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“Creation’s Holiday”: On Silence and Monsters in Australian Poetry

*Allow me for a moment, O Lord,
To begin to become a little bit like someone else.*

—Anna Akhmatova, tr. by Judith Hemschemeyer

*I keep telling people that if they want to start their lives over again, go
over to Australia to do it.*

—David Bowie

AND ONCE MORE SPACE AND EVEN SILENCE

In 1965, during the seventy-sixth and final summer of her life, Anna Akhmatova encountered the work of Judith Wright, an Australian poet twenty-six years her junior, living more than eight thousand miles from Saint Petersburg amid the subtropical rainforest of Tamborine Mountain, in the state of Queensland. The experience, we are told by Anatoly Naiman, moved the Russian poet to compose a fragment, one of her last:

Let the Australian sit down, invisible, among us,
And let her speak words that will make us feel luminous,
As if she shook our hand and smoothed our wrinkles,
As if she forgave, finally, the unforgivable evil.
And let everything recommence — time independent of
us again
And once more space and even silence.

— Tr. by Judith Hemschemeyer

Rarely is the third person imperative in English (“Let her . . .”) harnessed to express such personal urgency. Its imperious formality befits the diction of God (“Let there be light”) and twentieth-century elegy — “Let the lamp affix its beam” (Stevens); “Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves” (Auden) — to which it lends the pathos of severe objectivity. Even when hortatory, as in Whitman — “Let the people sprawl with yearning aimless hands! Let

their tongues be broken!” — a critical distance between speaker and object usually remains. The mood of Akhmatova’s fragment, by contrast, is as close to the cohortative mode of mutual encouragement (“let us”) as an imperative can be. In this it resembles Isaiah — “let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment” — eliding distance by eliciting speech. The Australian poet is urged to sit and speak “among us”; the fragment’s express desire is to close the distance between “the Australian” and the speaker by breaking the “luminous” bread of conversation. Like any poem of yearning, it is also asymptotic, and so a transhemispheric love poem of a kind.

In a mere two sentences, these lines haul substantial freight. Perhaps ultimately too much: surely no poet living or dead could bear the idealized persona projected here. Wright’s words not only make the speaker “feel luminous,” offering succor to the elderly poet by “smooth[ing her] wrinkles” in the way of a nurse-cum-dutiful daughter; they are bestowed with such powers of forgiveness (to forgive no less than “the unforgiveable evil”) as have not been seen since Beatrice smiled atop Mt. Purgatory (even if that place was located by Dante “forty miles high in the midst of Australian sheep land,” as Ezra Pound quipped). The Australian poet’s arrival comes as a late yet total consolation, a chance for “everything [to] recommence.” And in this “everything” Akhmatova includes not only time and space, but “even silence” (for the poet, silence would be a third foundation of knowledge). Is this silence what, in *The Infinite Conversation*, Maurice Blanchot calls an “austere silence, the tacit speech of visible things, the reserve of those invisible,” or might it be a “legitimate pause, the one permitting the give and take of conversation . . . that beautifully poised waiting with which two interlocutors, from one shore to another, measure their right to communicate”?

Can we compare silences across hemispheres? That Akhmatova’s concluding “silence” should bear the levity of absolution is a serious twist. “REQUIEM” is a compendium of the silences of the purges: committed to memory by friends before being burned, it would not be printed in full in its native language for more than four decades. The unfinished seventh poem in her “Northern Elegies,” an “elegy on silence” according to Lydia Chukovskaya (who committed more of Akhmatova to memory than anyone else), compares the “silence of arctic ice” endured by the poet for thirty years to the silence of the dead: “My silence can be heard everywhere./It fills the courtroom,” it drowns out rumor, “and like a miracle/It puts its stamp on

everything.” Indeed, silence in Akhmatova often speaks in some capacity for a generation of writers so brutalized by authoritarianism that they comprised, in Isaac Babel’s harrowing phrase, their own “genre of silence.” “Be the dark speech of silence laboring,” urged Mandelstam in his *Voronezh Notebooks*. “Speechlessness became my home/And my capital — muteness,” reads another late fragment by Akhmatova in its entirety.

“The authority of silence in the face of the inhuman,” as George Steiner put it in *Language and Silence*, was never more authorial than in the case of Akhmatova. But Wright (whose centenary was last year) has no less a claim to being one of the foremost writers of her nation’s silences. In both her writing and her unwavering activism, Wright fiercely held Australia’s conscience to account for the silences it does have a say in. In her lecture “Aboriginals in Australian Poetry,” Wright memorably observed how “a great silence falls” upon Australian poetry in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the country’s indigenous inhabitants were reduced to “a more or less invisible people” in literature as in life. This further complicates our reading of Akhmatova’s “invisible” Australian. One significant strand of Wright’s work is characterized by its commitment to render this silence; a typical example from her first collection, *The Moving Image*, concerns a massacre of Aboriginal people at a place once known as “Nigger’s Leap: New England,” who “screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff/and then were silent”:

Now must we measure
our days by nights, our tropics by their poles,
love by its end and all our speech by silence.
See, in these gulfs, how small the light of home.

In *We Are Going*, the first published volume of poetry by an Australian Aboriginal poet, Wright’s good friend Oodgeroo Noonuccal arrived to tell us of what was being lost. Wright would seek to document the devastating, accumulative silencings (called “dispersals”) of frontier genocide nearly two decades later in *The Cry for the Dead*, as her poetic output became increasingly intermittent. Of course, this silence remains no less visceral today, as we are reminded by Ali Cobby Eckermann, of Ngadjuri country in South Australia, in her recent “Faiku”: “When I pass away/Alone under the bridge/Weeds grow in your mouth.”

Akhmatova was not the first northern writer to envision Australia as a tabula rasa, a place where history might be rebooted. In D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* we also find Australia "swamped in silence," and the "new leaf" bound up with a concept of absolution:

Absolved from it all. The soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia,
the pale, white unwritten atmosphere of Australia. Tabula rasa.
The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The white
clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark,
without a record.

Lawrence's litany of negation — absolution, whiteness, the unwritten, the unrecorded — comprised so many filaments of an Australian otherness that transfixed literary discourse in the interwar years preceding Wright's first collection. Indeed, the promise of a new beginning, and an attendant sense of anticipation, had been uneasily associated with the idea of Australia since the time of its colonial poets: "We've nothing left us but anticipation," bemoaned Barron Field, author of the first collection of poetry published in New South Wales in 1819. Futurity *per se* was both a foundational and a fraught concept in Australian poetry from William Charles Wentworth — who crossing the Blue Mountains saw the New South Wales interior "Op'ning like Canaan on rapt Israel's view" ("Australasia") — to A.D. Hope, who more than a century later was still hoping that "from the deserts the prophets [might] come" ("Australia"). Anticipatory buoyancy, tempered by a grappling with the perceived Australian silence, became tied to an incremental claiming of subjecthood in a continent perceived to be out of the world's earshot.

Lawrence's articulation of the vision of Australia as tabula rasa would influence his erstwhile publisher P.R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, and in turn Rex Ingamells's essay, "Conditional Culture," the founding document of the Jindyworobak movement, which sought (with highly mixed results) "to annex, [or] join" Aboriginal myth and language to a poetry no longer "webbed about by the spider of northern verse idiom." But where the "Jindys" sought to rectify the tabula rasa by "annexing" Aboriginal culture, Wright would "deny/the reign of silence" ("The Bones Speak") in the first place, demanding instead that we listen more attentively:

I have laid my ear to the dust, and the thing it said
was Silence. Therefore I have made silence speak; I found
for the night a sound.

— From *The Blind Man*

In Wright, “silence is the ground of speech and the speech of ground,” as Paul Kane writes in *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*. The complex groundedness of her work exposed the lie of the tabula rasa more than any poet before her, and helped pave the way for generations of auditors of Australian silence to come. “Here the page is clean not blank,” writes Robert Adamson in “By No Man’s Code”; “So may the resonance/of this new psalm begin life” (“Full Tide”).

Fathomless silence has thus long functioned as something like the Mont Blanc of Australian poetry. In David Malouf’s “Notes on an Undiscovered Continent,” it manifests as a gnawing vastness: “Silence: so absolute it fills the mind with a slow-worm’s giddy/horror of distances, our counterweight to the Himalayas.” Almost seventy years earlier, it overwhelmed Henry Lawson, who declared his preference for “the thud of the deadly gun, and the crash of the bursting shell” to “the terrible silence where drought is fought out there in the western hell” (“The Bush Fire,” 1905 — though it is difficult to imagine him saying this a decade later). Ticking metronomically through the twenty stanzas of “Noonday Axeman,” from Les Murray’s first collection, *The Ilex Tree*, the “silence” of the Australian bush appears not as “inhuman,” but as “unhuman”:

Axe-fall, echo and silence. Unhuman silence.

A stone cracks in the heat. Through the still twigs, radiance
stings at my eyes. I rub a damp brow with a handkerchief
and chop on into the stillness. Axe-fall and echo.

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Axe-fall, echo and silence. It will be centuries
before many men are truly at home in this country,
and yet, there have always been some, in each generation,
there have always been some who could live in the presence of
silence.

“Noonday Axeman” is one of the starkest presentations of the double aspect of the Australian silence, as the negation not only of audibility, but also of autochthony, of settler Australians’ sense of being “truly

at home in this country”; Murray’s characteristically eccentric prefix serves to underscore its incomprehensibility. “Axe-fall, echo and silence” comprise three movements in a divine comedy of Australian self-fashioning.

The twentieth-century quest for a poetic vernacular capable of grasping the Australian sublime *qua* “silence” owed much to Wright’s earlier rendering of the numinous “silent rituals” of the Australian landscape:

Say the need’s born within the tree,
and waits a trigger set for light;
say sap is tidal like the sea
and rises with the solstice-heat —
but wisdom shells the words away
to watch this fountain slowed in air
where sun joins earth — to watch the place
at which the silent rituals are.

— From *Gum-trees Stripping*

The imperative to speak (“Say the need’s”; “say sap is tidal”) to or for the morphology of Australian flora — the warped and split bark of a sun-scalded (“solstice-heat”) eucalypt — is a desire to communicate (with) the ineffable. But “the human voice harvesting echo where there was silence before,” as Steiner writes, “is both miracle and outrage, sacrament and blasphemy.” We must speak; how dare we speak? Wright dared, and showed that only at the moment words were “shell[ed] . . . away” could the Australian silence be written, that poetry ritualizes the encounter between the imperative to speak and ineffability. In the realm of the ineffable, the eucalypt becomes a “fountain slowed in air”: as “fountain,” its growth is first sped up, as in the time-lapse footage of the tropic growth movements of plants seen in nature documentaries, but then this fountain is “slowed” down again. The real time encounter with the tree’s “silent” morphology becomes something resembling time-lapse footage in slow motion. With this speeding up and slowing down again of time, Wright sows the seeds of an ecologically-grounded poetics uniquely attentive to Australian silence. It should be noted that this commitment extended beyond her writing; at the time of Akhmatova’s fragment, Wright was one year into a twelve-year presidency of the pioneering Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, which she had cofounded three years earlier.

Wright's ecologically-oriented audition of Australian silences has engaged myriad diverse poets of the last sixty years, as this issue of *Poetry* attests. The following recent example, "Plant poem" by Claire Potter, is taken from *Outcrop: radical Australian poetry of land*, an anthology of work that writes both with and against the grain of Wright's numinous, ritual silences while interrogating its own textual conditions, and so furthers the conversation with the Australian silence in new and vital ways:

The decision of a plant
to grow this way or that
might mimic the decision
to leave by this door or that
but ultimately like a plant
one stays put, moving only in minute,
imperceptible degrees, craning
the neck, for example, towards the sun
towards light which remains glacial
towards peace that carries spurs
towards a singular voice, a neon
strobe which may flicker or be broken
but which nonetheless shines some
small thing inwards to pinken
the discolored mind, brighten the worsted eyes
which look this way or that
towards a door ajar but not open
extending just enough to hear as well as to feel
the work of the feet outside.

"Plant Poem" instantiates the "silent ritual" of phototropism, an imperceptibly gradual "craning/[of] the neck" towards a flickering source that "pinkens" and brightens. Like Wright's "Gum-trees Stripping," it too "waits a trigger set for light"; and it also holds the door ajar just enough for us to hear what botanists call the *phenotypic plasticity* of plants — their ability to "make *real time* assessments of stimuli and actively respond according to both the current state and previous experience," as poet Matthew Hall puts it in "Plant Autonomy and Human-Plant Ethics," a work of contemporary Australian criticism that would have undoubtedly interested Wright. In contrast to the axeman's arrival and incursion, here the heuristics

of departure, deciding which door to leave by, have become estranged: a deep imbrication of the speaker's perspective with that of the sessile plant sees human autonomy become hauntingly othered as the "work of the feet outside."

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We have no evidence that Wright was aware of Akhmatova's fragment; and unlike several of her esteemed peers — Rosemary Dobson, David Campbell, and A.D. Hope, who would all later translate Akhmatova, while Dorothy Hewett's visits to the Soviet Union inspired her "Mandelstam Letters"—she doesn't seem to have been particularly interested in Russian poetry. In 1980, however, Akhmatova's biographer Amanda Haight requested (through Hope) that she also write a biography of Wright. Wright's reply is a tantalizing insight into a startlingly modest estimation of her own standing within global literary and political crosscurrents:

But Akhmatova's life was, thank God very different from my own. I can quite see that all that drama and involvement in obviously world-shaking times and places required a biography sooner or later, let alone the fact that her poetry was so personally oriented. My sole claim to public interest has been my involvement in the conservation movement, part of which I've told myself, the rest is not so exciting. Even though we will all eventually drown in sludge, grime and poison if not by the Big Flash, one can't call the conservation movement very world-shaking—alas.

... Also, I'm busy. So, with my thanks to Amanda Haight ... I must say no.

That Wright, the preeminent elder stateswoman of Australian poetry at the time, considered her tireless activist work her "sole claim to public interest" signals the reticence to which her poetry would succumb in her last decades, as she sought to redress those Australian silences so central to her life's work. Certainly, the "forgiveness" imagined by Akhmatova is not among the first qualities one would associate with Wright in 1965. And Wright was well aware of the monstrousness that inhabits silence:

Look at them, but don't linger.
If we stare too long, something looks back at us;
something gazes through from underneath;
something crooks a very dreadful finger
down there in the unforgotten dark.

— From *Pelicans*

Not simply the remembered, but the *unforgotten* dark; negation concertinas in the swale of Australian otherness. A similarly sensate understanding of silence and the “dreadful” ricochets into the twenty-first century.

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“ON CREATION'S HOLIDAY” WITH HANNIBAL LECTE(U)R

One of the most remarkable monsters in recent Australian poetry would have to be “Hannibal Lecter,” Chris Edwards’s mondegreen for Mallarmé’s “clever reader” (*Lecteur habile*), in his 2005 *A Fluke: A mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés . . .”*:

I wish I knew what lunatic pasted this Note here — *park it elsewhere, I say* — these maimed, oblivious and hellish apprehensions remind me of Hannibal Lecter.

In Edwards’s “Lecte[u]r,” the reader apprehends its reflection in the figure of a peculiar kind of cannibal, one who would eat his own while haunting the interstices of translation and audibility (let’s not forget that Thomas Harris’s “Lecter” was traumatized into muteness as a child). No charge of dull parasitism sticks to *A Fluke*, which proves strikingly original in its effects: what in Mallarmé is seen “at first glance” (*frappent d’abord*) becomes for Edwards, “frappéd boredom”; when a thing shows itself (*qu’il se montre*), the cry goes up: “kill the monster!” The hazardous thread of *Un coup* is maintained and extended, even if as bizarre, chancy counterpoint. In the ten years since his appearance, Edwards’s “Lecte[u]r” has only grown in stature, and has become representative of a thriving parliament of monsters at work in contemporary Australian poetry.

To fully appreciate this, we need to trace the monstrous beginnings of Australian poetry in English. The year Keats composed his

odes and the birth year of Whitman, 1819 also saw the first printed volume of poetry in Australia: the self-consciously titled *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* by the London-born barrister Barron Field, a childhood friend of both Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt. The volume's two poems famously register the riot of the European mind upon encountering the "incongruous" flora ("Botany-Bay Flowers") and fauna ("The Kangaroo") of New South Wales. In the latter, Field rummages his mental database of monsters—sphinx, mermaid, centaur, Pegasus, hippogriff—but each, he concludes, "would scarce be more prodigious" than the iconic Australian marsupial. The epigraph of "The Kangaroo" is taken from Virgil's description of the Cretan Minotaur in *Aeneid* VI—"mixtumque genus prolesque biformis"—"mongrel breed, hybrid offspring." Dryden conflates the two into the economical "doubtful progeny."

But Field's volume was itself received as monstrous, a kind of "mongrel breed" or "hybrid offspring," on account of what, to one reader at least, was deemed a breach of the decorum of poetic allusion: its rampant use of quotation. Reviewing his friend's work in Hunt's *Examiner*, Lamb lamented that "there is too much matter mixed up in it from the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, to please some readers," and that

The thefts are indeed so open and palpable, that we almost recur to our first surmise, that the author must be some unfortunate wight, sent on his travels for plagiarisms of a more serious complexion. But the old matter and the new blend kindly together; and must, we hope, have proved right acceptable to more than one.

Lamb appears to have anticipated his own criticism three years earlier when he scoffed in a letter to Field—"Have you poets among you? Cursed plagiarists, I fancy, if you have any"—and he is relentless in leveling the charge upon his friend whom, he joked in his review, had been condemned to "administer tedious justice in inauspicious unliterary THIEFLAND." One could conceive "The Kangaroo," said Lamb, "to have been written by Andrew Marvell, supposing him to have been banished to Botany Bay, as he did, we believe, once meditate a voluntary exile to Bermuda." Lamb's concession that "the old matter and the new blend kindly together" did not assuage the forlorn Field, who soon after bemoaned his "prosaic, /

Unpicturesque, unmusical” and “prose-dull land.”

To twenty-first-century eyes, Field’s “thefts” betray a poetics of appropriation and citation that wouldn’t look entirely out of place in a Kenneth Goldsmith class: the volume features three epigraphs in addition to the Virgil (a reworking from the English satirist Joseph Hall, and direct quotes from Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* and Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*); it is shot through with chunks of quotation — from the occasional phrase, such as “dim spot” or “small deer,” which are in quotations marks, but whose sources (Milton’s *Comus* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* respectively) aren’t given — to more than a dozen lines throughout the text that are quoted verbatim from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It contains footnotes, the largest of which cites eight lines of Mercutio’s “Queen Mab” speech; there are also clear reworkings of Aristotle, Juvenal, and Pliny the Elder:

Join’d by some divine mistake,
None but Nature’s hand can make —
Nature, in her wisdom’s play,
On Creation’s holiday.

— From *The Kangaroo*, 1819

That the kangaroo must have been devised on “Creation’s holiday” is a reference to Pliny’s catalogue of the world’s races in the seventh book of his *Natural History*, which concludes:

In her cleverness nature has created these and other, similar things as playthings for herself, and as miracles for us. Moreover who has the power to list the individual things she creates every day, nay, almost in every hour?

“The Kangaroo” (and thus the volume entire) ends with a footnote explaining two final allusions, to the rare black or “sooty swan” and to the “duck-mole,” or platypus, famously suspected by British naturalists to be a hoax: “The *cygnus niger* of Juvenal is no *rara avis* in Australia; and time has here given ample proof of the *ornithorhynchus paradoxus*.”

In confirming the prevalence of the black swan (*cygnus niger*), and that the platypus was no hoax, the concluding footnote of *First Fruits* looks forward with keen (and suspicious) specificity to the work of the greatest monster in Australian poetry, Ern Malley:

I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
the black swan of trespass on alien waters.

— From *Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495*

Has there been a poet of more “doubtful progeny” than Malley, equal parts “black swan of trespass” and *paradoxus*? The notorious post-war Australian “hoax-poet” was conceived in an afternoon by James McAuley and Harold Stewart to lampoon the upstart modernists of postwar Australia, the Angry Penguins, with the help of misquotations and other Joycean “quashed quotatoes” from sources ranging from Shakespeare to an American report on mosquito breeding. The story of the astonishing ensuing court case and the “successful criminalization of poetic language,” as Philip Mead put it in *Networked Language*, is well known enough to not need canvassing here. It is worth noting, though, the revelations in David Brooks’s *The Sons of Clovis: Ern Malley, Adoré Floupette and a Secret History of Australian Poetry*, which finds a precursor for Malley in the figure of Adoré Floupette, a figure similarly “invented” by Henri Beauclair and Gabriel Vicaire in an attempt to skewer Mallarmé and other French Symbolists in 1885. It is apt that in Peter Carey’s treatment of the hoax in *My Life as a Fake* the Malley figure of Bob McCorkle should actually come to life to haunt his creator, who thinks of him as “the monster,” à la Frankenstein’s monster, à la the platypus, à la et al.

“Walter Lehmann,” one of five heteronyms of Gwen Harwood, allowed her to infamously harpoon the conservative *Bulletin* magazine in 1961 with a sonnet that spelled “Fuck all editors” acrostically. “Miriam Stone,” her only female persona, allowed Harwood to vent Medea-like thoughts that would have been considered monstrous at the time (and even now):

The clothes are washed, the house is clean.
I find my pen and start to write.
Something like hatred forks between
my child and me. She kicks her good
new well-selected toys with spite
around the room, and whines for food.
Inside my smile a monster grins
and sticks her image through with pins.

— From *Burning Sappho*

In “Miriam Stone’s” inner “monster grin[ning],” we see something of Malley’s Cheshire cat-like grin, lingering. Whatever Australia’s great poet-figments say about the social and cultural politics of their literary production, their existence underscores a fluid and strategic approach to authorship that appears rather unique among Anglophone literary traditions.

In an interview with Australian literary magazine *Mascara*, Peter Boyle — poet, translator, and flame-keeper (or thrower) of Malley’s and Harwood’s Australian heteronymous poetics — speaks to

the creative sense of becoming someone different, writing in quite different ways, for example, when I’m the Byzantine poet in exile Irene Philologos compared to when I’m the slightly Cuban Omeros Eliseo or the rather Wittgensteinian Leonidas.

He is referring to his *Apocrypha: Texts Collected and Translated by William O’Shaunessy*, a near-three-hundred-page compendium of poems and prose fragments by scores of real and imaginary ancient writers, all attributed to its titular, fictitious author, a “neglected classicist.” Boyle’s translation credits include Venezuelan Eugenio Montejo, Chilean Juan Garrido-Salgado, and Cuban José Kozer. His acknowledged influences (in addition to Malley and Harwood) include Pessoa, of course, as well as Edmond Jabès’s *The Book of Questions* and Henri Michaux’s prose poems of journeys to imaginary lands. (All of whom, we might add, find themselves “on creation’s holiday” with Pliny the Elder.) In *Apocrypha*, the Minotaur returns the curious guise of fictive “Andropoulos of Heraklion, The ‘Minotaur’ Poet, C 550 AD”:

Any moment now
he will invent himself in a different language,
a new shape purged
of grotesqueries.

— From *The minotaur, on reprieve, considers his difficulties*

Or there is the figure of Enobius, an emperor of Palmyra who is condemned to see nothing *but* the future, and who in the final year of his life

wrote the poem that begins “In which of my languages will I

die?” but was then overwhelmed by the conviction that someone in the future was writing the same poem but with some teasing slight variation. In despair he wrote “Everything I write plagiarises the future.”

—Dr Antoine Lemesurier, assistant curator,
The Secret Library Trust of Lower Egypt

Boyle’s forthcoming *Ghostspeaking*, an anthology of eleven fictive poets from Latin America, France, and Québec, is keenly anticipated.

“I always/*wanted*/to plagiarise you,” with “your fermented prosody/ripe for traffic,” writes Pam Brown in her hot and heavy “Sister Morpheme.” And wouldn’t Charles Lamb have a fit to see the correspondence of Walt Whitman and Bernard O’Dowd being delectably cannibalized in David Prater’s *Leaves of Glass*; the pamphlets of Mary Carleton, the infamous purveyor of false identities, providing grist for Kate Lilley’s razor-sharp *Ladylike*; the glitch and rupture of Michael Farrell’s *A Raiders Guide*, with its self-translations according to monoalphabetic code among other monstrosities; Farrell himself then sliced and diced along with Tristan Tzara’s manifesti in Kate Fagan’s cento “Dadabase”; or the “parlous state of despair” in which we find Jessica L. Wilkinson’s *marionette: a biography of miss marion davis* — smudged, struckthrough, redacted, and watermarked à la Susan Howe — in keeping with the actress’s films on 35mm reels in the UCLA film archive that inspired it. And pre-dating them all, Laurie Duggan’s *The Ash Range*, a two-hundred-fifty-page “documentary poem” of Gippsland in rural Victoria, harvests verbatim material from scores of personal journals of nineteenth-century pioneers and newspaper articles. These are but some of the “strange shapes bred from this/forsaken wilderness,” as Louis Armand puts it, with the help of Blake’s *Urizen*, in “Realism. Four Preludes.”

To the “divine mistake[s]” of Edwards’s (mis)translational poetics, we can add John Kinsella’s “distractions” upon Dante (*The Divine Comedy: Journeys through a Regional Geography*), Edmund Burke (*Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful*), and Thoreau’s *Walden (Jam Tree Gully: Poems)*. The spectrum of such poetics extends to those who blur the translational and the citational, such as John Tranter in his computer-aided mashups in *Different Hands* and his more recent “terminals,” like “The Anaglyph” (in which each line begins and ends with the same word as each line in Ashbery’s “Clepsydra”); his version of Rilke’s first Duino elegy begins, “If I were to throw a fit,

who/among the seven thousand starlets in Hollywood/would give a flying fuck?" The many Englishes of Melbourne clamor in π.O.'s (Pi O's) seven-hundred-plus-page *Fitzroy: The Biography*, a fast assortment of local historical figures who share the same "H'yoomen instink[s]."

It is important to note, of course, that the menagerie of Australian monsters isn't just the preserve of the "Lecte[u]rs." The Minotaur, for instance, has proved an enduring figure more broadly. We find him in "Bull-leaping," a poem from Dorothy Porter's *Crete*, whose opening line asks whether "poetry [is] a strange leftover/of Minoan bull-leaping," with "the crowd enjoying/your big sexy risk"; in Thomas W. Shapcott's "Death of the Minotaur," "trapped within his labyrinth, choked by a cord/of cheap thread that slits language out of his throat"; from Dorothy Hewett's "The Labyrinth" to Rebecca Edwards's "Birth of the Minotaur in a Public Ward," to name just a few. No wonder "small minotaur bones" turn up in Les Murray's "Walking to the Cattle Place" in *Poems Against Economics*. Fred Boettcher, of Murray's *Fredy Neptune*, is monstrous in two ways: as an Australian of German heritage during the First World War ("Weird, how German Yank talk is:/Hamburger and fresh, all over and auto and dumb./They live half in translation"), and as someone who loses all sense of touch after witnessing Armenian women being burned alive in Trabzon, a Pliny-esque creation befitting the century.

The deadly box jellyfish is given the voice of her mytho-scientific monicker in Sarah Holland-Batt's "Medusa": "See how my mind skates,/vain and clear as melting ice./It contracts with a heart's pulse:/selfish, selfish." The recent "Monster (o.2 Reloaded)" by Samuel Wagan Watson (of Munaldjali and Birri Gubba ancestry) provides a virulent comment on race in Australia, whose speaker is a "Frankenstein of the Dreamtime," with "reanimated flesh that once sang natural song-lines" but now "thinking black is a thought crime." All manner of "GM leaks" ("nano bees," "fluorescent foxes," bonsai gum trees) light up Lisa Jacobson's sparky sci-fi verse novel, *The Sunlit Zone*, whose designer embryos result in unforeseen mutations. These Australian monsters can speak to each other across different poetics in strange ways, too: L.K. Holt's *Man Wolf Man* brings Goya's monstrosity, with "every horror a new eyehole/for you to focus"; "big bad wolf mask(s)" make up the title sequence of Toby Fitch's Orphic inkblots in *Rawshock*, while "Wolves are Swarms" in Astrid Lorange's swarm theory poetics:

I just said: population vegetating under the sun
I just said: Bohr was not “too” anxious
I just said: I am a swarm of impressions
I just said: this is a suite of dirty little wolves.

Australian poetry harbors more monsters than Pliny the Elder could poke a stick at, and it undoubtedly finds itself at home with a radical recombinant poetics that is by turns (mis)translational, heteronymous, and even cannibalistic, in the way of Hannibal Lecter[u]r.

The cannibal poet may be a self-negating monster — “on Creation’s holiday,” this is celebrated. Perceiving that poetry in Australia would come to work through a tension between the poet and its negation, Wright, in her essay “Australian Poetry after Pearl Harbor,” writes:

Poetry contains all the possibilities. If we are due for a takeover of “anti-poetry,” this is only a necessary criticism of the Symbolist-Romantic style; not a denial of the past but a new development of it. Somebody remarked not long ago that inside every poet there is an anti-poet and inside every anti-poet a poet.

The self-negating figure of the poet of any stripe is a strange kind of *mixtumque genus*: the poet “monsters” silence, and is monstered by it in return.