

Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language

Volume 8
Issue 1 *Landscape: Heritage*

Article 15

March 2018

Hyde Park, Perth

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Independent Writer

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Recommended Citation

Tognini, R. (2018). Hyde Park, Perth. *Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*, 8(1).

Retrieved from <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/landscapes/vol8/iss1/15>

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Hyde Park, Perth

Rita Tognini (Independent Writer, Perth, WA)

(i)

Now a zoo of trees
each plot of ground a cage.
Here jacaranda, palm and oak,
there conifer and lime,
willow, plane and flame.
And with horizontal boles
anchored by python roots
an avenue of fig.

Before the wetland was smoothed to lawns
and ornamented with flower beds,
this was 'Third Swamp'.

After the river changed course
this place became Boodjamooling,
waterhole and meeting ground.
Here Nyoongar camped,
wove reed huts, fished
for gilgie and tortoise,
listened to the wind
in the melaleucas,
sang the children their history.

(ii)

A babushka and her brood
are here most mornings.
She leads,

they follow her calls
rich in accents
of Smolensk or Minsk.
Her youngest lopes
beside her. Infant
in the body of a man,
he speaks a language
only she– and birds–
understand.

Two women pace here,
arm in arm
beneath the branches.
One is tall and spare,
the other half her height.
*'E non prende u straccio per pulire,*¹
I hear the tall one say.
*'Lo credo,*² her friend replies.
Then counsels,
*'Se Dio lo vuole, lasciala.'*³

Here man and child
circle a flowerbed.
Giddy with bloom, the boy
breaks from father's orbit
chases ducks to water.
The father watches
sees his Nyoongar seed

¹ And she doesn't pick up a rag to clean.

² I believe it.

³ If it's God's will, let her be.

hard and dry in the boy,
waiting for fire
to scorch it to growth.

(iii)

A corps de ballet of boughs
poised over water,
a greenhouse of birds.

Ducks stretch grey-tipped wings,
mallards nod emerald heads,
lard-white geese make greasy calls,
coots and moorhens
scuttle to undergrowth,
pelicans feed with gravitas
and black swans preen the air
with scarlet bills.

Here– landscape and memory
experience and tradition
text and translation.

Boodjamooling was this place.