her trips down here, gone in, but she wondered if the owner knew about Hanrahan's cottage, and decided she would ignore her abhorrence of the smell of musty books and enquire.

The lane ended at the back of the old church, and she quickened her steps as she made her way around the perimeter fence, her head bowed as if she was in prayer, or a spy, and she only looked up when she safely came out on to the busy Strand. She turned left, over the rail crossing again, and stopped outside the antiquated front of the bookshop. An assortment of hardbacks was displayed on stands and prominently arranged, all with a nautical theme. She got the feeling the display hadn't changed for some time, but she did notice – why hadn't she before? – Thea's sign in the window, advertising her talents amongst flyers for line dancing and rock and roll classes, which didn't interest Sophie greatly, and

reminded her uncomfortably of the night before. What did catch her eye was the little neatly handwritten card sitting next to Thea's, advertising drum lessons, beginners welcome, and to apply in person at a berth at the Goolwa Wharf. Drum lessons ... on a boat? Her youngest son had had lessons at school, and she fancied herself at keeping a beat. Beats on a boat, she giggled. Okay, as the saying goes, she danced to the beat of her own drum, but wasn't that the point? Berth Three, Goolwa Wharf. Why not? She could take a trip down there later. She closed her nostrils and stepped through the open doorway, hoping she could carry on a conversation while breathing through her mouth.

Robbie found himself in his usual late afternoon position, lying on his cabin bed hoping for sleep. His fingers clasped across his chest, moving with the gentle rise and fall of his breath as he stared up at the ceiling. He'd carefully positioned the photograph Thea had given him on the dado rail that ran along the side of the bed and his eyes moved from the ceiling to the picture then back to the ceiling again. His mother hadn't believed him when he'd told her that he was going to the other side of the world. Mike had thought it was cool, and his father had smiled and given him a wink. Robbie knew that Megan had longed for home more than she'd longed for him, but the adventure of it, the possibility of it, was too hard to resist. He lay there patiently waiting for sleep, or for something profound. Whichever it was, he realised, he didn't mind. A knock on his front door jolted him out of his reverie. Please, not Ely, he thought. He wouldn't, surely? Oh, of course, it's Ezra, come for a lesson he realised and bolted up from his sailor's cot, manoeuvred around the already set up and waiting drum kit, nimbly avoiding the book and record towers like he'd lived there forever, and reached the front door, pausing for a second to compose himself. Best not to look too desperate was

another life lesson learned over the years. And so it begins again, he thought, as Rob the cool musician replaced Robbie the confused and emotional kid.

As Sophie turned right on to the Victor Harbor Road, she felt like waving as if she was embarking on some great adventure, return date unknown, instead of taking a simple trip to Goolwa. She thought of the score she'd got from the second-hand bookshop, where she'd discovered that after some initial gagging, the odour wasn't that unpleasant, and although the old guy who ran the bookshop had no idea where Barbara Hanrahan had holidayed, she'd noticed a brown paper covered hardback of Leonard Cohen poems sitting on the counter, and she'd cheekily picked it up. I love Leonard Cohen, she'd said, and he'd been happy to sell it to her, although it had only just come in. As she began singing 'Bird on a Wire' as if in performance mode, a beam of afternoon sun came through the car window and warmed her as she sang. After singing the opening a few times, as it was her favourite part of the song, especially the bit about being free, Sophie's attention turned towards the job at hand and she pushed play on The Cult CD that lived permanently in the car sound system and waited in anticipation for the drums to announce the meaty part of 'She Sells Sanctuary' after Billy Duffy's jangling intro – bang – right on cue, she never missed a beat, well not that one anyway, and dance-drove down the Victor Harbor Road like a banshee, finally pulling into the Goolwa Wharf carpark, a little emotional, but not in too bad a shape. It seemed pretty quiet for a Saturday afternoon, she thought, but it was the middle of winter, and it had started to drizzle again, so pulling her hoody up over her head, she made a run for it down to Berth 3 at the end of a row of houseboats all bobbing in the gentle wake of the great Murray River. She steadied herself as she took her first steps on to the small gangplank that lead up to the houseboat's front door, and knocked, quite firmly she felt, as was only right in these circumstances; she was about to meet a complete stranger and most probably enter their abode, but she was comforted as she'd turned her mobile location tracker on just to be sure.

As the door finally opened, they both stood silently staring. Fuck, it's the mad-woman Robbie thought. Shit, it's Johnnie Depp, Sophie thought. They both smiled as Robbie introduced himself and suggested she come aboard to which Sophie heartily agreed.

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