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Land whisperings and a poetics of newplace and birthplace

Glenly R. Phillips

Edith Cowan University

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LAND WHISPERS AND
A POETICS OF NEWPLACE AND BIRTHPLACE

Glen R E Phillips
BEd (Hons), MEd.

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
PhD (Writing)

Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University

February, 2006
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

The creative component of this doctoral submission, entitled *Land Whisperings*, comprises a selection of seventy-five poems, ten short stories and a novella. The connecting theme of this body of work is the emphasis on the landscapes of three continents: Australia, my birthplace, Italy, my wife Rita Tognini’s birthplace, and China, where I have visited and taught for many years. These locations have also been the subject of substantial research and field experience over the past four years. Since I am an Australian, there is a natural predominance of Australian settings for the poetry and short stories. The selected creative works also demonstrate differences between writing about a birthland as place, opposed to foreign landscapes and cultures that have been ‘adopted’.

In the accompanying essay or exegesis I have explained that significant progress in environmental consciousness in our society has taken place (instructed by the immense growth in ecological studies and debate around the world) over the past forty years. Therefore, it is this body of theory that I claim to inform my writing and thinking today. Consequently, I make a case for including ecocriticism as a vital area of a Writing Theory.

The subsequent chapters also deal with aspects of contemporary writing theory and practice relevant to my recent work. However, the references to current environmental or landscape awareness (including both rural and urban aspects) are fundamental to my concern to offer landscape as a privileged setting for poetry and prose. I have based my advocacy on several decades of growth of interdisciplinary ecological studies overseas and their application within literary studies, specifically under the ecocriticism label, in particular referring to the work of Glotfelty, Fromm, Gifford and Kinsella.
I demonstrate my concept of landscape as palimpsest, following Bachelard's interest in how important formative places are in instilling in us an attachment to a chosen place—or a place that has chosen us—in a range of configurations of the 'Palimpsest of Place'.

I refer to palimpsest as a re-written page, with the previous story or images almost entirely erased. Works of landscape art (including, of course, literary works) necessarily erase wholly or partially the representations of previous renditions, always repainting, as it were, the canvas.

Apart from Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, I refer to Lefebvre, Deleuze, Summers and Casey, among others. The two vital concepts of place and space constitute for me a forward strategy for the artist working with an environmental specialisation. Of course, 'landscape' itself is a construct, a mental projection. Yet that mental construct is actually what we are dealing with in thinking about, talking about or representing a landscape. So we effectively become complicit in the destruction of environment as we base creative work on it.

I argue that the artist or writer not only re-writes other former artistic depictions of the landscape as some sort of freeze-frame interpretation but, at the same time, erases part of these previous works. What is more, he or she also can change or influence the landscape itself by presenting the 'new' work to readers or viewers and thus encouraging changes in society's attitudes to the modification of that landscape. This shows another face of the palimpsestic process—the page that is erased (whether paper, papyrus, vellum or bark) has itself been subject to man the tool maker, the creator of his own 'metaoptical' art media as well as being a transformer, a re-writer of his living environments.
I have also argued creative written work should be consciously respected by authors (and writing teachers and their students) as being an integral part of the whole printing and publishing process, thus implying a necessary interdisciplinarity in related educational programs. The preparation and composition of major creative works of student writers are underpinned by ‘research’ activities just as intensive, challenging and valid as those of students in other disciplines. Research funding sources need to recognise the legitimacy of creative work and its research outcomes need to be supported through to their publication or other means of dissemination.

From case studies of two publishers, I have raised my awareness of the local (if limited) context in which to submit my own poetry and prose fiction for publication. This was a first step in confirming its ‘publishable standard’.

The doctoral presentation as a whole should be seen as a substantial collection of poetry and prose fiction informed by the accompanying essay. Above all it demonstrates landscape as a generative force for the artist and advocates ‘earth loving’ as embodied in its landscape ‘whisperings’.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible for poets or fiction writers to offer complete and (in that sense) adequate acknowledgment of their debts to the support groups on whom they rely. I cannot trace all the influences, which have cumulatively produced several hundred poems, some two-dozen short stories and a novella over the past four years. Additionally, for my critical studies, there are just too many colleagues as well as distinguished theoreticians and commentators to whom I am consciously or unconsciously deeply indebted for me to offer an inclusive formal list. I do have a duty to nominate some individuals but in doing so assert that the support so acknowledged in no way implies that the body of submitted creative and critical work is not entirely my own.

Naturally enough, first in order of mention are my supervisors, Professor Andrew Taylor (my first principal supervisor) and Associate Professor Jill Narey (as the full-time staff member) who took over this role when Professor Taylor was forced to retire due to sudden ill health. Now as Emeritus Professor of Edith Cowan University, Professor Taylor fortunately has been able to continue as my second supervisor and to help see me through to the final stages of my candidacy. These two colleagues and friends of many years standing have continued to give generous and enthusiastic support to my labours and to voice reassurances of their confidence throughout my four years of toil. I also take this opportunity to thank two former Deans of the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences, Professors Susan Holland and Bill Louden who first suggested that I should take up the higher degree program following my retirement from active teaching at Edith Cowan University. I also thank my Head of School Professor Graham McKay who has been supportive at all times.
Colleagues at the International Centre for Language and Landscape, where I have worked now for nearly eight years are also owed a debt of gratitude, especially my fellow ICLL Principals and the members of the Centre’s Board. The activities of the Centre, especially its colloquia and conferences, its field trips and Visiting Fellows program, have helped me to unearth contemporary concerns in eco-theory and practice which have much informed my thinking and writing for this project.

I hasten to mention my family’s support, especially my wife Rita Tognini, who has proofread most of my work and tolerated my endless writerly preoccupation and absences on field trips. My daughter Perdita Phillips, an environmental artist, has read much of my work and provided greatly needed insights into environmental and aesthetic theory and accompanied me on many of my fieldwork excursions. Both my wife and my daughter are currently enrolled in PhD programs so the time they gave to my project was all the more valued.

Deserving unreserved thanks are my many friends among the writers of Australia and overseas. Fellow writing students Bronwyn Thomason, Helen Hagemann, Lucas North, Frances Macaulay, Sharron Quayle and Andrew Burke have met with me on a regular basis to review each other’s ‘works in progress’ and I have been able to read many examples of my draft manuscripts at events organised by all the local writers centres. Also I have been invited regularly by Dr Ffion Murphy to read poetry and stories at the ‘Lunchlines’ programs conducted by our Faculty for students. Dr Murphy has also kindly proofread much of my manuscript for the project. Samantha Hutton and Tina Haralambakis checked and proofed individual manuscripts for me.
British poets Esther Morgan and Anne Born, US poet and environmental scientist Madeline Ostrander, Indian Doctoral student Divya Anand (who first introduced me to ecocritical theory), Indian poet and fiction writer Anuradha Shyam, Italian poet Giulia Grazi and Italian-Rumanian fiction author and academic Gabriela Dragnea have all provided feedback on specific poems and theoretical issues related to my exegesis. Australian authors Dominique Hecq, Les Murray, Heather Nimmo, Nigel Gray, Sally Clarke and Joyce Parkes were also kind enough to read some manuscripts and provide comment. In China, Professors Lu Le and Ye Sheng Nian have helped with similar responses and with my research in that country. Three of my Shanghai academic colleagues, Liu Pingping, Zhou Zhongfei and Jiang Hua have been kind enough to read much of the poetry and prose, particularly the work actually set in China, and to give me valuable responses.

However, my real mentors and exemplars are, of course, two writers who have really shared my preoccupations with the West Australian Wheatbelt, Dr Barbara York Main and Dr J V Kinsella. Over the past four years the latter has been extensively involved with local and overseas academic and writing careers (especially at Churchill College, Cambridge, and at Kenyon College, Ohio), while the former continues her nationally significant biological research at the University of Western Australia.

My research on Western Australian publishers was made possible by the kind cooperation of Professor Richard Nile (Curtin University Press) Dr Jenny Gregory (University of WA Press) and Mr Clive Newman (Fremantle Art Centre Press).
Others, as well as many referred to above, who provided me with information, ideas and inspiration are listed in the ‘References and Works Consulted’ section of the accompanying essay, ‘A Poetics of Newplace and Birthplace’.

I acknowledge typing and clerical assistance from the School of International, Cultural and Community Studies, in particular from Janice Bryant and Shirley Stacey and the final formatting of the manuscript carried out by Caroline Horobin.

Finally, I owe my greatest thanks to the three environments, which have provided me with both inspiration and authentic settings. I was able to appropriate each of them in turn for my created characters in my poems and stories. Only through the peopling of space and place have I been privileged to speak to my readers. Thank you, Australia, Italy and China, you have shown me, as Katharine Susannah Prichard put it, the way to be your earth lover.

Glen R E Phillips

February, 2006.
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Part II

A Poetics of Newplace and Birthplace
INTRODUCTION

Newplace and Birthplace
General Preface

The title of this Essay, 'A Poetics of Newplace and Birthplace', reflects the integration of the usual two aspects of such a candidature in Australia today. On the one hand, I have presented a selection of the poetry and prose fiction composed for the program and reflecting responses to my 'own' and 'foreign' environments, while on the other hand these have been contextualised with reference to certain critical and environmental theorists, foremost among whom would be Gaston Bachelard, David Summers, Edward S Casey, Terry Gifford and a whole group of figures within the emergent Eco-critical movement in the United States and Britain. Additionally, I want to bring to notice the not inconsiderable contributions of some home-grown landscape theorists, who have influenced my recent thinking and creative work. Among them I might mention at this stage George Seddon, Barbara York Main, Stephen Muecke, John Kinsella and Rod Giblett.

The original title for this Essay derived from the first short story completed early in the project. 'Rock Dragons', as it was called, refers to a type of highly mobile lizard (amphibolarus ornatus), which inhabits the granite domes or monoliths. These are a key signifier in my birthplace Western Australian landscape. These prominent rocky peaks are remainders of the pre-cambrian granites underpinning the westernmost portions of Gondwanaland, the ancient continent from which the modern landmass of Australia has evolved. I decided that a more appropriate title would be: 'A Poetics of Newplace and Birthplace', since the poetry and prose fiction are focussed not only on Australia but my two 'adopted' countries, Italy and China.
Research in my home landscapes has been a life-long process but a particular episode some twenty years ago instigated serious study for me. A research grant for 1991 enabled a comparison of artistic responses to the Western Australian ‘Wheatbelt’ landscapes and the central Italian province of Tuscany. This was to be done in conjunction with photographers, cinematographers and a visual artist, the painter Judith Dinham. Supplementary to this university project I commenced work on another collaborative project with Judith Dinham, to produce twelve half-hour public television educational programs entitled *Landscape and You*. This second landscape project involved a comparison of my Western Australian Wheatbelt landscapes with the Murchison district east of Mount Magnet, some 600 kilometres to the north. I undertook extensive research in the many areas which constitute the Wheatbelt, starting from my birthplace of Southern Cross and stretching west to Mukinbudin and south-east to Lake Grace, all being towns where I lived as a child. Clearly, I have significant roots in this region. My heaviest concentration was on the vast Avon River catchment area, roughly the size of Tasmania, where my maternal grandfather pioneered his East Beverley wheat farming property. My mother was born in Beverley and raised in this district, which is called Bally Bally, at the foot of Quajabin Peak, one of the highest points in the area. As a young high school teacher I was based in the town of Northam, some sixty kilometres to the north. The last years of my primary schooling were at Pingelly, about thirty kilometres south of my grandfather’s farm.

Sharing my Australian birthplace landscape in my poetry and fiction are two other countries to which I have formed strong attachments. Italy became known to me when, in the mid nineteen seventies, I first accompanied my Italian-born wife to reconnect with her cultural origins in alpine Lombardy. This helped discover for me not only this part of Italy, the Valtellina, but many other regions throughout the mainland and Sicily.
In 1980 and again in 1991, I carried out study programs in both Umbria and Tuscany. The former was principally fulfilling an Italian Government Scholarship to study the Italian language and the latter was the university funded ‘active research’ project on ‘landscape learning’ and subsequent external studies MA course entitled *Landscape and You*. On each occasion I spent six months or more in the regions. Follow-up research visits for my creative writing have been made at regular intervals ever since, including during the completion of this PhD program. These visits also helped maintain and extend my knowledge of Italian culture and language. Hence I would claim that substantial selections of the prose fiction and poetry (three of the short stories, including ‘The Lie’, set in Sicily, and poems such as ‘Incidente Stradale’ and ‘Terra Etrusca’) in my ‘Land Whisperings’ collection, reflect my engagement with Italian landscapes. In chapters Two and Three, I will deal in more detail with why such an ‘adopted’ landscape, in my view, illuminates the essential contrast between the way one responds to a ‘birth’ landscape, and then to an ‘adopted’ landscape. Italy represents an accessible source of important elements (particularly Roman and classical Greek) in my cultural heritage of Western Civilization. I illustrate how my selected Italian landscapes have vividly confirmed those important links, which certainly do exist despite the geographical remoteness of my Australian birthplace.

The second of my adopted landscapes is the Peoples Republic of China. I first visited China twenty years ago, and it is a country where I have taught and travelled for extended periods and have revisited regularly, especially in the last four years. China also provided my third incentive to learn a foreign language and, though I have been minimally successful in that respect, I have travelled extensively in many parts of the country and made particular studies of the south-east province of Guangdong and the central east coastal region of Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces (including Greater
Shanghai). Once again, the selection of this country as an appropriate region to compare with Australia and Italy was not an arbitrary one. Mandarin has the world’s largest number of first language speakers and is the only real rival to English as the most spoken language in the world. In terms of landscape, China was one that did not have significant association with my own cultural origins and therefore, hopefully, would provide a possible opportunity to observe how a writer finds new means to construct responses to an unfamiliar non-Western culture and a new landscape.

Back in Australia, in the mid 1990s, once more I began to visit the Wheatbelt, this time with Dr Barbara York Main, distinguished entomologist and ecologist from the University of Western Australia. She has been largely responsible for my scientific education in this region. This was the beginning of a new series of field studies that culminated in the field research done for some of my most recent writing.

Over the past few years I have undertaken further intensive and extensive travels, usually in the company of a fellow writer in all the areas of the Wheatbelt that have become familiar to me in my lifetime and which have been detailed above. I have made detailed audio recordings of conversations and observations resulting from these travels and have also put together a comprehensive photographic and video record of these journeys. I have studied most of the local histories of these Wheatbelt shires. Several years ago I also began work with British poet Anne Born on a collaborative comparison of the granitic zones of Western Australia and that of South Devon. This involved mutual exchange visits to each other’s territories and much research into geology and human use of granite over the centuries. The fauna and flora of areas such as Dartmoor and Western Australian granitic monoliths (monadnocks) such as Walga Rock and Yorkrakine Rock have been examined in the field and researched in the scientific
journals and books on granite eco-systems, such as the ‘Granite Outcrops Symposium’ number of the Journal of the Royal Society of WA (1997), Ian Bayly’s Rock of Ages (1999) and Life on the Rocks by Nikulinsky and Hopper (1999). These studies have been of particular value to my project by adding a great deal of depth to my knowledge of my Western Australian homeland.

The other recent field trips that have formed part of my PhD research on the Australian landscapes deserve some mention. In the spring of 2004, in conjunction with the International Centre for Landscape and Language at Edith Cowan University, I undertook a four-day field trip north of Kalgoorlie to study Lake Ballard, site of British artist Antony Gormley’s 2002 Perth International Arts Festival mammoth sculpture project. This consists of 51 stainless steel life-size statues of the residents of the small desert town of Menzies. The figures are each set in concrete at various points spread all over the vast surface salt of the lake. One major poem, ‘Visitants: a tribute to Anthony Gormley’, is included in the poetry collection.

The second trip took place in July 2005 when I travelled by road with my daughter (an environmental artist) more than 3000 kilometres, from Kununurra in the northeast Kimberley region to Perth via the Pilbara and the Murchison regions. This journey, which I documented, gave me a comprehensive and continuous image of my home state, a context and backdrop for my former intense and relatively confined study of the Wheatbelt landscapes. The trip did result in a major work of poetry, ‘Kimberley Quartet’, which was added to the ‘Land Whisperings’ collection.
In November 2005 I made my most recent research journey. This was a part-research/part-pilgrimage to Nanjing, formerly the capital of the Republic of China (from 1910 until 1949). In December of 1937 the invading Japanese Imperial Army massacred 300,000 defenceless men, women and children in this city—more than the combined numbers killed by the atomic bombs at Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. I wanted to see this recovered city’s memorials and its museums to the victims of the massacre. I also wished to meet the Director of the Nanjing Normal University’s Centre for the Study of the Nanjing Massacre, Professor Zhang Lianhong, about his Centre’s recent researches and publications. My motive was primarily to gain some assistance in grasping the extent and lasting influence on the people of Nanjing of this terrible event. I intend that the sequel to the novella Afterwards will be partly set in Nanjing. I also wanted to see a historic urban landscape in its recovered state, as a contrast to some other landscapes visited in China, Italy and Australia.

**Introduction to the Creative Component**

As briefly noted previously, ‘Land Whisperings’ comprises a selection of the poetry and prose fiction created over the four years of my candidature. Three collections of poetry with landscape emphasis were the basis for the final poetry choice, of some 75 poems in three groups of 25 viz., ‘Shanghai Suite, ‘Granite Matters and other Sinologies’ and ‘Fire, Ash and Palimpsest’.

The first group, ‘Shanghai Suite and other Sinologies’ consists of selections from the poems written during residencies, teaching exchanges and research trips mostly to two
different areas in China. Guangdong Province is situated in the south-east adjacent to Hongkong and I have been visiting and working in the city of Guangzhou (formerly Canton) since 1986. The other region which I also know well and which I have visited for months at a time over the past two years is the central east coast (Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces) and especially the cities of Shanghai, Hangzhou and Nanjing. The majority of the poems in this section come from a 28-poem sequence *Shanghai Suite* that I wrote while teaching at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology in the spring of 2004. The poems composed during this period clearly demonstrate that it was the landscape, or I should say the ‘cityscape’ of this immense metropolis, one of the greatest of the modern world, that had become my preoccupation. Perhaps it was totally antipathetic to the rural landscapes, which had previously been my predominant interest. And because Shanghai landscapes are essentially a ‘built’ environment, man-made landscapes, the human presences in those city landscapes also play a larger, more significant part in this group of my poems.

‘Granites Matter’ is a collection of poems honouring the remnant landscapes of western Gondwanaland, the primeval continent from which (as noted previously) most of Australia was formed. Huge rafts of granitic rock constitute the basic continental masses of the planet, together with some later basalt extrusions and lava flows. But the oldest of the world’s granites can be found in Western Australia. While engaged in dialogues with Devonshire poet Anne Born, I became interested in the history of the human uses of granite in South West England. Anne lives close to the great Dartmoor monolith. I then went on to look at the human use of the much older granites of south western Australia. Incidentally, we found a nineteenth-century connection between Dartmoor and our southwest: the Irish patriot, poet and American public hero, John Boyle O’Reilly, was transported as a convict from Dartmoor to Fremantle with a group of
other Fenians as political prisoners of the British. No doubt he had ample time to note
the predominance of granite in the two countries while breaking stones! Many of my
granite poems have arisen from field trips to the dozens of Great Western Plateau
granite domes which are glacial remains, therefore, standing high above the gently
rolling country of the local Wheatbelt.

The final selection, ‘Fire, Ash and Palimpsest’, was written in Australia and Italy and
explores disparities between the encultured and multi-layered landscapes of the latter
and the wilder Western Australian environments which have also been subject to human
alteration, massive ones in many cases, but only in recent times. Such degradation from
wind and water erosion and salination are the negative effects of monocultures like
wheat farming... and can be compared to the degradation of landscapes caused by grazing
animals or strip mining or open cut mining for minerals. The Italian landscapes, on the
other hand, range from the harshness of Sicily to the relative fecundity of Tuscany or
the towering glaciated slopes of the Valtellina. Therefore, it is not surprising that this
part of the poetry selections has more contrasts than the other two groups.

The longest prose work is *Afterwards*, a novella in three parts. It is set in Shanghai in
the year 1931. As explained previously, it tells of an Englishman working in a merchant
bank in the British Concession, who, while coming home one morning with his fiancée
from an all night dance party, discovers the body of a young Chinese woman in a boat
floating in Soochow Creek. There is a certain intertextualising with Tennyson’s *The
Lady of Shalott*, but this is a murder mystery as well as a romantic tale. The novella’s
subplot explores significant shifts in cultural attitudes that the protagonist undergoes as
a result of a series of traumatic experiences culminating in the Japanese attack on the
Chinese quarter of Shanghai.

The inclusion of the novella *Afterwards* was not my original intention, which was to
concentrate on short stories of traditional length. However, I decided that it would be
appropriate to include the novella, which had virtually created itself spontaneously
during the candidacy, as an unexpected extension of the range of my writing. It also led
me to do some research on that genre and I am indebted to Dr J Van Loon’s
unpublished PhD exegesis submission, entitled ‘Narrative Strategies in the Novella: 1984-2004’ (Van Loon, 2004), Curtin University of Technology. My novella *Afterwards* concentrates on a specific zone of Shanghai city and events covering a very
short span of time leading up to the first Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1931. I have
also incorporated other important features of a novella. An extra quality of
‘obsessiveness’ not so intense in the average novel is also imparted by my partial use of
the ‘murder mystery’ fictional form. The story commences with the discovery of the
corpse and then the exploration of suspects and motives. The lone protagonist,
particularly as a distanced subject, is often characteristic of the novella form, according
to Dr Van Loon. So my central character, Frederic, the transplanted British bank clerk,
who believes he must solve the murder case, is more or less a cultural isolate, a subject
who grows more and more ‘distanced’ as the novella proceeds. He is distanced from his
own English culture, but within the cosmopolitan culture of pre-war Shanghai, he also
begins to ‘go native’ (another species of obsession?) and therefore will come perilously
close to finding himself isolated between Western and Eastern cultures, ultimately
unacceptable to either. The Japanese attack, which anticipated that nation’s alignment
with Nazi Germany in asserting joint world denomination, and the Nanjing massacre in
late 1937, is an ironic foretaste of the perilous cultural bridge which Frederic believes
love is leading him to cross. Because this is intended to be the first novella in a series of three, many of the challenges of achieving multiculturism are intentionally left unresolved.

The final ten short story selections are grouped under the title ‘Rock Dragons’, named after the initial story that I completed. As the first of the twenty-five and subsequently having been accepted for publication I decided it was inappropriate to include it. All the 25 stories are listed with brief details in Appendix I. In addition to demonstrating a range of narrative points of view they also embody a series of ‘experiments’ with classic story types, viz. rite of passage (bildungsroman), quest, love story, nursery story, murder mystery, epic journey, rescue mission and revenge. All such varieties are represented in the chosen ten stories.

I had taught short fiction as a literary mode for more than forty years and this had provided a good opportunity to examine many of the best stories the world has produced. But my insights into the real process of writing short fiction did not seriously begin until four years ago when I began to write my own stories. Fortunately, from the late 1960s onwards I began to mix with Australian writers themselves through membership of the Australian Society of Authors and the Fellowship of Australian writers, especially those authors associated with Tom Collins House. This brought me into contact with some of Australia’s best and, although counting myself only as a poet, I did meet, interview and in many cases count as friends, such exceptional story-telling talents as Peter Cowan, Tom Hungerford, Mary Durack, Donald Stuart, Justina Williams, Dorothy Hewett, Nicholas Hasluck and Joan London. Sadly I was too late then to meet Katharine Susannah Prichard or Gavin Casey, even though their fiction work is, in my view, amongst the best of its kind ever written in Australia.
I have gained huge benefits from admiring the published perfection of Chinese short stories such as those by Lu Xun and Bao Dun and the tales of Italian authors such as Moravia and Calvino, but somehow it was those local authors who accepted me as a fellow writer who radically changed my attitude to narrative fiction. I was seeing the text of a story from the creator’s point of view, rather than from the consumer’s. I soon realised that, as a teacher of literature, I was not only a particular consumer of their creative output but was being comparatively much better paid to be so.

Maybe that is why I held off so long before taking up my artisanship as a writer of short fiction. I am referring to that ‘blacksmith’s craft’ that Eliot alluded to in thanking Pound for his editing of The Waste Land. So I count these friendships with living writers and the insights they willingly gave me to be of as much or more worth than all the theory I could ever read. In my acknowledgments I also have made some mention of this. One more thing: few periods of art have flourished unless the creators were not only well-informed in contemporary theory (scientific, cultural or political) but were excited by it and were trying to write in response to it, or to embody it in some way in what they wrote. My own theoretical interests will be enlarged upon in later chapters.

So to the final short story selections: three Italian stories were chosen to represent a range of environmental locations and also narrative points of view. From Agrigento on the southern coast of Sicily we move to central Tuscany outside Siena and finally east to Urbino, birthplace of the painter Raphael, in the Marche region. The first, ‘The Lie’, was an exercise in trying first to start composing a story in Italian and then translate it almost simultaneously into English. The purpose was to embody some of the rhythms of
the language in the narrative tone. Additionally, I wanted to try to match the landscape and culture more accurately by thinking of it in the same language its inhabitants might have used to ‘learn’ that landscape over the centuries. Of course that ‘language’ has varied from the first indigenous languages to Greek and Roman and, finally, to the Sicilian dialects (with some modern Italian amongst it) today—not to forget influences from the Spanish and Norman conquests; and of Arabic intrusions. The final language in which most locals will read of this region might well be the elegance of the Nobel Prize winning poet, Salvatore Quasimodo. Or even more likely, the richly ironic Sicilian dialogue of that highly popular contemporary Italian detective television series, ‘Inspector Montalbano’, which has a cult following, even in Australia.

In my case it had to be the Italian language as I had learned it, mostly at Perugia and in Florence, where I studied on an Italian government scholarship in the early 1980s. It was at that time I first visited Sicily and saw the imposing Greek temple ruins of Agrigento and the elemental landscapes celebrated by Lampadusa and Quasimodo.

‘On Monte Amiata’ is the second of my selected Italian stories and is set in a small village outside Siena. I had in mind the remarkable walled town of Monteriggioni and it is from here this story becomes linked to the extinct volcanic peak of Monte Amiata, now a winter ski resort. It is situated about half way between Siena and Lago di Bolsena in southern Tuscany. The story, much of it ‘recalled’ by the protagonist, ranges through this area to Arezzo in the east, back to the Crete country and then south to San Quirico d'Orcia, then to the ancient mineral spa of Bagno Vignone and finally, by way of Castiglione, to Monte Amiata.
The third story, ‘The School of Urbino’, in this Italian group is set beyond the Alpi della Luna and towards the Adriatic coast. Urbino is a beautiful old hilltop city, hometown of the incomparable Raphael and noted also for some of the greatest paintings of Piero della Francesca. Of course the title ironically reflects one of Raphael’s most famous paintings, *The School of Athens*, since the main event of the story is a gathering of academics. At the beginning of the 1980s, Italy suffered the violence of the Red Brigades and even the lives of reclusive academics in such incredibly beautifully preserved renaissance surroundings as Urbino were not beyond their reach. But the real interloper, the roughly slouching beast suddenly to emerge in Urbino at the academic conference, is an aspiring poet and minor academic from Tasmania. His life is ripe for change.

Two of the three selected Chinese short stories are set in the south-eastern province of Guangdong, while the third centres on the capital, Beijing. The first of them, ‘Just a Pair of Old Shoes’, makes the reader aware of several well-known Chinese assumptions: there is nowhere to hide once your sins begin to be revealed; no matter how briefly you serve as a teacher, you hold that responsibility to your pupils until the end of your life; and, even if the tree ceases to sway, it doesn’t mean the wind has died down. This late 1970s story is set in lush tropical China at a southern campus for foreign language studies, a composite of the many at which I have been a guest lecturer or poetry reader in past times. My story is influenced by some of the modern Chinese authors. The style that consummate prose fiction writers like Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Zhang Xianliang, Gu Hua, Ha Jin and Gao Xingjian employ uses a narrative simplicity, while embedding deeply ironic and politically allusive details of which their protagonists usually seem unaware. Mao Dun’s ‘The Shop of the Lin Family’ and Lu Xun’s ‘The True Story of
Ah Q' are early examples of this style and Nobel Prize-winning Gao Xing Jian's *Soul Mountain* or Ha Jin's *In the Pond* have more or less continued this tradition.

The second story, 'Fugitive', takes place at least ten years after the first, in the year following the painful events of the Tiananmen student uprisings in Beijing in 1989. The situation is that of a so-called 'foreign expert', an Australian university lecturer brought in to teach in English at an institute for foreign studies. Foreign language institutes were highly selective in their intakes of students and consequently were keen that the best graduates would be competent enough in their second languages to pursue higher degree studies in overseas countries. They were expected to come back and make a valued contribution to the advance of the Chinese nation. This policy initiated by the late Zhou Enlai was actually a modified version of one that had operated through the late Qing Dynasty and the first republic. Back then, promising young Chinese scholars were despatched to study in the USA, in particular, but also to Europe, and ultimately did provide some of the most able of the country's political leaders and public officials in China's earlier era of modernisation. In the 1980s, China was happier to bring the foreign language experts into their own country so that their students could model their speaking of the foreign languages on the expertise of these native speakers from abroad. However, this story introduces some aspects of cultural challenges created by the policy and complicates it with references to the outlawed democracy movement and the authoritarian aftermaths felt by some Chinese universities following 1989.

The third of the China stories is set in very different landscapes, in and about Beijing, the post-1949 northern capital city (formerly known in the West as Peking). 'Happy New Year' tells of a young couple in a group of Australian tourists on an inaugural winter visit to see the city of Beijing, the Great Wall and other well-known tourist
places. This story is set about midway in time between the other two. It is the period of China’s cautious emergence from being a very controlled society to the brave new world of individual enterprise and ‘open door’ attitudes to both foreign investment and foreign technology, all presided over by the benevolent Deng Xiaoping. The point of the story, amongst other lesser matters, is that the tourists always remain culturally isolated, despite the constant diversions of their holiday, so that they are unaware of the greatness of the aspirations towards more freedom and change, which are in fact becoming apparent. The earnest attempts to respect the Western New Year celebrations on the part of a disgraced democracy supporter and ex-university lecturer/tour guide therefore pass unnoticed. The irony of the contrast between the New Year as celebrated by the partying tourists and the ‘real’ celebrations, which characterise a Chinese New Year event at the end of each January, are implied. Cautious (and risky) overtures of their Beijing tour guide towards his newly found Australian heroes of a democratic foreign nation are also wasted on these tourists.

To complete the prose fiction selections, there are four Australian stories selected from fifteen that I have written during my candidacy. Two are set in the Wheatbelt area of south-western Australia. The most recently written of these, ‘Salty Jerusalem’, is ostensibly a present day story in the area known locally as the ‘Great Southern’, but the story recalls certain earlier racist incidents that might have occurred in a little rural town prior to the Second World War. The next story, ‘Like Rabbits’, takes place in the northern Wheatbelt, about a decade after the First World War. The farms in this small community included land sold or granted to ‘returned soldiers’ who often found they lived at subsistence level, battling drought, rabbit plagues and the limitations of choosing a farming monoculture subject to the vagaries of the world wheat markets. Additionally, the clearing of marginal land with poor soils to set up these farms was an
ecological disaster because, after the removal of the indigenous vegetation, salination, water and wind erosion often became insurmountable problems for the once hopeful settlers. This story implies some kind of natural punishment for the area's loss of fecundity resulting from these land settlement policies. It is also in part a fable about the killing of wildlife, including the deep-seated feral instincts inherited by all creatures, including men and women. 'Hunting the Qualup Bell', the third of this trio of bush stories, really takes place on the south coast of Western Australia, a traditional holiday destination for many farmers from the Wheatbelt. Set in the mid-nineteen fifties, the story depicts early stirrings of ecological awareness in what was at that time an environment scarcely invaded by resort development. The protagonist is something of an amateur botanist, intent on studying rare plant species in one of the richest and most biologically diverse plant environments in the world. As the portrait of a hunter, it shows us a man who is changed after unusual experiences alone in isolated landscapes. In some ways his pursuit of the wildflower becomes secondary to other serious alterations in his life's direction.

The final story in the Australian group moves to a city environment and possibly presents less 'typical' Australians than those encountered in the previous stories. The key character in the story is a young married woman who, as a child, survived her Sino-Vietnamese family's perilous escape by boat from the conflicts in her Vietnamese homeland. Their fortunate safe arrival on the north-west coast of Australia led, however, to unexpected further suffering when they were incarcerated in a variety of refugee camps in Darwin and Sydney. This woman survived her experience of diaspora to become an Australian citizen and to complete a university education. In the process of working her way through university she has supported herself by part-time work in a supermarket in a typically multi-cultural area of the city. Here she experiences a first
intercultural romance (of a kind) before settling down to a somewhat self-congratulatory suburban existence with a husband of her own culture. Yet, looking back on her life, she is aware that she has emerged partially from her family’s ethnic background. Ironically, her first romance had been with a representative of an earlier migration or diaspora that had helped break the Anglo-Celtic domination of Australian settlement. The December 2005 racial tensions in Sydney have reminded us of earlier confrontations, going back to the Chinese miners during the gold rushes of the 1850s, or the Western Australian goldfields riots in Kalgoorlie in the 1930s, when people and property suffered extreme violence. In a way, I also use this story to retrace the diasporic movements into Australia.

The creative component of this submission, in summary, comprises a substantial collection of poetry (some seventy-five poems in all) but also offers a collection of ten short stories and a novella. The connecting theme of this body of work is the emphasis on the landscapes of the three continents. As explained, these locations have been the subject of my substantial research and field experience especially over the past four years. However, since my birthland is Australia, there is a natural predominance of Australian settings for the poetry and the prose.

**Introduction to the Theoretical Issues**

There are certain emerging theoretical issues of landscape or environment that have engendered several decades of recent debate. These are integral to my work and are developed in the main chapters of this essay. One general idea has predominated in my
own poetry and fiction writing, as well as in my critical thinking: how do we as humans 'learn' the landscape into which we are normally born and which in mental or physical terms still constitutes a 'survival challenge' of a quite basic kind? And how does 'language', that seven league boot of human communication, relate to our ability to 'learn' landscapes? Furthermore, we may ask, is the 'learning' of new landscapes during each person's lifetime (especially for artists and writers) a greater or lesser challenge than, for example, second language learning for most monolingual speakers?

The other theoretical or deliberative components of the essay concern certain stylistic experiments. Briefly, the palimpsest is one trope that interested me and is reflected in a number of variations I set myself in my 'Fire, Ash and Palimpsest' group of poems. The so-called 'palimpsest' poems and the 'irregular' variations on traditional forms are examples. The former are 'written over' an existing well-known poem, which has been partly or almost wholly removed and then overlaid by the 'new' poem. Another self-imposed challenge was creating unique forms, including free verse patterned poems. An example of 'original' form, involving very tight stylistic 'rules', is my 'settina', and for the special free verse forms, the 'irregular' versions of certain traditional or classical forms, such as my 'irregular sonnet' sequences. A wide range of experiments with rhyming and metrical combinations is included and in some poems I try combining two languages. The latter poems were not merely experiments, of course, but were written in response to problems of depicting encultured landscape in which landforms and the language to express them have become inextricably interwoven. This may be seen in some of the Italian poems (such as 'Monteriggioni' and 'Night of the Falling Stars') and in 'He Pointed out Hai’an Road' and 'Prometheus Bound' among the Chinese ones. The exploration of repetitive motifs, such as 'granite' and the development of narrative
structures for the ‘longer poem’ (as in ‘Fourteen Stations to Southern Cross’, also with its New Testament motif) are aspects of other works.

The four main chapters of this Essay deal with aspects of contemporary writing theory or practice relevant to my recent work. The references to current landscape or environmental awareness (including both rural and urban aspects) are fundamental to my concern to offer landscape as a privileged setting for poetry and prose. With the future of life in all its diversity on this planet now at risk because of our ignorance or indifference to the exploitation of energy and agricultural resources, I don’t imagine the emphasis requires defence.

The first of these chapters asserts the applicability of contemporary eco-theory to my prose and poetry writing. I deal especially with recent American theories of eco-criticism and the comparatively recent British rethinking of the traditional pastoral mode in literature. My second chapter considers ‘configurations of the palimpsest of place’, especially in relation to Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (Bachelard, 1964).

The third chapter goes on to develop some of my own theories and those of David Summers and Edward Casey regarding ecologically responsible landscape writing, and so is entitled, ‘Palimpsest to Palliative Care’. The fifth chapter is an attempt to place the work of the ‘author’ in the context of the claimed interdisciplinarity involved in the creation of written work, together with the ‘printer’ and the ‘publisher’ of it. Since it is a requirement of a writing higher degree study that it be of ‘a publishable standard’, I researched the production houses most immediately available for the publication of creative and theoretical work in Western Australia. The case studies included in this chapter throw light on the future of our local publishing industry and the education and training of all who contribute to it. In my view, this provides a broader context to the
works I generated within the academic institution during my candidacy. Nevertheless, the intent of writing them ultimately has to be publication, and so readers have to be found with whom to share them.

A brief conclusion completes this Essay and reviews the theoretical assumptions outlined previously and which are embodied in the creative component of this submission of work.
CHAPTER 1

RELEVANCE OF ECOCRITICISM THEORY TO WRITING PRACTICE
If writing is to put bread in a writer's mouth, it seems to me that those taking up writing, especially in universities and academies, ought to have some awareness both of the strategies adopted by most working writers and the areas of contemporary theoretical discussion that are central to writing as a calling. In this chapter I will consider in particular what are some appropriate areas of literary theory (or 'writing theory' as writing teachers are now more and more prepared to call it), which have been most helpful to me over the years I have worked on my current project.

Those who have tried to live from their writing alone know how the focus on craft sharpens if your words go out into the world to feed your family's waiting mouths. On the one hand, it produces journalism and copywriting, on the other, it energises the novelist, dramatist, scriptwriter, song, lyric and that aberrant threatened species, the poet. In between are all those who otherwise put the written word to work: reviewer speechwriters, public-relations professionals and creative non-fiction authors. No, I am not suggesting yet another binary fallacy. What I mean to say is merely that the market for one’s work as a writer must never entirely slip out of view and at the same time one has an obligation at least to be aware of the theoretical discourse relevant to one’s profession.

My recent experiences teaching in China, teaching literature in English there, confirm what I long ago discovered about the market for highly literary writing. Whenever I tried probing for some awareness among students or Chinese academics of the existence of Australian literature, the response usually went along these lines:
'Oh yes,' they would smile, their eyes lighting up in recognition, 'the Aussie *Thornbirds*, a wonderful book. And we saw the film three times.' So why is this somewhat of a chastening experience for me as an Australian Literature academic? The feature on Colleen McCullough in the 2004 November 13 'Review' supplement to *The Weekend Australian* provided most of the answers about her best-seller status. And no doubt she is deservedly gleeful. Bryce Courtney and the late Morris West might well give an echoing chuckle, if a ghostly one in the latter case.

My opening gambit here is to underline an essential difference between teaching a writing course and teaching a literature course in our universities and TAFE institutions. The academicisation of writing courses (like the potentially baleful influence of rigid rules in a visual art academy) is something many a writer or writing teacher has resisted. The looming danger in this process has often been the body of literary theory (and specifically post-modernist theory), which has reared its head over the happy rowers in the 'lake district' of writing schools like the accusing mountain loomed over the young Will Wordsworth on Lake Windermere in his account of it in Book I of *The Prelude*, lines 357-400 (Wordsworth, 1928).

Paul Dawson, in his excellent PhD thesis, 'Building a Garret in the Ivory Tower: English Studies and the Discipline of Creative Writing' (incidentally, now published), quite properly suggests that writing teachers in the USA and Australia were merely fostering 'a pre-professional training ground for artists dedicated to their craft' (Dawson, 2001), partly to resist the presence of any study of literary theory for the would-be writing practitioner. Others around the world and in Australia (Kevin Brophy), for example, in *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing* (Brophy, 1998)) have argued cogently for a body of theory specially selected for
teaching writing. Here, they say, the student ought to be somewhat preoccupied with thinking like the creator of text rather than the reader or consumer of text. Since the energies of the new theorists in the last thirty years have grandly defended the rights of the reader, it is claimed by the proponents of a ‘Writing Theory’ that it is time to look again at theory which can inform and enrich the creation of prose fiction or non-fiction, all kinds of scripts and that lunatic fringe of writing we call poetry (well, some people regard us as moon burners).

In the course of evolving myself into a post-graduate writing student (who never had the luxury of finding a creative writing course to undertake in an Australian university during my undergraduate years), I have become even more convinced that it is essential to be qualified in appropriate theory to teach writing students. And I include in this judgment courses I established myself from the 1980s onwards. I did resist at first the need for the writing teacher to be much engaged in theory and instead sent off the students to study literary theory along with the literature students. I was surprised, however, to find how positively they were taking aboard this theory, especially postmodernism in all its highly technical manifestations. That is not to say that those writing students hadn’t initially resisted and gritted their teeth to pass the required literature units merely because they were a compulsory component of their degrees.

But the adequacy of this ‘default’ approach became acutely questionable when I began working on my own PhD in the new (for me) field of prose fiction. My deferred and anticipated pleasure to indulge at last in being a teller of tales, rather than cavorting always within the enclosed space of poems, was soon tempered by my lack of engagement with appropriate theory. I had not then found anything I thought appropriate to support my particular fascination with landscape and environment in the
stories I was writing. Fortunately this search was eventually fruitful and proved essential for preparing this accompanying Essay.

Let me explain in more specific detail. When I set out to prepare my collection of landscape-oriented short stories and poetry set in the three selected countries, I hoped I could find points of connection between landscape and existing post-modernist literary theory. Yet I lacked a sense of urgency and energy, which would render the acquisition of that body of theory a whole lot more than a chore or an act of submission to literary, if not political, correctness. For me some time back two things changed all that, initially at least.

The first of these was the discovery of the work of a new poet who, rejecting the old Australian flirtations with Western pastoralism, or even ‘anti-pastoralism’, had gone much further to what may be called a radical post pastoralism stance in basing poems in the very same wheat belt locales in Western Australia. As I have already made clear, these landscapes have been my life-long fascination. John Kinsella is that poet and he, of course, had ‘tuned-in’, ‘dropped out’ and re-emerged by the end of the 1980s with the considerable blessing of international theorists as (to a degree at least) a supporter of what we now call eco-theory or, sometimes, ecocriticism (with or without hyphenation). The second manifestation of change for me was the establishment of the International Centre for Landscape and Language five years ago in Perth at the Edith Cowan University. The instigators, apart from me, were John Kinsella and Andrew Taylor, my fellow professors who agreed the time was ripe to embark on an interdisciplinary approach to environmental consciousness that nevertheless would be led by the three of us, being poets who have a strong leaning towards landscape, and who also were then keenly involved in teaching writing in tertiary institutions.
Since that time there has been more and more evidence of similar initiatives in Australia and elsewhere in the area of eco-theory. These are generally linked to writing, literary studies and visual arts, always, of course, associated with geography, environmental sciences and Australian studies generally. The eco-tours that our Landscape Centre instituted as the WILD courses for overseas students are only one initiative. Australian national conferences on environment, the sense of place, the beach and the poetics of Australian space have been held in increasing numbers in the last few years. Curtin University has instituted a unit in environmental writing and likewise the University of Queensland. Others, for example Griffith University, have successful courses in creative non-fiction, which place great emphasis on what might be called ‘nature writing’. So it seems even more appropriate that my area of theory to explore in this Essay should be in that area of ‘writing theory’ focussed on eco-theory and ecocriticism.

The strong emergence of environmental influences on literature and writing teaching came to my notice, happily for me, about half-way through my current research when I was talking to a visiting PhD scholar from an Indian university. This was at a literary conference in Perth, when environmentalism was being discussed. Ms Divya Anand provided a helpful bibliography which encouraged my interest in environmentally conscious literature and the emergent theoretical area of Ecocriticism. I also happened at that time to be about to commence supervising an MA candidate from a university in Shanghai, who was also needing a body of theory to support a critical analysis of Kinsella’s successful collection *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony* (Kinsella, 1995). I will return to that student’s project in a later chapter. But by then, I had an even more urgent need to explore this area of eco-theory. So, although Ecocriticism emerged strongly in the USA in the mid nineteen nineties, and had its genesis through most of the eighties, I
had not been aware of how vigorously it operated as a sub-discipline. Evidently, I had also not been aware that Ecocriticism already had a very significant following outside of Australia.

While in China and India for the greater part of first semester 2004, I was busily building up my own reading list in Ecocriticism. Subsequently I obtained copies of the very useful *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1995). The two editors teach and research at the University of Nevada and were involved in establishing the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment which has a most informative website at: <www.asle.umn.edu>

Another extremely useful source-book proved to be Englishman Terry Gifford's *Pastoral* (Gifford, 1999). Besides providing his own account of the evolution of the 'pastoral' mode in literature up to the present (emphasising English literature, of course), Gifford also traces its counter-response of 'antipastoralism'. In his final chapter, however, he introduces a third concept, 'post-pastoralism', as he calls it, and argues for his six criteria for detecting what is really a latter day consciousness of environmental concerns. Shortly I will look at some of his definitions of the above three categorisations, but I will also look at the definitions of 'ecocriticism' provided in Glotfelty's and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader*.

My third primary source of theory is not a work of literary criticism but comes from the area of visual art. It is David Summers' *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (Summers, 2003). His second chapter on 'Places' and his seventh chapter on 'The conditions of Western modernism' with his theory of 'metaopticality'
seem to me to relate very cogently to Writing Theory and the representation in prose and poetry of special ecocritically sensitive attributes such as ‘landscape’. Finally, I was able to read Edward Casey’s *The Fate of Place* (Casey, 1997) and *Getting Back into Place* (Casey, 1997) which also provided necessary background on the history of ‘place’ and ‘space’ in Western philosophy.

Next I want to clarify what I mean by ‘a Writing Theory’ as opposed to ‘a Literary Theory’ and offer some argument as to why I think ecocriticism is an essential component of the former. As previously mentioned, Kevin Brophy’s *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing* (Brophy, 1998) was for me one of the first Australian books to provoke us to think profoundly upon how we go about teaching in such a relatively new tertiary studies field as Writing (or Creative Writing). It was perfectly natural, then, for him to publish *Explorations in Creative Writing* (Brophy, 2003), a reference work for teachers of creative writing. It is not so much a work of theory as the report of a gifted writing teacher thinking aloud and profoundly about writing and the teaching of it as a profession. It is writing theory but not in the tradition of the ‘tractus’ or assembled body of theory such as might be expected from a Derrida, Deleuze, Barthes or Bakhtin. On the other hand, that is not to say the Post-Modernist ‘greats’ in the field of literary criticism cannot be highly relevant to the writer. An author may be coming from an obsession with the creation of text as opposed to the reading of it, but most writers do desire to have a highly developed sense of what it is like to be a reader or part of a readership. Here one would argue also for the relevance, in part at least, of Lefebvre, Bachelard, Shrader-Frechette or Aldo Leopold, not to mention the ‘deep ecologists’. In our own backyard, Paul Carter, Stephen Muecke, George Seddon, Barbara York Main and Rod Giblett provide plenty to think about for
aspiring young writing teachers (and writers). The ‘List of Works Consulted’ at the end of this exegesis indicates certain of their relevant works.

The essence of a ‘writing theory’ is that it does take the point of view of the creator of text, as I said before. What that certainly means is to consider the extent to which the writer as artist is a channel for social, political and historical influences, just as it has been an important preoccupation of contemporary literary criticism. However, most writing teachers would not regard the author as dead, deconstructed or even comatose. Unless you were teaching a unit in automatic writing you would probably assume the writer is able to exercise some freedom of will. Most believe that insofar as anyone, even a postmodernist critic, is responsible for his or her own actions; in terms of content and stylistic decisions or the perfecting of techniques, the writer does contribute to the created work. Therefore, examining what these skills are and, if and how they might be learned, is an area that should be as susceptible to theorising and experiment that is of no less sophistication than any other area of human endeavour. Similarly, one would suppose that a ‘writing theory’ would lead writing students to all kinds of considerations about the dialectical or non-dialectical generation of the ideas or beliefs that become the content of written texts.

One genre or area of writing, which has established itself as significantly content based, is creative non-fiction. Although I have argued against creating a category for what has happily existed without such identification for as long as there has been writing, I now welcome the label for this specialisation because it clearly demonstrates a fact about the writing processes normally labelled as ‘creative’. You cannot write such creative non-fiction without research, I mean field research (even if supported by scientific study), since much of the early work of this kind was concerned with environment and human
interactions with it. In fact I believe you can't write much creatively, even poetry, without a great deal of public or personal research. This is perhaps the most overlooked aspect of the writing process on the part of literary critics and even some writing teachers. It suited some of them in the past to perpetuate the myth that writing fiction, poetry or drama is almost one hundred percent of an internal diamond mining process where all the diamonds are found ready cut and polished (and perhaps also fabulously mounted as well).

No doubt successful and feted authors don't necessarily want to disabuse their reading publics of their belief in the supposed effortlessness of the art of composition. They don't want readers to peek at them in the midst of their toil since it has been a long tradition in art to keep the sweaty part of it under wraps. The effortless tossing of pearls to the not so swinish punters is indeed a tempting image of the dilettante writer of literary creations that might be described as 'high art'. Nevertheless, research of one kind or another (whether it has been collected as autobiographic experience), is fundamental to a writer's continuous output. Writing schools increasingly teach this, despite the one-time condemnation of working journalists, who did and still do face research as occupying the largest proportion of their working lives as writers.

The authors of 'creative non-fiction' in their pursuit of the kind of richly factual detail their readers most enjoy is what leads me to my own particular interest: writing about landscape and environment. In this I share a huge interdisciplinary support area from the burgeoning of eco-theory through the 1990s into this new century. With publication of books such as The Ecocriticism Reader, there has been a very great opportunity for a new area within Writing Theory to be linked, in a non-oppositional way of course, with existing and future Literary Theory.
Since the 1950s, when E M Forster, I A Richards and 'practical criticism' virtually reigned supreme, Literary Theory has, of course, gained in respectability by leaps and bounds and eventually achieved its thousand plateaux. A 'Writing Theory' for the new course areas of Writing in our universities, for us the new wave of the nineties, is now developing strongly. Apart from Kevin Brophy's contributions, Nigel Krauth and Tess Brady are currently editing a book of essays precisely to fill the need for a textbook on this topic.

Now that we have left behind the year 2005, I certainly would not expect the above response to my promoting (as a component of Writing Theory) such a well known area of theory as Ecocriticism, well established in America for more than a decade. The first use of the term 'ecocriticism' as a methodology for reading literature is attributed to William Rueckert, who coined it in his 1978 essay, 'Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism' (Rueckert, 1978, p 71). There are other terms, which have had their currency too: 'antipastoralism', 'ecopoetics' and 'green cultural studies', for example. It was Donald Worster (The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination, 1993) who put the case for an interdisciplinary act of responsibility in raising consciousness about the increasing possibility of humans completely destroying the Earth's ecosystems:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function...it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help the understanding.' (Worster, 1993, p 27)
In her extremely scholarly work, *Environmental Ethics* (Schrader-Frechette, 1981), Professor Kristin Shrader-Frechette warned that solving environmental problems requires both time and a major revision of our ideas on ethical behaviour:

If environmental degradation was purely, or even primarily, a problem demanding scientific or technological solutions, then its problems would probably have been accomplished by now.’ (Schrader-Frechette, 1981, p 58).

She went on to say, ‘Our crises reflect profound difficulties with some of the most basic principles in our accepted system of values.’ Shrader-Frechette also proposed that human beings needed to discover ‘new ways to behave ethically or to be a “moral person”.’

Once the ecocriticism movement was underway, the leaders, such as Cheryl Burgess (now Glotfelty), by their advocacy and their actual teaching of literary studies as ecocriticism, were soon presiding over a series of stages similar to those followed by feminist criticism and, later, post-colonial criticism. The common link we can see is that the building of an awareness that environment has become an ‘other’ in our consumer societies as effectively as the female gender or the colonised indigines were similarly marginalised. You can follow a parallel progression in ecotheory to that which occurred in the rise of major bodies of theory. At first (as Cheryl Glotfelty explains it, (Glotfelty, 1996, pp xxii-xxiv) there is the revelation (or exposure) of how literature distorts or ignores the environment or ‘nature’ in the way it is presented in the literary ‘masterpieces’. The next stage is the zealous establishment of an accredited list of the worshipful brothers and sisters, the stalwarts of the new theoretical school (ie
identifying the originators such as Gilbert White, Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Barry Lopez, Terry Gifford, Simon Schama and George Seddon—to remind ourselves finally of an Australian contributor. Following this stage there is the application of the new critical structures and techniques to contemporary and classical literary works—in America this included Adrienne Rich, Gary Snyder and Ursula Le Guin; in Britain, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney; and, in Australia, Les Murray, Tim Flannery and, more recently, John Kinsella. The final stage of the process (as identified by Elaine Showalter, in describing the evolution of feminist theory) is the truly ‘theoretical’ evolution. Here the new area of theory finds links with respectable theoreticians such as Bakhtin, Derrida or Deleuze. Offshoots can develop, as with ecofeminism and deep ecology and other completely new areas, such as Gifford’s ‘post-pastoralism’. Glotfelty has claimed, ‘By 1993...ecological literary study had emerged as a recognizable (sic) critical school’ (Glotfelty, 1996, p xviii)

To conclude, I have set out in this chapter to make a case for including ecocriticism as a vital area of a Writing Theory. I have based my advocacy on several decades of growth of interdisciplinary ecological studies overseas and their application within literary studies, specifically under the ecocriticism label. I do allow that Terry Gifford’s concept of ‘post pastoralism’ is an alternative and valid approach, coming as it does more out of European and British traditions of the classic pastoral mode, tempered by post-renaissance dialectical rationalism:

‘We need a post-pastoral literature that will help us undertake that dialectical experience [of pastoral versus anti-pastoral] and how we can take responsibility for it.’ (Gifford, 1999, p 174)
In my own writing as a poet (and latterly in prose fiction) I can see that what I wrote in 1964 or 1984 and what I write now, at least two decades later, clearly demonstrates that, like it or not, a significant progress in environmental consciousness has taken place, instructed by the immense growth in ecological studies and debate around the world over the past forty years. Therefore, it is this body of theory that, I claim, should inform my writing and thinking today.
CHAPTER 2

Configurations of the Palimpsest of Place

...the profound reality of all the subtle shadings of our attachment of a chosen spot.

Gaston Bachelard
I wandered into the Railway Hotel’s front bar. It was three o’clock on a weekday. The air that floats heavily at this time of the afternoon lingered over damp beer mats and stained jarrah wood. When all is said and done, what are we here for? I said that to the barman, Steve. But just then a host of Japanese tourists burst in, cameras swinging, plimsoles squeaking. Outside, their tour bus stood beside the lake. Steve couldn’t even answer me, so busy drawing beers and searching for ice. Their tour guide, fluttering and darting about tried to explain what each desired while I just leaned on my elbow, ears full of continuous babble of their baffling tongue. I thought to myself, it’s like when you walk past bee hives. With a wave and a twinkle in his eye, Steve spoke to me over bobbing heads: How’s this, boyo? Better I serve ‘em here than when they stretched that railway towards Burma. At least this time I’m making a buck! But I’d had enough. Stepped along the parquetry past them and out into the street.

The heat from the tar road hit me as the easterly blew ten thousand head of wild oats in a devil dance. I pulled my bike from shade of the york gums that were tossing their heads in that breeze, which could turn to a willy-willy in an instant, launch scrap paper and whip the waves up over the salt lakes. I threw a leg across the saddle and pushed that ancient grid until I out-did myself, whizzing past the Co-op and Roads Board towards my little spot, the “jwb & i” by the creek.

A poet once said, ‘How is it that you live and what is it you do?’ Well, my answer in such a case would be, ‘Yet still I persevere.’ Entering my gate I propped the Malvern Star on a post. I gazed at my vegie patch, now pretty dry, and said, what wealth that gave me all of winter and spring! It was true I’d daily stripped my vines of beans and tomatoes for oft my garden seemed to grow obsessed, as if to bury me in plenitude of sprout and leaf and tuber. In vacant lots you sometimes see this frenzy with weeds that cannot seem to abide a square foot of bare ground. They flash their instincts, stomata reckless to the sun.

I went into the cooler dark of the closed up house, which is my refuge now in this part of my life. I had the day’s paper to spread out on the oilcloth.
and then I'd make a strong pot of tea and reach
for one of my favourite books, "The Prelude" maybe. Light weaves
and dances through the flapping window blind. Peculiar grace.

I began with this palimpsest of mine to test recognition that one of the most familiar
landscape poems in the English language lay partly erased below the Australian
landscape depicted here.

My earliest formative years spent in the inner Wheatbelt pretty well insulated me from
the then emerging or emerged Australian modern art movements and their supporting
culture of the nineteen thirties, forties and early fifties. Small towns did have a rough
and ready aesthetic, led by a few zealous souls but, apart from my grandfather’s
predilection for the Bulletin’s Pink Pages, and a calendar print in the farmhouse kitchen
of McCubbin’s famous painting Down on his Luck, I wasn’t really caught up in ‘higher
culture’. At elementary school we relied for our cultural education on the graduates of
the State teacher training college, and their role seemed to be that of a species of
middle-class cultural filter. And a pretty anally retentive one at that. The clergy of the
town stuck closely to their scripts and rituals, which for all we knew might well have
been from another planet in terms of relevance to Australian bush life. Books of any
kind were not in abundance for children then. It was post-Great Depression genteel
poverty all around, and certainly things did not improve in the wartime years. Every
substantial publication of blotter-like paper had a printed notice assuring it complied
with wartime economies.

To be brief, I would claim that our rural education during those years was obsessed with
economic survival and the war effort. Such cultural heritage as we were exposed to
carried us (a bit like the protégés of Mary Poppins) in a parabola leading straight back to
England and Europe. The poems and songs we learned were almost without exception from a distant Victorian era. The accounts of the good deeds of the British Empire (and friends) were part of a gospel. The images were, when not earnestly salutary (in the *Hard Times* sense), pleasantly decorative in vaguely pre-Raphaelite fashion, or owing much to William Morris's by then dated enthusiasms.

As I emerged from this background, wanting to become any sort of writer, a poet even, I believed that I had to clear a space in this dusty cultural underlay (as may be discernible in poems I will quote later), so I could respond to the interior and exterior spaces of my Australian environments. To set aside what our community thought of as ART and indulge in creation of my own art seemed to me like partially rubbing away a stained glass image on a window to see outside another world lying beyond. In my case these 'windows' principally seemed to have had interior decorators from the 'mother country' as it was still called. So any consciousness of Australian landscape was always a palimpsest to some degree.

Dorothy Hewett had an upbringing, which bore many similarities to mine, both in physical isolation and the above acculturation process, which was filtered by the education system (in her case initially the correspondence ‘School of the Air’). Since she was some fourteen years my senior and was sent to an elite boarding school in the city before the Second World War, I don’t want to strain the comparison (Hewett, 1990). My point is that, like many rurally educated Australians of those times, we had to make an extraordinary mental gymnastic leap to reconcile our everyday Australian outback spaces (with which we were bonding) with our distant cultural heritage, presented as a kind of parallel universe.
Listening on the radio in those days to the Argonauts program (including people like Alec Hope in disguise) accentuated the problem, in a way opposite to today's impact where enormous volumes of Australian and other electronic global images of cultural spaces come flooding into families. Back then, the American and British domination of the movie houses denied us even cinematic models of Australian artistic responses to Australian space.

During the World War we were fascinated (or obsessed) with warfare as all pre-pubescent boys seem hot-wired to be, but we saw our Australian nationalism presented as Aussie soldiers in the context of other people's wars in other people's lands. Thinking of the current war in Iraq, I suppose little has changed. But this ever-present shadow of war rather maintained the puzzle of reconciling the inherited cultural sense of place with the space we lived in then. I remember very well the day our seventh grade teacher (a young returned RAAF pilot) suggested we go out of the classroom and draw any tree in the dusty school grounds. Up to that time, unless helping with farm work chores on the farms of relatives, or being taken on a rare hunting trip, we went from home to school and returned to the house as domestic refuge. In Bachelard's terms it was to do with the 'intimacy of the refuge' (Bachelard, 1964, p 14), but this was somewhat accentuated by its being wartime. There were black- or brown-out curtains each night. Streetlights and car lights were dimmed or switched off. Japanese invasion was not just a theoretical prospect.

Children respond, as Dorothy Hewett has told in her work (Hewett, 1990, p 7), by trying to create their own poetic inner spaces. These were partly to erase or modify elements of the external environment that did not accord with what our imported cultural conditioning dictated. It now seems strange that the cultural trappings of Arthurian
chivalry and romantic aspirations of class obsessed minor British public schools were what often prompted creative enactments of our imaginative spaces within the safety of house, garden or school room.

To return to my first lesson in drawing from nature. I was amazed that it was possible to be approved to draw an actual tree and not to have to make it resemble an oak or an elm. Thank God for that lemon-scented gum. Soon I was borrowing my elder brother’s box of watercolours when he returned from technical school. I walked miles, painting every kind of road verge or bush paddock I could find. This was some kind of affirmative experience that had implanted itself, like an invasion of an imaginative virus. And also thank God for that desire to draw or paint the environment, because it became a sizeable enough habit to survive until the time I went to high school and university (where Australian studies of literature or art, if they existed, were definitely extra curricular and confined to offerings by eccentric Austrophiles among the docenti). I remember one particular lecture entitled, ‘The Regrettable Absence Of Nightingales In Australian Poetry’.

Now I have finished this admittedly autobiographical position statement I want to re-contextualise my argument in a more deliberate way. I came across a most interesting essay by Steven Muecke some time back, in the Fall 2003 issue of The Kenyon Review. In part he says:

‘The consciousness of a society and of what has become our memory (and it is not that far removed from the present), is vehicled by popular forms, as these codes and forces are articulated with a logic, not of causality, but with a more poetic logic of interval, movement, and the multiplicity of layers folding over each other in a heterotopic and variable space’ (Muecke, 2003, ‘A Landscape of Variability’, p.297/98).
Muecke is, of course, responding here, in part, to Bachelard’s interest in ‘phenomenology of space’ as mentioned in his ‘Introduction’ to The Poetics of Space. Muecke’s response prompted a line of thought I had been developing: ‘landscape palimpsest’, a notion of mine that when invaders, settlers or those migrating to new lands come harbouring a measure of ignorance of new landscapes and, either in fearing to become the iconic ‘lost children’ of settlers, or even lost explorers, they try to ‘re-write’ or ‘re-draw’ and certainly rename these unfamiliar environments, to accord with the inherited cultural mapping which they bring with them from their ‘old world’. There used still to be atlases even in the 1940s that had strange brown clouds drawn upon certain wilderness areas of Africa, South America, the Antarctic and Central Australia, representing unexplored places—the ‘other’ that conveniently erased what was there until Euro-centric Western Culture should inscribe this supposed tabula rasa.

I alluded to the situation of the ‘post-colonial’ adoptee of a territory (not to ignore the violent seizure of the land by forebears) earlier, when talking about my upbringing in the South West. What I refer to is the birth bonding with a rural environment or landscape even by a person whose cultural history is still largely an inheritance from a completely different part of the world. This nevertheless can be powerful and life-long in effect.

Unfortunately, because our inherited impediments in the form of cultural ‘displacement’ from the ‘old world’, people like me have little prospect of seeing our Australian birth landscapes other than as a ‘manuscript on which an earlier text has been significantly effaced’. In the second place, another text is the fifty-thousand years of reading of the landscape and making dance, song and story of it, which was the achievement of the Indigenous Australian people. Slowly the settler-invaders have improved their own
understanding of that environment with the aid of some elements of Aboriginal culture, and not insignificantly, as a result of the flowering of Aboriginal writing, with the support of such important agencies as Magabala Press in Broome. Peter Read’s essay in the 2004 October issue of *The Australian Book Review*, “A Haunted Land No Longer?” (Read, 2004, p 41) discussed this change at length.

There are of course, lots of previous examples of theorists linking the idea of the palimpsest with landscape. Some of these occur in areas such as in genetics, physical and cultural geography, astronomy (*Memphis Facula* ice crater on Jupiter’s *Ganymede* is an example) and in historical studies. In literature, Thomas Love Peacock, writing in the nineteenth century of “The Palimpsest of the Human Brain”, saw analogies between a document ‘cleansed and re-inscribed’ and the process of human remembering.

A hundred years later, in the poem “Palimpsest of Twilight” (1916), D.H. Lawrence saw twilight as a time when a transition could occur in which the text of day underwent partial defacement:

...litter of day
Is gone from sight

(Lawrence, 1916, p 72)

In 1922, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, borrowing Vico’s cyclic theories of history, depicts the European civilisation’s great cities rising and falling in a way that anticipated the concept of ‘the city as palimpsest’. Even Freud had some interest in applying the palimpsest to psychoanalytic theory and, no doubt, modern-day sleep therapists could see the essential processes of renewal during the brain’s sleep modes as a parallel with an event like the disappearance and re-emergence last century of the precious rediscovered Archimedes palimpsest text. (Freud, 1961, pp 16-17).
But returning to landscape, no doubt we could trace elements of the palimpsest as a particular theory through Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Deleuze and Guattari. It is well known that both Marx and Bergson supported the idea of a continual obliteration and renewal. The Gestaltists no doubt saw a process of cognitive mapping and remapping as a key to understanding human behaviour. And, as Stephen Meucke claims in his Kenyon Review article, ‘Gaston Bachelard finds his phenomenology of space in poetic emergence, images without casualty on history,’ (Muecke, 2003, p. 297). He is again referring to the Introduction to The Poetics of Space, and it is in the act of writing poetry that there is much of the palimpsest.

The landscape poet, or the poet writing in the landscape (and I am here separating such a writer from those more pre-occupied with satire and social poetry, the poetry of manners, or other poetry genres) is certainly concerned with the poetics of space, or more particularly, place. As George Seddon once observed, ‘we have the word “timely” but there is no equivalent “placely”’. And he also said that ‘a sense of place is basic to civilisation’. (Seddon, 1972, p 262).

When I was a relatively uncivilised four-year-old I became obsessed with borrowing my mother’s straw broom (the one used outside the house) and taking it into the saltbush and mallee trying to sweep paths through the bush. In a poem written relatively early in my efforts to become a poet, I think I was really re-imposing on that partially erased bush place of my pre-school years, some of the subsequent transplanted culture of my euro-centric origins:
I went up to the hospital first in the milk cart.
The horse trotted, the cart jigged, the milk sloshed:
the milkman made a noise for the horse with his tongue.

I went to the church and we sat in the backroom;
there were long benches where we rolled plasticene;
we made crosses of the reddish brown sticks of clay.

We learned the story of the man they killed once
and were given treasured sticky pictures of another world.
These we carried carefully homeward where the Easter lilies bloomed.

We walked a long way past the salt lake;
our feet in borrowed shoes crushed the samphire clumps;
we went over the hills 'til a bull or a white horse frightened us.

The storm blew the dust from the showground;
it blew across the yard just before the rain came.
The water in the lake rose to meet the salt wind from the sea.

Sap rose in the delicate fringed trees
and the manna gum poured out like wounds.
Light over the salt lake blossomed in a gold haze.

Later, bonfires shone in the early summer dusk.
I saw the whirring halos of the Catherine wheels
and turning back, entered the dark empty house.

We stood in postholes hewn in the red clay
our heads below the surface of the ancient land.
After our game we clambered out to light.
And Christmas came.

In more recent years, after spending deliberate periods of study of landscapes outside of my birth country, I have written in the following poem of those childhood times when one of our obsessions was sweeping clean paths through the bush. This time the metaphoric palimpsest relates to the street sweeper traditions in Italy and China, which I
had observed with interest in both countries over the years. The difference between the
two poems is, I hope, an illustration of the progress made by me over some 35 years as
an observer of landscape, and on the part of somebody whose Anglo-Celtic culture does
not originally derive from that landscape. So, first I unknowingly erased much of what
the Indigenous observer is aware of and then began a re-building, still inevitably
borrowing a great deal from my cultural origins but also discovering new information
about the landscape and also learning more and more from the indigenous culture. An
example of this was the first time I saw an exhibition of watercolour paintings by
Aboriginal boys from one of the old Christian mission ‘schools’, Carrolup, in the Great
Southern Wheatbelt. Their eye for the detail of the plant and animal life that I had
thought I knew well was a revelation. More recently their work has been again
celebrated after the rediscovery in America of paintings last seen in the early 1950s.

The successive ‘layers’ or palimpsests of the poet are a form of rewriting just as an
image is reworked in a ‘photo-impression’ computer program as a series of altered
layers until the final form is achieved. As Bachelard supposes, thus we introduce what
could be called ‘originality’ to the created landscape poem, as in the following:

SWEEPING MY PATHS OF LEAVES
(for Fei-fei)

when I think of the misty early mornings
years ago in Firenze or Perugia,
Guangzhou or Xi’an, I remember
insistent whisper of sweeping
brooms in the cool pre-dawn hush.
pigeons muttered and crooned from the eaves
of the tiled roofs and their music slipped in
through the slats of the shutters
with the tireless morning sun and
the stirred motes of the street sweepers—
restless ‘spazzatori’ or ‘qing dao fu’.

they still used the old brooms then—
swatch or thatch of twigs gathered tight
on the long broom handle’s end.

that was how we made them as children
in the mallee country of the wheatbelt
of my distant west of Australia.

that was how we made them as children
when we played by the salt lake
making trails among sparse bush growth.
we swept and swept all leaves and twigs
as if we cleared the way for English nannies’
prams in some antipodean British park;

s. there in Pisa, when I went to breakfast
on a balcony, to regard below
in the piazza’s stone paved street
the sweepers move in their ‘ballo lento’.
I knew I was led to join a slow dance
from childhood paths to adulthood.

back now under banksia, hakes or gum
each new day I see more fallen leaves
to sweep clean from proud new paths;
each day new paths to extend my maps.

when I cease sweeping, will I concede
it’s the will of the paths whether to remain
free of the filtering leaves? You only
have to turn your back these days
and they’re all back again, ticking
down, proving time’s bound to pass. Only
when caressing broom is replaced
by hiss and swing of indifferent scythe
will you understand that fallen leaves
are no longer meant for the likes of me or you.

in contrast to poems written out of an intimate acquaintance with particular landscapes
there are the so-called ‘post-card’ poems. Such impressionistic works are a relatively
common kind of ‘immediate’ response by poets to landscapes visited briefly or
infrequently. Though they can offer flashes of insight and a freshness of perspective that
comes from engaging with the unfamiliar, they must always risk expressing mere novelty. Excitement and wonder are no substitutes for the stronger associations with landscape that come from one's birth country of longer acquaintance. Here is an example of one 'postcard poem' of mine that was actually printed in a postcard series I published while working on a project in Italy with Australian artist Judith Dinham:

ARRIVO

Wheeling through Tuscan hills, rounding the hollow of brown valleys, the woods leafless now.
The darkening.

In the compartment the lamp glows weak, yellow on the stained leather seats. Sleet spits on the glass.

Valdarno, and lifting of luggage. Rush of freezing air, the platforms wet, black, empty as echoes die away.

Fumbling for 'gettoni' In the harsh salon light. Confused voices, headlamps flicker. Strangers push past.

After the uneasy waiting a car slows in the icy square. Greetings break out. Pains dissipates.

Cases are loaded in. Light snow sticks to a curly head. We stoop, still half in greeting, outside, the next train slides in.

The time one spends observing landscape in places visited for a short time can be compared, perhaps, to our attempts to learn new languages. Our native language is
pretty painlessly learned both when we are at our most receptive to language acquisition and when receiving our most intensive exposure to the culture that is speaking our language. All people (except maybe the few who have a genius for new language learning) who try to acquire additional languages know that their efforts are generally rewarded with depressing levels of competency, compared to ‘native speakers’. I have theorised elsewhere that, since humans once did not have language, but did still need, as a matter of real survival, the mental potential to know their environments (and make their landscape maps in the mind) extremely well, their potential to ‘learn’ landscapes might well precede our amazing abilities to acquire and use languages. So learning your birth landscape would be an expected developmental task, reflected perhaps in the interest of some human beings in rendering landscape as visual art or in poetry. Therefore, I argue further that learning second landscapes is a second order of survival skill. Since skills can be taught or at least learned more efficiently through applying a process, it seems to follow that there would have to be additional skills related to adjusting the pre-existing mapping and imaging of the environment, which we had begun to acquire in early life. Just as we experience ‘interference’ from existing languages when we acquire new ones, and have to partly erase (at least temporarily) the old habits and vocabularies, I believe we can (and the better artists do) adjust to new landscapes by responding in new ways to them. Thus a palimpsestic process takes place.

I learned many years ago from one of the finest entomologists in Australia the value of spending time on intensive field trips in the country, which you thought you knew well. Barbara York Main is the author of several unusual books about the Wheatbelt of Western Australia but the one I prefer is Between Wodjil and Tor (York Main, 1969) which details physiographical and biological processes in a typical Wheat belt
landscape over one year. This book taught me that the process of learning to know your
‘own’ landscape is inexhaustible. As Wilf Douglas, a veteran linguist revealed in a
translation of a Wangka Mirrka-tjarra desert song, you must walk and walk your
country for your whole life. Learning and renewing is the key.

They travelled along . . .
To the Place of Honey they came
They rested and arose.
They travelled on.
To Mad Place they came and passed it.
They pressed on.
And reached Thigh Place and drank.

Again they travelled on

And came to Message Stick and turned,
They travelled north
And came to Two Daughters.
There they camped.

(a Desert Song, translated by W H Douglas in
Westralian Voices, Marian Aveling (ed), 1988)

To this end, I have embarked for the last ten years on an unusual project with a well-
Wheatbelt at different points, observing with the aid of scientific data, maps and
historical data, walking as much as we can, recording conversations, video recording
and photographing and then working later on transcribing the exchanges. Since both of
us draw upon this region as a ‘formative’ landscape essential to much, if not most, of
our ordinary writing, the process has become integrated with our own independent
writing careers. And, of course, it has resemblances to the integration of walking and
visual art, which has become a significant movement, particularly in Britain today. The
following palimpsest echoes such a field trip:
IN THE HOLLOW OF THE LAND III
(a palimpsest for Viv's boy)

This is the story of Yorkrakine Rock in the dead land of salt scalded farms. This is the story of a ruined house among cactus effigies to decayed dreams. In the land here the stone is signature to glacial aeons. Images of half a mile of ice grinding the grey granite are raised. These lovers are sheet ice and stone, they receive each other's straining embrace and melt as the supplication of this shaping of Gondwana.

A dead man's country, now. You reach a hand under warped veranda boards and see the twinkle of something in the dust. Relic of a fading star, this battered pocket watch, unstrung.

Is it like this where other granites nudge above wheat-lands? In death's delay, the salt creeps slowly up creek-beds. Other kingdoms may thrive on deep sweet flood-plains waking to spring rains and benign household gods.

Alone at the hour when night's south wind is waning we are watchful but at peace on this monolithic shield, trembling with the sheoak, kunzia and tamma bush; tenderness shared with lizard and spider and wheeling plover. Lips that would utter curse on these killing fields instead take kiss of the dawn wind. Deep brows of the riven rock form prayers untuned by civilisation's chatter. Eyes lift to broken stone of this worn enduring form.

I will conclude with some poems that have come out of undertaking the learning of 'new' landscapes in other countries. First, in Italy, I was intrigued once to notice in a small town near Siena (where I worked for about seven months) some lettering on a sign-written shopfront that was beginning to appear through the repainting and re-lettering of the wall. Eventually I was able to decipher an old Fascist slogan from the thirties or forties. I responded to this reversal of the normal palimpsestic process with the following poem, hopefully re-asserting the principles of the palimpsest
MONTERIGGIONI

On the wall of the Bar in Dante’s towered town
paint had thinned, peeled to show
slogans of il Duce there:

*If I go forward follow me!
If I falter, give me a shove!
But if I stop, then kill me!*

On the wall of the Bar the tiny craters
where the firing squad of partigiani
had sprayed a little wide of the blackshirt bodies:

*If I go forward follow me!
If I falter, give me a shove!
But if I stop, then kill me!*

These incisions had not faded
had neither been erased
nor had ghosts returned
like the painted-over slogans
to haunt this place. Time
is a cobbled street with stone walls
that run round and round a town.
And tourists gape:

*If I go forward, follow me!
If I falter, give me a shove!
But if I stop, then kill me!*

In the Alps behind Milan lie Lake Como and the Valtellina region. More than a dozen
times I have visited the area and stayed there for lengthy periods and gone on long
walks in the mountains. This is a landscape that has been inhabited by successive
conquerors including Etruscan and Celtic civilisations during just the last four thousand
years or so. Therefore, the landscape has been ‘re-written’ as palimpsest countless
times. I developed a ‘new’ kind of postcard poem for these landscapes, based on the
figure seven in certain configurations. The following is an example.
SUMMER TORRENTS

Spinedi, 1980)

Plunge ankle-deep in the clear streams across alpine-chilled stone; delicately you step past wine-dark berry barbs. taste wine past caring; then delicate stone steps lead down to more streams: clear as ever, torrents plunge

No doubt you noticed that each of the seven lines has seven syllables and that the seven headwords are repeated in reverse order as the end words.

Finally, I thought to turn to my most recent preoccupations, with Chinese landscapes. In 2004 I was living in Shanghai for a number of months and began a series of poems that I have called a ‘Shanghai Suite’. I first visited Shanghai twenty years before and the changes since then seemed staggering. This is a city that rewrites itself at a speed probably unmatched anywhere in the world. In the process, the population of greater Shanghai can now see huge swatches of former farmlands on the east side of the river and like quantities of the traditional clerestory windowed old city on the west side being cleared away each year for new building projects. This sort of civil engineering palimpsest is for me, as a would-be-poet of cityscapes, and even using the mode of poetic postcards, difficult to respond to. But here is just one of such glimpses from my ‘Shanghai Suite’, being 28 poems of that city.
BY BUBBLING WELL ROAD

If you look into this old Yangpu River
where it flows past wharf and pier,
past creek and bridge and tower,
you see in its darkness the floating weeds
the murk of muddied lanes and streets,
the spent humours of these multitudes
who have endured dynasties on these banks.

The delta’s drainage meets the ocean’s tides
and the outflow is all the ends of lives.
Nearby waits the great Yangtse’s flood

that spends its strength through highland
and gorge, tumbling from distant tributaries.

When morning’s eastward paleness lights
the pall over all these sprawling suburbs,
I think of fresh mountain streams that plunge
among the rocks and have four thousand
Yangtse miles to run. Such young torrents
have no patience for the last slack reaches
of an indolent river. Darkened waters resist
embraces of open sea; measure time’s
vast stretches which pass swiftly and forever.

In this chapter I have tried to look at a range of configurations of the ‘Palimpsest of
Place’, following Bachelard’s interest in how important formative places are in instilling
in us an attachment to a chosen place—or a place that has chosen us, in the case of a
birth land or birthplace town or even the house of childhood. Speaking as a non-
indigenous Australian I have acknowledged that I am complicit in the process of
obliterating the invaded culture’s attachments and responses to Australian landscape.
Yet I have, I hope, gone beyond merely transplanting the general Western cultural
heritage. I hope I have shown that I have made efforts to study my birth land carefully
and to learn something from indigenous culture as it has become accessible to me. The
work of writers such as Jack Davis, Kim Scott and even Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo)
ought to be acknowledged. And travelling overseas I have studied landscapes in Italy and China, which have, in turn, by providing a basis for comparison, further informed my understanding of local landscapes in Western Australia.

On a field trip conducted by the Centre for Landscape and Language at Edith Cowan University in 2004, I visited remote Lake Ballard and the 51 sculptures of Antony Gormley erected on what must have seemed to him that great tabula rasa of the salt lake. Of course it was anything but a tabula rasa. So it struck me this was actually a particularly grand site of palimpsest for an artist to choose, and part of my response is shown in this final poem, itself (I would claim) a palimpsest of sorts.

LAKE VISITANTS

(A homage to Antony Gormley)

Trying to remember the word for mirage
I walk out on the russet clay of the lake
towards forms of the fifty one who lived once in the remains of Menzies town.
Out on the flat salt the iron anti-bodies
crane sinewed limbs and look in vain
to the emptiest sky for just one bird,
their blind mute heads nodding and nodding.

One figure I see, a *mimi* manikin
who seems to stand thigh deep
in the bluest of blue water. Entranced
I pace over the red sponge of the lake's bed
seeming to see black swans, wild duck
bobbing on that shimmer of a mirage.

Then I find the fence, which had looked
flooded up to its second-most wire, is derelict
but dry. A few prone posts fallen there
like long ago prospectors perished
in search of some mythical gold reef.
So I pause here with the curved end of the rusted wire catching at my heel; obdurate march of this fence points straight to far-off scrub-lined safety of the shore. But these unstrung wires no longer hum or sing.

Still in the distance, that knee-deep figure, head held high, awaits my pilgrimage. I begin to shuffle forward, the sky still an empty lens of blue, until someone or something whispers to me. Over my shoulder? No, it seems to the right? But nothing's there. I stand mystified.

Then at my feet a faint swirl of foam surfs in on this immense brown beach. Staring down at this broken wave I see the crowd of tiny wildflower petals and winged seeds in their deep space travelling. This was that whispering sound, this dry spindrift and I notice more and more wavelets of them, rushing and swirling in their hope to cross somehow that blazing salt earth's face. The more I listen the more this hush becomes a roar of molecules in which my blood is intermingled and seems to seek to leave me and join this spheric dance. Shocked into motion I turn from the iron sentinel, mastered by mirage. Stagger all the way back, while I still have strength.
CHAPTER 3

PALIMPSEST TO PALLIATIVE CARE:

a ficto-critical proposition for the earth lover
A question I frequently ask myself is, ‘How can the contemporary artist learn to “love the earth”? ’ You might say that loving doesn’t have to be ‘learned’ for it is an instinctive response. Like the ‘red, red rose that’s newly sprung in June’, it is just a natural reaction, isn’t it? But I would argue that especially over the last two centuries human kind on this planet has manifestly demonstrated a loss of ‘natural’ love for this Earth. There are notable exceptions: the celebrated Romantic Movement, late twentieth-century environmentalists and a host of artists have tried to weigh against this earth’s vandalism. Pastoralism became a hollow shell, which, in its escapism, created false gods and distracted us from our rapaciousness and despoliation of the natural world. Anti-pastoralism, the pastoral gothic and radical pastoralism have all helped to expose and undermine the old deceit of pastoralism, especially in modern times, but frequently offer just those ruins for our contemplation, rather than a program of reform or even a palliative. Perhaps Terry Gifford is right in his forecast of ‘a reversal of focus in the elements of the pastoral’ (Gifford, 1999, p 148).

One of the founders of America’s burgeoning ecocritical movement, Lawrence Buell, said a decade ago of the movement’s purpose:

‘As this ecocentric repossess of pastoral has gathered force, its centre of energy has begun to shift from representation of nature as a theatre of human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake’ (Buell, 1955, p 32).

To me this is a statement redolent of a revival of earth love yet hovering still in the left hemisphere of the brain, the zone of logic and rhetoric, rather than the right hemisphere with its talents for ‘advocacy of nature’ through created art works. In 1932, Katharine Susannah Prichard observed in her poem ‘The Earth Lover’: 
For I am an earth child,
An earth lover,
And I ask no more than to be,
Of the earth, earthy,
And to mingle again with the divine dust.

(Grino, 1988, p 188)

If I am not wrong, Prichard’s poem is intended to create a response to the living world, which, in the act of creation (as Koestler put it), moves on from pastoral or anti-pastoral mode to reclaim the art of celebrating our earthy origins. I don’t quote these lines to suggest they are unusual or even particularly original in the tradition of romantic pantheism or even soft-hearted dialectical materialism. What I value in them is that they seem a useful prompt in moving along from the ‘waste lands’ of anti-pastoralism and the practical issues of environmentalism in a world whose ecological clock appears to be winding down at an alarming rate. Gifford describes it this way in his interesting little book, Pastoral:

‘what is needed is a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia was premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language’ (Gifford, 1999, p 149)

Gifford is hinting here, I believe, at the long reign of Arcadia as a solace that was ‘untouchable’, as in the fable of the town mouse and the country mouse. The country mouse is seduced by the sophistication and intensity of the ‘built environment’ and by the multiplicity of sensations provided by a seemingly sybaritic existence. Of course, disillusionment follows and the reverse attraction of bucolic life is promoted by the fable. Les Murray, in his A Working Forest, reminded us of what he supposed to be Greek binary opposites of the Athenian and Boeotian lifestyles, as suggested in his essay ‘On Sitting Back and Thinking about Porter’s Boeotia’. He comments, ‘we may
say that the old perennial struggle is coming to a head with Australia finding herself, very much to her surprise, to be one of the places where some sort of synthesis might at last be achieved. ' (Murray, 1995, p 122) That may be so, but the reality is that we know Arcadia is, if not already spoiled, threatened probably beyond salvation. Fortunately (and thanks to post-modernism, or 'post-modernisation' as it perhaps ought to be known), we also know that such binary opposites commit the so-called 'fallacy of the excluded middle'; and that compromise between the positive and negatives of both urban and rural environments may at least delay, if it cannot save, the planet from ecological destruction. The lesson is clear in our history – whether in the rise and fall of Central American civilisations, or North Africa and Middle-East deserts. The denuding of Lebanon of its cedars, even the self-destruction of the Easter Island culture, are object lessons. And all those things took place in the pre-nuclear warfare age!

John Kinsella's The Silo is a key text in my ecological education. Ever since it was first published in 1995 the book strongly aroused my interest. Significantly, it has gone through many editions (including one published in Bangladesh), been translated into many languages and set as a school text in at least two Australian states. It specially caught my attention because all of the poems in the book relate to the area of my birth and upbringing: the Western Australian Wheatbelt. Certainly there have been some fine Australian poets responding to these same locales, Randolph Stow and Dorothy Hewett for example, but only for a portion of their work. Kinsella, on the other hand, rarely fails to make direct connections in his poetry with this area.

In the 1960s I began writing poems about my childhood years, which had been spent in many a country town, and on a number of family wheat farms when I was still at
primary school. However, previous to The Silo I could not find anyone who seemed to share with me what I considered my ‘secret’ knowledge of the actual ‘wheatbelt gothic’ or ‘poison pastoral’ (as Kinsella has termed it in an essay on ‘The Australian Pastoral’, situation. In this zone in Western Australia you find a less than Arcadian situation of over-clearing, of extinction of species of plants and animals, severe salination, climate change, a steep decline in the human Wheatbelt population and indifference to indigenous culture and dispossession. Up until this time I had probably been too timid (mindful perhaps of large numbers of relatives still involved in wheat farming) to write in my poetry about the negatives of the area. Often, ignoring the huge scale of the problems in devastated areas, I chose to write of the earlier times, in my childhood or my mother’s youth, when there were still some beautiful remnant bush locations and the pace of development remained mostly in the ‘horse and cart’ phase.

I already knew from excursions with Wheatbelt ecologist Dr Barbara York Main and from reading her outstanding scientific books and papers that there are unique plants and animals still flourishing. These were in relatively undisturbed locations where pockets of the original habitats have miraculously survived. Yet these natural hidden treasures and certain human stories (autobiographical and otherwise) are the subjects I found alongside exposure of the waste and cruelty in Kinsella’s poetry of The Silo, a work subtitled ‘A Pastoral Symphony’ and structured to suggest ironic comparisons with each of the five movements of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. Kinsella showed me that it was possible to write internationally relevant poetry about the sacrificing to greed and ignorance of the Wheatbelt landscapes. Les Murray wrote of The Silo:

‘wheat fires, salt hollows, lightning as a type of razor wire, lymphatic fog, parrots with bolt-cutter beaks - here’s an anamnesis of rural Australia, but a poet unafraid to honour it with the full stretch of his language’ (quoted on the book’s cover)
It has been a sensationally successful book but more interesting is its acceptance at the highest levels internationally. Critics as divergent as the late Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, J.H. Prynn, Rod Menghem, Xavier Pons and Marjorie Perloff have admired the work greatly. Bloom even went on to edit and introduce with enormous enthusiasm the Peripheral Light: New and Selected Poems in 2003. So what did an English language student at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology make of The Silo poems? It was an interestingly rocky road at times but did confirm that Kinsella’s seemingly regional canvas has more than enough universality to be intelligible and relevant to a contemporary Chinese young person.

Some three years ago I spent eighteen months supervising this Chinese MA student, who was making a detailed study for her thesis of selected poems from Kinsella’s The Silo. This took me back to a more intensive reading of the poems. However, I want to recount a little more of that overseas MA student’s struggle with the ‘fairly obsessive’ (Mengham and Phillips, 2000) Kinsella. Some of the poems finally selected for her dissertation are indeed among the most forceful anti-pastoral or ‘radical pastoral’ images offered by contemporary poets anywhere. Kinsella, however, customarily employs his so-called ‘Trojan Horse’ (so called by Charles Bernstein) approach to bring the reader into landscapes typical of the wheat-growing areas of Australia. In the works of other writers (thinking of Colin Thiele and O. E. Schlunke), such landscapes can be temptingly nostalgic—in the iconic tradition of the Heidelberg School’s ‘golden summers’ depictions of Victoria, or Hans Heysen’s paintings of his beloved gum tree landscapes of South Australia.

Kinsella’s structural debt to Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony is made obvious, and he evokes remnants of the pastoral literary form especially in the title poem, ‘The Silo’.
(Kinsella, 1995). As I did when a child, Kinsella had been somewhat fascinated by the pillar-like concrete forage silos. They had been erected by a few farmers, as something of a fad, in the period before the Second World War. These conical-roofed structures, a little like moon rockets about to be launched, were mysterious and fascinating to many a Wheatbelt child. All of them that I ever saw seemed in a disused state and Kinsella too had seen the same thing decades after, when spending much time in his youth on relatives’ farms, or as a young man, when working at various jobs around the Wheatbelt. Strange rumours apparently existed of autistic or deranged children imprisoned in one such silo. Obviously the silos were an example of inappropriate British or European farming techniques transposed to a landscape incapable, by virtue of low rainfall, thin and deficient soils and serious erosion problems, of supporting such an inefficient monoculture. As the Shanghai student, Miss Liu, saw it:

> the silo (compared to modern metal field bins) is an inappropriate piece of architecture in the wheatbelt landscape, and so points upwards an accusing finger to the folly of wheat and wool farming in this place. (Liu, 2005, p 57)

According to Liu, Kinsella himself seems to present a kind of tableau in his poem: an elderly farming couple contemplating having to sell up and leave the property, despite years of toil. The red dirt path to the doorway of the abandoned silo is ‘a long thin/stream of unhealthy blood’ (Kinsella, 1995, p58), suggesting the cursed ancestry of the settler invader in occupying the region in the first place, and the rumour of a degenerate child imprisoned in the tower (besides being Byronic and Gothic). All of it might symbolise the guilt beneath the vaunted achievements of Australia’s wheat harvests over the decades. Now the farmer is a virtual prisoner of debt on his own property:
Previously in the poem, the poet had mentioned the red-tailed black cockatoos, commonly called ‘rainbirds’, which arrive before a summer storm to settle on the roof of the silo ‘sparking the straw like a volcano’ with their brilliant tail feathers: ‘dark/fire erupting from the heart of the white/silo, trembling with energy.’ Symbolically, the survivors of the natural world disturbed by the farmer-settlers, triumph over the artificially displaced interlopers because they have a natural energy that cannot be matched by the profit motive of the late-comers to this land. As Miss Liu observed at one stage in discussing this poem,

‘ “The Silo” hints that the farm is an invisible prison for all exploiters in this harsh land because the farm is naturally family.’ (Liu, 2005, p 57)

This comment reflects typical Chinese respect for family and, as mentioned previously, confirms how relatively easily The Silo could be comprehended by the Chinese student of Australian Literature, a complete ‘outsider’ to our culture and landscapes. From an ecocritical point of view, Kinsella’s use of the modified anti-pastoral stance clearly asserts a universality in these times of ecological concerns.

I would have to say myself that as an example of the ‘radical pastoral’, rather than the merely anti-pastoral, Kinsella’s poetry not unexpectedly displays intertextuality with more orthodox anti-pastoral poets such as Oliver Goldsmith (‘The Deserted Village’), Ted Hughes (‘Thought Fox’), and Adrienne Rich (‘Towards the Solstice’). Another major connection must be to the work of the late Dorothy Hewett. Shortly before
Hewett’s final illness, Kinsella completed *Wheatlands*, a collaborative collection of their poetry about the same area, a landscape which some would say had been ‘anti-pastoralised’ in *The Silo*. Hewett’s poetry and several of her plays of the salt-affected region have, of course, a darker Gothic aspect than Kinsella’s.

Now I want to comment myself on another of the poems in *The Silo*, which has a similarly powerful impact on the imagination. The first ‘movement’ of the Kinsella ‘pastoral symphony’ also uses a shortened version of the title of this poem: ‘On Arriving at a Deserted House Deep in the County.’ The intertextuality here is, of course, recalling Beethoven’s ‘Pleasant Thoughts on Arriving in the Country’.

The extraordinary full title of the poem is: ‘On Arriving At a Deserted House Deep In The Country After Running Over A Rabbit On A Gravel Road, At Night.’ But the poem sets much of the anti-pastoral tone of the whole collection and spices the imaging with a chilling wheatbelt (or pastoral) Gothic atmosphere which should warn us that this is no country mouse indulging the comfortable dream of pastoral lyricism:

> ‘The flywire door slams ominously  
> as the fluorescent starter cracks  
> and light suggests company  
> that evaporates, fails  
> to materialise’ (Kinsella, 1995, p 12)

Kinsella immediately invokes the failure he sees in such a disastrous venture of broad-acre monoculture on the thin, fragile and nutrient deprived soils of this part of Australia. Now that the exodus from failing farms has started a population depletion that continues in such rural areas even today, the folly of our invader/settler culture is written plainly. But the visitor from the city (whether town mouse or country mouse taking temporary refuge) has not found the pastoral comforts mythologised by Australian culture with respect to the Outback. As he says, it is all ‘Mice unsettling’ and in undertaking the
pilgrimage, the visitor has killed a rabbit, wrapped its fur around the car’s wheels and his tyres are ‘slicked with blood-letting.’ Kinsella reminds us that this large-scale farming is no detached agricultural experiment but one in which death is the consequence of the white man’s failure. He intertextualises with ‘Macbeth’ with the line: ‘Stop damned/flywire, stop!. Just how critical this opening poem is to Kinsella’s ‘Past’ and ‘Symphony’ is made absolutely clear:

‘If not fear then uncertainty
curtains the windows like moon slick

on a densely atmosphered night  Wide-eyed
like a rabbit, I await my brother. (Kinsella, 1995, p 12)

I believe that Kinsella’s radical pastoralism re-enacts a rite-of-passage of childhood, the loss of innocence so frequently reflected in the bildungsroman and in the Childe Roland re-incarnations amongst younger poets from Shelley to Dransfield. Kinsella did find his childhood holidays, on farms away from the city and suburbs, a transforming experience where he indulged the perpetuated ‘frontier’ family myths of his farming relatives. These were the same ‘pastoral’ myths that had justified free settlers trying to recreate their English or European Arcadian in the original Swan River Colony in 1829. This loss of innocence is brilliantly and graphically recorded in the long poem ‘Shootings’ in the Second Movement of The Silo, where Kinsella recounts in one of the twelve ‘Parts’ to this work:

‘My cousin grips my arm
and points to the corpse
splayed on the ground,
tail cocked heavenward.
Something twists
In my stomach,
I am too young
To put a name to it.
I lower the gun
And turn for home.’ (Kinsella, 1995, p 51)
However, I have a concern that radical pastoralism may prove, in a sense, to be a young man’s sport. Perhaps ‘I grow old’. And I agree with Gifford in his Pastoral that we must move on from the ruins of the temples of pastoralism if we are to reverse or at least delay our destruction of the planet’s living environments. As explained in some detail in earlier chapters, the work of Buell, already alluded to, and Cherryl Glotfelty and others in the United States has led to the emergence of a praiseworthy systematic ecocriticism movement in literature teaching. As Glotfelty says:

‘Regardless of what name it goes by, most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling unawareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human action are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems’ (Glotfelty, 1995, p xx)

If we turn now to ‘writerly’ responses to environmental concerns, on the part of poets themselves, I will allow Kinsella a comment himself, this time speaking at one of his annual Landscape Lectures, sponsored by the International Centre for Landscape and Language at Edith Cowan University:

‘The city and the bush require each other – both are constantly shifting in their relationships. They tend to create paranoid mythologies of one another – both are vulnerable while claiming strength, indifference, and distance... rare species of flora and fauna make way for parks with replacement trees, and the bush “adventure” packaged as a playground or feature lake. The views over these parks elevate housing prices and people watch shows like Bushtrucker Man after commuting from their often distant places of work.’ (Kinsella, 2002 Landscape Public Lecture)

Professor Harold Bloom comments in his introduction to Selected and New Poems of Kinsella’s, after singling out ‘Field Notes from Mount Bakewell’ as a major work in Peripheral Light:
'The final vision of Mount Bakewell marks the end of Kinsella’s Australian pastoral ... The end of one mode of poetry, pastoral in the last ditch, and the coming-on of something different and darker.' (Bloom, 2003, p xii)

However, it might have been a little too early for Bloom to decide whether Kinsella is resigned to darkness closing in, ecologically speaking, or whether he is following a new path to an enlightenment yet to dawn. That would require an investigation of one of Kinsella’s latest collections, A New Arcadia (Kinsella, 2005), which is well beyond the scope of this Essay, since it would require not only a chapter in its own right but also a comparison with the earlier two works in the trilogy, The Silo and The Hunt (Kinsella, 1998). But in the case of the late Dorothy Hewett, a kind of optimism in rediscovering the childhood visions of a different spiritual Eden seemed to remain. In her 1982 Westerly essay, ‘The Garden and the City’ (Hewett, 1982, p 41) she remembered:

‘The garden is, of course, eternally paradoxical. How to make a garden of stinkwort, salt lake and scrub? But the garden is a garden of the spirit and bursts into wild unpredictable flowering, like the West Australian spring.’

My siblings and I actually did, as pre-school children, make our ‘gardens’ in the bush by the salt-lake, probably aping the gardens of the new tidy town we lived in, largely peopled by English immigrants fleeing post-World War I economic depression. As Hewett also said in her well-remembered introduction to the 1972 Sandgropers anthology:

‘Some of us have gone in for ancestor worship, or ancestor burying, the bush is still really just across the subway from the dogs home, childhood beckons us all with nostalgia for those romantic rituals and ceremonies made valid by time. The scrub is endless ... It is a lonely country, and it grows lonelier as the spaces fill up, and the last refugees are discovered’. (Hewett, 1972, p xii)
Accurate as these words may be in reflecting the mood of the seventies (when ecological issues were beginning to touch the public conscience), they appear nowadays a little too reminiscent of the ‘smoothing the dying pillow’ sentiments expressed, just after World War II, by some of the earlier ‘sympathisers’ with the Aborigines of Australia during the continued decimation of their population. In fact, Hewett went on in the mid 1980s to write her most environmentally conscious play *The Fields of Heaven*, which was, according to her, something of a tribute to her father, whom she regarded as one of the first settlers to show any interest in conservation in the Wickepin district of the Wheatbelt.

Which brings me by way of circularity to my maternal grandmother, partner with my grandfather to farming on a virgin block in the Yenyenning Lakes district of the Central Wheatbelt. According to my mother, our Grandma Wood decried the wholesale clearing of the thousand-acre savannah-like york and salmon gum farm. All but ignored by the rest of the family, she fought and won a battle to preserve five acres of natural bush at the farm gate. Despite the farm long-since having been sold and the great granite stone homestead now having been unroofed and fallen to ruin, the remnant trees of that patch remain. Perhaps this is the origin of my own concern for ecologically sustainable landscapes. However, that patch of bush stays in my mind in the context of the grandparents’ farm where I spent so many holidays.

Perhaps also this is where my concept of landscape as palimpsest is worth introducing. Of course, a palimpsest is literally a re-written page, with the previous story or images almost entirely erased. My latest theory is that works of landscape art (including, of course, literary works) necessarily erase wholly or partially the representations of previous renditions, always repainting, as it were, the canvas. Yet something of the
previous work usually may be discerned. It is analogous to the way we displace the language and dialects of an occupied or conquered country, retaining only the faintest traces of them. How many Celtic words are there (apart from place names) in the English language? Surprisingly few! How many Aboriginal words from the 400 or so original languages of this continent are part of present-day English? Remember, each of those languages would have had 10,000 or more words. Thus there is an implicit threat to landscapes in their representational “mirror image” form in Australian art and literature since the 1770s. You only have to pass rapidly from Van Guerard to Tom Roberts to Nolan to Fred Williams; on to Brett Whitely and Rosalie Gascoigne; or to Howard Taylor and Judith Watson, to see the Australian landscape being re-created (but also being replaced) as if a time-lapse image.

When we turn the literary pages of Australian poetry the same process unfolds, from Wentworth’s crude Anglo-isms through the romanticising of Harper, the social realism of Lawson, the Celtic-twilight pastorals of McCrae and on to Randolph Stow’s modernist symbolism with his I’Chi reading of the landscape. We have already spoken of Kinsella, who as a post-modernist and exponent of L = A·N·C·U = A·N·B poetry brings minimalism and environmental politics to his versions of Australia through the artist’s eye. All this interested me so much that I began to experiment with poetry as palimpsest. The following is a resultant short piece:
SONG FOR A GIRL
(a palimpsest for John Dryden)

Young I am walking in an orchard
of maturing fruits and see a lover yield.
How to keep these images of green shade?
I believe this taught me when to feign.

Take me from these dry wheatlands
to deep forest where trees grow young and true
till I need recall no more
those bodies jerk in dust; and roll my eyes.

Stay not till knuckles ring hollow on
the water tau.k’s lowest rungs and to betray
he that has sired you and your kin;
to stay longer would be to deceive the rest.

Could I find fresh water to replace
dust-brimmed teacups? And full of truth,
brisk, and of sound mind and body,
shed the mire of years, again to be fifteen?

As you can see, I have rubbed out most of Dryden’s original euro-centric depictions
(my inheritance of Anglo-Celtic culture of another continent, now only faintly-
inscribed) but used the same page, as it were, to re-sketch Western Australian
landscapes that I have ‘known’. What I believe I do in this process, however, is also to
largely destroy the actual landscape as previously expressed by others—whether in
explorers’ diaries, prose fiction or bush poetry or any number of other disciplines who
have ‘been there’ to record (including of course, the indigenous song cycles).

Landscape itself is a construct, a mental projection, never the ‘real’ thing—whatever
that is—and therefore something which human beings may never know! Yet that
mental construct is actually what we are dealing with in thinking about, talking about or
representing a landscape. So we effectively become complicit in the destruction of environment as we base creative work on it. You only have to look at old photographs or even your own early work as an artist to see landscapes that are irretrievable. No amount of nostalgia or wishful thinking will be restorative. Paintings can be ‘restored’ to good condition; even palimpsest documents like the re-discovered works of Archimedes may be ‘restored’ (even that being an illusion). Then who is to say that expressing landscape is not a contributor to its demise? And while we paint or pen our masterpieces, our real masters are even more vigorously destroying the landscape. Even those who work strenuously in the various ecological services, such as the Australian Bush Heritage or as part of the earnest governmental agencies, ‘protecting’ reserves from feral weeds and animals (and tourists in four-wheel drives), lack our physical labour supporting them in their vineyards and so the withdrawal of our potential labour while we are preoccupied with our creative tricks must be seen (since Wilderness is sadly now a myth) as only hastening the changes we lament.

But palimpsest is, in a sense, also a natural process in the landscape itself. If the landscape is being altered by development, clearing, erosion, bushfires or climatic changes, for example due to global warming, of course this alteration, as we all know, then proceeds more quickly, more relentlessly. Whatever the changes or the causes of change, the land itself is like the river of Heraclitus: you cannot step into it twice.

Gifford’s suggestions about post-pastoralism (Gifford, 1999, pp 146–147) are all very well but are no curatives and are palliative care at best. The indigenous people of Australia knew long ago, as we know now, that the best we can probably do is to caretake, to seek if not to achieve sustainability. For it is true that the era of the Australian ‘mega fauna’ passed shortly after the penetration of \textit{homo sapiens} into Terra
Fire-stick farming changed habitats and forced plant and animal species to alter their evolutionary courses. Geographers and historians have posited that, just prior to colonisation, land management practices of the Nyungar people in the south-west of Australia were coming close to the management of the western grey kangaroo as a semi-domesticated food source. Fish trapping was a necessity in some areas to sustain large ceremonial gatherings. More sobering is the thought that by the time we reach something like our 300th year of white occupation of the Australian continent, our negative transformations of the ecology will measure a thousand-thousand times the changes that occurred in the whole fifty thousand or so years of Aboriginal custodianship.

Not long ago, I suddenly remembered the Aboriginal ‘home help’ who was sent to care for us more than sixty years long since, while my mother was laid up at the local outback hospital with her fourth child. Swept up in the social conditioning that had already begun (even by my fifth and final) year of freedom, prior to starting primary school, I was to forget until only a few months ago this woman who asked us to call her Aunty Lizzie. After that I seemed to be able to recall a great deal and wrote the following:

**FOOT PRINTING**

Clothesbasket under her arm
full of the wrung-out spirals
of our day and night-wear;
warm still from boiling
in the black bowled old wash copper.

She was Nyungar blood
but how she came to be there
in that almost brand new town
circled by lakes and salt marsh
nobody seemed to know, or care.
Still she washed clothes well enough or ironed pretty good for townswomen, yes, when they were heavy with child or in labour in the town’s spanking new hospital. They agreed she put her heart into the job, could knock up a family’s meal, take a straw broom to house or yard. And she just loved looking after kids. For their husbands, (they hoped) too skinny and too old.

I followed her then to the clothesline, propped with a forked stick, bush cut, which her wild-bearded walkabout man had sold us for a shilling months before, and saw her footmarks in the yard’s red dirt.

Bursting with questions about snakes, birds, lizards, wild honey yams and bardies; or hunting habits of dingoes, specially where young kids were concerned, I carefully tried my own feet in her prints.

In recent months I was invited to the launching of a book about the Indigenous people of the Great Southern district, centred round Gnowangerup. A friend, Kim Scott, co-authored *Kayang and Me* (Scott and Brown, 2005) with a rather wonderful Nyungar matriarch, Hazel Brown. When Hazel was signing my copy, I mentioned Lizzie Nellie as the mystery woman who first raised my awareness of race and racial prejudice. I had never heard more of Lizzie Nellie after we left the Great Southern area in 1941 but Hazel remembered her well and told me she was born in Albany. Then she wrote the following in my copy of her book:

*To Aunty Lizzy Nellies friend
with regards from Hazel Brown*

This reminds me that Kinsella has written ironically about the attitudes to Aborigines of farming folk, developed over a number of generations:
'One night a group of young men from surrounding farms, who'd been trucking in grain, joined forces with the workers from the pub, shot the Aboriginal people's shacks to pieces and burned them to the ground. This was hushed up. One of the guys I lived with, who said he wasn't involved, secretly said to me: "They'd be safer in the bush," "they" meaning the indigenous people. This was actually an expression of compassion, but said much about the relative nature of what we call the outback. The noble savage exclusionism, the "in their place", the place that is constantly renegotiated and resurveyed, comes into question.' (Kinsella, 2002, Landscape Public Lecture)

So finally we are talking about place and space. Edward S Casey in *The Fate of Place* wrote,

> Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. (Casey, 1999, p ix)

These are vital concepts in the development of a forward strategy for the artist working with environmental specialisation. The so-called landscape artists (whether painters, poet or electronic media/film artists) must forge some link with place and I have briefly discussed how in my case, and that of John Kinsella, this link may have special origins including that of birthplace. Such 'places' are certainly characterised by the spatial patterns these locations have, in terms of natural or artificially constructed origins. For example, 'drought time: building bush fences' about my homeland is actually a palimpsest.
DROUGHT TIME: building bush fences

having to cut fence-posts to size
was a big task as I’d want. Later we’d peel
away the light-coloured sapwood, telling ourselves
that darkness is heart-wood, dense as ice;
excepting the jam-trees’ scent of raspberries exposed to light.

seemed that with the frosts, I had thought ice
to be a clear sign the logs would split true; misted
transparency of early morning assured
from memory the break of season. But there was none;
other than odd cool days, and I’d come to fear
I could still cut each week’s quota of posts. The thought
that some day I’d fail plagued me. Our contract was near
an end, but what next? Winter with no water?

I have already mentioned David Summers and in his interesting recent book, Real
Spaces, he takes some pains to argue that, ‘dangerous as the modern world has been and
remains ... it still offers positive choices we must learn to make in terms of values
rooted in a revised being-in-the-world.’ (Summers, 2003, p 14). Summers’ overall
argument appears to be that to deal aesthetically and philosophically with ‘space in the
world as we understand it today’, we must step away from post-Galilean Western
perceptions ‘of the earth’s surface as metric’. (Summers, 2002, p 14) This latter three-
dimensional grid (being an imposed intellectual concept) remains a hypothetical
construct of space which he calls metaoptical space and has been imposed by Western
culture to such an extent on the modern way of thinking of the world that we forget that,
useful as it is, it is only a construct.

It took him nearly 20 years to write Real Spaces, in which he further argues that the
modern Western notion of the ‘visual arts’ should be replaced by that of ‘spatial arts’.
The latter then has two categories, viz. ‘real space’ (which we share with people and
things; its ‘arts’ include sculpture and architecture) and ‘virtual space’ (the two
dimensions of space represented in paintings, drawings or prints).

It seems that Summers’ thesis partly supports my idea of art as palimpsest, but also he
sees the interventions of science (via metaoptical space) as a re-drawing or re-writing of
place. He argues this ‘redrawing’ extends to the more obvious erasures of space that
once had been occupied by ‘natural’ environments. He observes that this phenomenon
at its most violent and tragic includes the former World Trade Centre:

The example of the World Trade Centre is more than merely topical, and it
cannot be assumed that icons of modernity will simply be embraced as
contributions to universal progress. Only in the last two centuries, and in
some parts of the world have human lives begun to be separated from the
regularities of nature and the skies, to which people had fitted themselves
and their lives for millennia. This separation was largely effected by
devising ways of treating even nature as if it were analysable to
metaoptical space and active force. (Summers, 2002, p 656-7)

Summers calls us to value ‘metaoptical space’, because, as he argues in his book, it is a
conceptual acknowledgment of the man-made environment (or, as it is sometimes
known, the ‘built environment’), including superhighways, subway tunnels and airport
runways. Moreover, he claims these are present-day extensions of the first hominid
tools. To deny this ‘created world’ and focus only on the remnant wilderness is
somewhat analogous to denying archaeologists their concern for scientific study of
ancient human sites. The archaeologist lays down his or her temporary grids (as with
‘grids’ of modern astronomers mapping star systems) but that does not diminish the
translation of that gridded site into meaningful interpretation or even artistic response
(as in A D Hope’s ‘A Visit to the Ruins’). So we have Jeffrey Smart’s absorbing Italian
industrial landscapes of ‘…autostrade or factory sites’. Indeed, Summers claims that
‘metaoptical space is an unprecedented generator of new real spaces’, yet he makes no
claim for moral superiority of metaoptical space. It is merely a separate ‘reality’ from the subjective conceptions of space from which each individual’s point of view must remain apart. In fact, Summers discusses the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York as a possible confirmation of the dangers of exploiting his metaoptical space, which the twentieth century has done in various ways in its pursuit of ‘control over nature’. This obsession to control has been raised to unprecedented heights:

‘The uncertainties of human life have by no means been eliminated, and we have moreover learned that other problems for solution arise with their elimination. In the West itself, the pursuit of the technologically possible has outstripped the attainment of the self-evidently humanly desirable, at the same time that the technologically possible has come more and more to define a new culture, a culture of incessant change toward unanticipatable consequences’ (Summers, 2002, p.660)

I don’t want to dwell on one book for too long, nor do I want to overstate the claims about what Summers calls ‘the primacy of real space’. However, Summers does make a point about how the formats of the work of artists over thousands of years have a powerful influence on how artists depict, and that these formats, although having differing meanings at different times and in different cultures, have a surprising persistence:

‘We may consider the case of Australian Aboriginal painting, the ancestry of which may be traced to the very earliest human marking. Bark paintings were first made on irregular pieces placed in shelters, and, as Europeans began to collect them, the pieces of bark became more square, more like canvases. Aboriginal painters finally adopted Western formats and paints (preferring acrylics) and have become successful in the international art market.’ (Summers, 2002, p 661)

This is true only in part, nevertheless it shows another face of the palimpsestic process—the page that is erased (whether paper, papyrus, vellum or bark) has itself been subject to man the toolmaker, the creator of his own ‘metaoptical’ art media as well as being a transformer, a re-writer of his living environments.
Edward Casey sums up another view on space and place perhaps relevant and somewhat optimistic for the creative artist whose art is founded in landscape:

Yet places abound even in this blasted, desolate wasteland. Here, too, places are ‘spread out’... To spread out in places is to leave (behind) the extensiveness of homogenous infinite space and to inhabit a new kind of space, one that is heterogenous and open, genuinely spaced-out. If such a space is ‘everywhere open’ it is open precisely in places, for it is in them alone that space attains poignancy and plenitude... (Casey, 1999, pp341-2)

‘Poignancy and plenitude’ appropriately seem to prevail in the three landscapes in which the poetry and prose of Land Whisperings are set.

Henri Lefebvre in The Production of Space contributes an idea that has particular relevance to the literary artist, for he claims that in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, when the ‘town’ finally overtook the ‘country’, land ownership, which had been the absolute measure of social hierarchy ‘lost its former absolute primacy’. (Lefebvre, 1991, p 269) Later, following first the rise of a middle class of moneyed consumers, then came the industrial revolution, and with it the emergence of a working class with significant powers to have influence over the forces of production. Lefebvre claimed that this all important change (with its global implications that we can witness so easily today) ‘did not go so far as to destroy nature; it merely enveloped and commandeered it.’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p 269) Now in the twenty-first century we might beg to differ with Lefebvre, but he makes one additional interesting remark in this context:
This was the point at which the town was conceptualised, when representations of space derived from the experience of river and sea voyages were applied to urban reality. The town was given written form—described graphically...And a language arose for speaking at once of the town and of the country...at once of the house and of the city. This language was a code of space.’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p 269)

Lefebvre explains that this codification worked in the new city states where the architect and architecture became the final arbiters of the built landscape. They were, of course, only the forerunners of modern civil engineering, which has transformed, in a decade, such a city as Shanghai has become today, with its freeways, runways, subways and super magnetic suspension rail systems. And he relates how facades of buildings, the changing ‘faces’ of the built environment, are re-written in palimpsestic fashion. To rewrite our rural and ‘bush’ places may be a slower but ultimately more regrettable process yet it continues despite whatever damage control we can muster. The artist or writer not only re-writes the former artistic depictions of the process, as some sort of freeze-frame interpretation but, at the same time, erases part of any previous works. What is more, he or she also can change or influence the landscape itself.

This may seem an awesome or even absurd claim of responsibility. Yet Shelley maintained that poets were the unacknowledged legislators of the world! Perhaps in our day he would have sought to extend that power of the poet to include dominion over landscapes? Because landscapes are a human construct, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, they are susceptible to influence to an astounding degree, given that enough artists and writers coincide in their efforts. Not just literary tastes, but clothing fashions then follow. Even garden design and estate and parkland design might continue the process. We call an equivalent literary phenomenon a ‘school’ or ‘movement’, as in the ‘Movement Poets’ of the fifties and sixties in Britain. This certainly occurred on a large
scale in Europe in the nineteenth century (and not only in the world of art) with the Romantic Movement. It could also occur in the future when global warming and the diminution of what we think of as the remaining wilderness habitats alarm artists and writers sufficiently.

In the spirit of Bachelard’s statement in *The Poetics of Space*, in his chapter ‘House and Universe’,

> When a dreamer can reconstruct the world from an object that he transforms magically through his care of it, we become convinced that everything in the life of a poet is germinal...
> (Bachelard, 1994, p 70)

and with this in mind, and because this chapter is, in part, ficto-critical, I will conclude as follows with two little demonstrations, hopefully, of palliative care and earth loving:

**VISITING GNAMMAS ON THE BULLFINCH ROAD**

The sign said ‘Gnamma Holes’ but we knew *gnamma* meant that anyway. Through the tammar thicket and loose-lined gimlet scrub we pushed to a cleared space. Here rock pavement of tawny granite stretched down to a place

where gnamas indeed held cool deepgreen water. Autumn storm rains had refreshed so much that a seral green meadow lipped each precious mouth.
There was no *inselberg* nor nubbin, not even a castle *koppie*. No tor-like *tafoni* or majestic wave-form rock mantle to be seen. Just sweet deep jars of sustenance once only the *Wongai* knew.

And had hid them 'til brutal horsemen forced tribal men to madness of thirst. To commit sacrilege and bring the *djanga* here.

Now the sign on the main road made it all plain. Heavy of heart, unslaked, we rejoined the road south.

**MAN OF PROPERTY**

The farmer saw me painting, perhaps as he pondered what to do that day; creaking into the saddle of his unkempt hack he advances across pastures steadily until his shadow moved across my moving hand; gruffly he looked upon my tinctured lines, I thought approvingly. But then he spoke, turning his horse away: I wish, he said, *I had nothing better to do with my life* than filling an empty page.
CHAPTER 4

EXPLORING MY PUBLISHING PROSPECTS
Most of all in this chapter I want to look at the prospects for publishing, including the output of created work from university courses in writing and, in particular, my own prospects for publishing the poetry and prose fiction arising from this PhD project. Recently, I was reminded by a Professor of Australian Studies that all the emphasis in research funding, especially from the Australian Research Council, has so far been directed towards generating research and not to its dissemination. Professor Richard Nile has been active for some years through the Australian Public Intellectual network (API) to increase opportunities for publication of research in the humanities field, including creative writing. In general, opportunities to publish have steadily decreased, in part due to the decline in the frequency of journals publication, their transference to internet publication or their closing down altogether. Professor Nile and I agreed that it is especially important to ensure that the universities support the publication of outstanding students’ work produced within the many postgraduate writing degrees that have emerged in Australia in recent years. Where university presses have managed to survive, they ought to look at taking some of the responsibility for publishing creative work, at least of graduate students. This especially applies to experimental writing or writing that is exploring areas beyond the interest of mainstream commercial publishers.

In the context of the ‘creative arts industry’ departments of universities, as they have been christened in recent times, all the poetry, prose fiction and other genres, as well as the exegetical writing of hundreds of students ought to be seen as products or outcomes of ‘research’ in the context of aesthetic work. Everyone associated with creative and other forms of professional writing knows that such ‘research’ can, and ought to be, just as rigorous and demanding in its own way as acceptable scientific research. It is of course very difficult to change century-old attitudes towards what is actually meant, within universities, by the term ‘research’.
However, since the creative industries are now in the universities, for better or worse, it is imperative that the students gain recognition and funding opportunities for their research. Their research outcomes in the form of created works need to be disseminated in the same way as the knowledge produced in more traditional disciplines. There is some irony in the fact that students engaged in the literary criticism industry (and which is based on the products of creative writers) face no such obstacles. Admittedly, they do share the general plight in universities that ARC funding will support the production of new knowledge but not provide for its dissemination. Yet sharing knowledge is the reason for the existence of universities in the first place. Publication of creative work faces additional hurdles, in that the academic journals and academic publishers mostly ignore this responsibility. The same problems face students in other creative areas, such as the performing and visual arts. Here the need would be for exhibitions, theatrical staging or film production as the normal outcomes for students. It does not seem reasonable for universities to enrol writing students and accept their fees but discriminate (by comparison with students of traditional disciplines) against the publication of their course outcomes, especially while insisting they be of 'publishable standard'.

The relevance of this to my own case as a PhD student in writing is central to this chapter. First I want to respond to the above-mentioned 'publishable standard' for creative writing at the PhD level and what responsibility that implies for me to have to go out and 'test the water' for publishing opportunities before final submission of my work. In the second place, I am anxious to advance a concept I have been developing to put greater emphasis on the interdisciplinary potential of the whole area of publications education, within which the writing or generation of text is only a part of the process,
albeit the foundation one. It is an inescapable fact that my almost fifty years of teaching writing (all but four years in tertiary institutions) are a background to my current role: author of poetry and prose fiction. Sometimes, of course, the past haunts me, for the ‘instructional voice’ of the dominie or the docente intrudes, despite my best efforts to still it. On the other hand, the context of my writing being within academe justifies, I think, my concern to re-examine a general tendency to isolate creation of text from the other and subsequent processes of printing and publishing.

Likewise, I disapprove of separating writing education from the rest of publications education. It is logical for me, therefore, to attempt to contextualise my own generation of text in this PhD project within the broader spectrum of the printing and publishing world. Hopefully, this will facilitate my efforts to see at least a respectable portion of the creative component accompanying this dissertation eventually published in the public domain.

I do have a hunch that, as a writer who is also an academic, I can too easily be satisfied with merely creating poems or stories and not be strenuous enough in accepting the responsibility of bringing the work to a public readership. The closet author is a well-known phenomenon in English literature faculties. And one I have decried often enough in the past for tending toward the sins of vanity and self-indulgence. The rest of this chapter chronicles some of my efforts to escape such a fate.

In November 2005 I attended in Shanghai the International Conference on Publishing and Printing organised by the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, the Chinese Institute of Publishing Science and the China Academy of Printing
Technology. The whole conference was sponsored by the General Administration of Press and Publication of China. Why was such an important conference held in China at this time? I learned that, for several decades, Chinese universities and technical institutes have developed a large area of vocational education in the service of the massive printing and publishing industry in that country. In some respects, I feel we can learn from the Chinese experience.

Publishing became a timely issue in China in 2005, certainly justifying an international conference. That is because China was then in the first stages of opening up its printing and publishing industry to the world trade market. Hitherto, as with many other Chinese businesses, the area of printing and publishing was serving a more or less protected market where, not so long ago, book publishing was dominated by political priorities, including, one must say, a desire to ensure Chinese classical works were freely available to the people. But this is all set to change as China enters the world’s competitive publishing markets. As one delegate to ‘2005ICPPT’ wrote in his paper: ‘With the transformation of publication policy in China, there is a pressing need for talented professionals with a broad and deep knowledge of the industry.’ (Wang, 2005, p 1).

New emphases that have been forced on their universities have no doubt hastened the process of rethinking publications education courses and the need for greater interdisciplinarity. My point is that Australian universities should give strong consideration to greater unity across the whole area of writing and publications education to improve the prospects for all who seek careers in this field, even if we do not have the pressing economic motivation of our Chinese colleagues.
In the previous situation, universities in China found that the supply of personnel capable of working across the whole spectrum of the publishing process was a welcome training responsibility of universities and technical institutes. This covered roles from authorship and the creation of text to print production (including sophisticated digitalisation of graphic design) and on to business management and marketing. Some of the newer (or newly amalgamated) Chinese colleges and other institutions rose strongly to this challenge and instituted a remarkably interdisciplinary approach to publishing education, as they call it.

What intrigued me was that, hitherto I had convinced myself that a writer, especially a student of writing, should basically stick to his or her own professional territory, the creation of text, and leave the business of publication and its associated areas of editing, design, print production and marketing of the final printed product largely to professionals in their own fields. My experience at the Chinese conference convinced me that a writer ought to expect his professional education (if he undertakes it in some formal sense) to include familiarisation with the whole spectrum of this process. Therefore, I want to take a moment to review the Chinese experience with their interdisciplinary concept of Publications (and Printing) Education, as a subject area, over fifteen years or more.

Among the positive outcomes, judging from many papers describing detailed curricula for this area of study, has been a lot of refinement of the topics selected for study and training and much talk of core curricula. It is important to bear in mind the scale of the educative process when, for example, Greater Shanghai has only a little less than the entire population of Australia. Professionalism across the whole process of writing and publishing achieves high standards. Both core and specialised areas of study abound in
the general area that is called ‘publications education’. On the other hand, negatives were reported in several papers, including Wang Guanyi (Wang, 2005) who listed out-of-date teaching modules, lack of eligible teaching staff, limited textbook selections and lack of rational understanding of the modern publications industry. The drift away from workplace practice and the academicisation of some training courses were also noted by Wang Guanyi, who is from the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication. However, at least these dangers are recognised, and the (now) alert and alarmed Chinese commercial publishers are warning universities that degrees in Publishing Education will only have their future support if the graduates have experienced a strong and relevant practicum component in their courses.

Following my attendance at the above conference I re-examined my own special area of interest, creative and professional writing. It is clear to me now that, only with an interdisciplinary approach, can authors see their work pass through all the processes of reproduction and publication and understand more adequately how to best serve through information and entertainment a readership (or viewing audience), who alone provide their financial reward.

Traditionally, in most of the Western cultures, we have concentrated in higher education on the training of scholars or potential readers, rather than the writers of great literature (and the viewers of visual art). At best this has given both the readers and the writers an unnaturally ‘worshipful’ sense of the cultural achievements of the classical writers of the past. Some literature courses indeed seem more like training in an obscure minority religion. No wonder when I was a young university student of literature and a would-be-poet, I felt we were being educated always to try to emulate only the noblest works of literature, an obviously unrealistic hope. So I became largely a ‘closet writer’.
It is also no wonder that, in the past, the physical side of the publication process—
printing technology, typography, bookbinding and packaging design, photography,
plate-making and even editing as a profession—was almost of no interest to university
educators.

I decided to conduct two case studies of publishers in my own State in order to educate
myself as to their views on publications education. An additional motive, under-
standably, was the ultimate hope of submitting to these publishers the book-length
manuscripts of creative work arising from my PhD project. Elitist writing deriving from
a scholarly source was never going to interest commercial presses who clearly cater for
a readership (viz. the general public) from whom a profitable return is essential.
However, in my own state of Western Australia, the University of Western Australia
Press has managed to survive up until now. Like certain other university presses it has a
record of publishing not just heavy academic tomes for the university libraries around
the rest of Australia, but also many very interesting works of history, biography,
geography, anthropology and natural science. Additionally, it has published special
editions for the WA Government including one to celebrate the Australia’s Bicentennial
in 1988. UWAP, as it is often known, has published anthologies of WA literature for the
Fellowship of Australian Writers, and also has now brought out a line of children’s
books as well as a number of art books. In 2005, the Press began to publish two novels
by postgraduate writing students in Western Australia. This was an initiative suggested
by Dr Terry-ann White, Director of Special Programs. Thus it seemed obvious that for
my first case study I should interview representatives of the UWA Press, so I drew up a
series of questions to seek their views on publications education in a university and tried
to discover something of the secret of their continued existence as one of the rare survivors among Australia's university presses.

I spoke to Dr Jenny Gregory who was Director of the Press from 1997 to 2006, and she told me that UWAP was established in 1935 to publish university textbooks. This makes it easily the longest surviving press, commercial or institutional, in Western Australia and a history of the first seventy years of the Press was published in 2005.

In 1953 it adopted its current name and from this time its purpose has been to pursue more noble objectives than producing textbooks, viz, to promulgate in the wider community the knowledge generated by the University's teaching and research. To achieve this purpose they bring out about 30 volumes each year as well as certain academic journals.

The lofty aim to disseminate new knowledge coming from the University's research work so as to benefit the community has a second benefit. We all know that, to succeed in academia, staff must publish and, although journal publication is by far the most attractive to academics, book publication is also important for reputations. According to Jenny Gregory, the majority of books written by university staff have no chance of being accepted by commercial publishers. Commercial presses must look for a quick cash return from large sales to the public but would make an exception where an academic work is set as a high school or university text and guaranteed sales can be expected. The irony, says Dr Gregory, is that such books would have been very helpful to make the UWAP show a better financial return for the University. She told me that, only because grant money is provided to the Press to subsidise their book publishing,
together with some commissioned works, does the Press have any chance of remaining viable. Fortunately some costs that commercial publishers would pay, such as for land and buildings, do not apply to the Press.

A question I put to Dr Gregory was, if the UWA wanted to ensure its work was made available to a public readership, why not make arrangements with commercial publishers to subsidise from University funds the publication of specialist books that the public would not buy in large enough numbers to be commercially viable? She maintained that only a university press has the special knowledge and skills to edit the work of its academics so to give the books the quality in design and presentation as well as the standards of editing make them a credit to the University.

Finally I asked her about the level of responsibility of a university such as her own to foster ‘publications education’ of students or other persons seeking careers in any part of the publications spectrum, from writing text to marketing and sale of books. Her answer was that, whereas much has been done to foster the teaching of writing, certainly not enough is done by universities to help lecturers prepare students to enter the publishing professions, as editors or in areas such as the production and printing professions. When academic papers or books, they could benefit greatly from awareness of the whole publication process. Areas such as English Literature courses have been the traditional recruiting grounds for publishers seeking new staff. Yet the publishers have always had to train them ‘on the job’, because the universities, with few exceptions (such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), have not considered it a specific part of their responsibility.
What is lacking in universities, she agrees, is an interdisciplinary approach across the whole area of publications education (including such matters as electronic print engineering, materials design and even legal aspects of publication such as copyright law).

My second case study was the remarkably successful ‘finest small publisher in Australia’ (as they describe themselves in their promotional material), The Fremantle Arts Centre Press, located not unexpectedly in Perth’s port city of Fremantle. It is true this press has an amazing record but this can also relate to State Government initiatives. With a sizable cash grant to publish and promote Western Australian writers exclusively, the Government established the press back in 1976. It had virtually no competition, since older local commercial publishers mostly had been absorbed by the large Australian or international publishing houses. Another important reason for the FACP (as it is commonly known) to be backed by the government was that local authors were in a very disadvantaged position of being isolated from the leading publishing houses in Sydney and Melbourne. If an author cannot have constant access to publishers and compete directly for attention in the places where most of the nation’s books are published, reviewed and discussed, it is very difficult even to gain that vital initial recognition. This is probably also part of the reason for establishing Magabala Books in Broome for Indigenous authors.

So the FACP was intended to give WA’s authors a ‘running start’. It has done this now for a hundred or more authors and achieved some spectacular successes. The FACP has also been able to help many now famous names among Australia’s writers by being a
first publisher of their work when they began establishing their careers in Western
Australia. Examples that spring to mind are Elizabeth Jolley, Philip Salom, Joan
London, John Kinsella, Gail Jones and the Aboriginal novelist Kim Scott. Other major
writers of WA origin, later in their careers, have been generous enough to place their
books with the Press and these include Tom Hungerford and the late Dorothy Hewett.

FACP's non-fiction publishing includes many historical and scientific works, together
with biographies, books on WA's landscapes, art books and children's books. They
continue to be among the few publishers in Australia to continue regular publication of
poetry, short stories and literary anthologies.

For this case study, I interviewed Mr Clive Newman, one of the two directors of FACP,
responsible in his case for marketing and production management, whereas his co­
director, Ray Coffey looks after the commissioning and editing side of their operations.
I asked Mr Newman how easy was it to find suitably trained staff to work at the Press,
particularly in the first years of its operation. In his view, there was little hope of
recruiting top class editors, book designers and editing staff in Western Australia. None
of the five local universities had shown much interest in training people specifically to
work in a publishing house. In fact they have shown much more interest in turning out
authors (journalists, novelists script writers and non-fiction writers), since job
opportunities were so few in publishing itself. FACP was founded to assist, 'with the
aim of developing the widest possible audience of outstanding WA writers and artists',
to quote the press itself in one of its current catalogues.
Clive Newman told me that in the last year or two, FACP undertook its first joint publishing venture with another local university. Curtin University Books was the subsidiary which claimed they were ‘committed to publishing books that demonstrate creativity and innovation’ but whose authors were not necessarily from WA. The new publishing house would bring out only 4-5 books initially, rising to ten per year (compared to the 30 or so published by FACP annually). Regrettably, this venture had to be discontinued after one year due to restructuring of the university’s finances.

I asked Clive his opinion of the likely influence of digitalised publishing (such as the e-books, e-journals, digitalised imaging systems and so on) and new forms of ‘publishing on demand’ (POD) on the future of the publishing industry. In his view the traditional book will survive these innovations and adopt them where they make a better product possible. But he believes the book as a precious artefact, a possession in which readers take pride and which still has advantages of portability, will ensure its continuance in the future of FACP. Clive does not think that for the foreseeable future the Press will change from its primary emphasis on the traditional book.

It seems then that this press depends on annual subsidies (in its case from the Australia Council and ArtsWA, the State Government’s funding authority), not unlike the typical university press, and can afford, therefore, to publish many titles which would not easily attract the major Australian or international publishing houses. However, it does give the local authors, disadvantaged as they are by isolation from the main publishing scene, a chance to break into print for the first time. One supposes that, if they prove to be excellent, their careers might well blossom as they then attract the attention of national and international publishers. Salt/Folio, as it was originally known, comes to mind. Of course, there is a risk they may then detach themselves, to the competitive disadvantage of the ‘mother’ press. More recently, at least some of my academic colleagues and
fellow writing students at ECU have been successful in approaches to the Fremantle based Press.

An interdisciplinary approach to the coordination of all courses relating to writing and publication processes might now have to be considered at my own university, Edith Cowan. ECU could benefit from any such new initiatives, especially since the areas covered by the English and writing courses, together with those in the Communications and Media studies areas, would conceivably serve the education of professionals for the whole spectrum: from creating text and image to the areas of publication and distribution or marketing. This would be an interdisciplinary approach.

I will be bold enough to suggest that the example set at ECU by our successful International Centre for Landscape and Language in raising consciousness within the university towards environmental issues, and working across the boundaries of traditional subject disciplines, initially might be a useful model also for promoting the concept of Publications Education. Although components of such a course can exist in separate university faculties, only time will tell if it will be possible to achieve a fully coordinated approach in order to improve the career training prospects of a whole group of related professions in the publications industry.

To sum up this chapter, I began it by looking at the recent history in China of university courses offered to students seeking to train for positions specifically in the publications and printing industries. Then I commented on the need to place even more emphasis on writer-centred rather than reader-centred approaches to publications education. Finally, I reported interviews with representatives of two successful publishers associated with
universities in Western Australia. I found these publishers hesitant to accept innovatory
and 'high tech' approaches to publishing but supportive of increased coordination of
university courses to create an interdisciplinary 'Publications Education' concept of
professional training. This could help provide a source of professional staff for
Australian publishing houses and all those associated with creating and marketing
publications.

In conclusion, I believe significant issues have emerged. The preparation and
composition of major creative works of student writers are underpinned by 'research'
activities just as intensive, challenging and valid as those of students in other
disciplines. Research funding sources need to recognise the legitimacy of creative
work and its research outcomes need to be supported through to their publication or
other means of dissemination. In the second place, I have argued creative work should
be consciously respected by its author (and the writing teacher) as being integral to the
whole printing and publishing process. Hence the writer should not hold himself aloof
but respect the other professionals working in areas beyond text generation itself. As a
result of my case studies of two publishers, I have tried to provide myself with an
appropriate awareness of this limited local context in which to submit my own poetry
and prose fiction for publication. This would be a first step in order to confirm in some
sense at least its 'publishable standard'. It remains to be seen if the knowledge I
gathered about publication and publications education as discussed in this chapter will
improve my prospects of seeing some or all of my poetry or prose fiction from this
project taken up by publishers. However, as indicated elsewhere, it must also be said
that some of the stories and poetry have recently been published in journals and that a
poetry collection is 'in the queue' of an overseas publisher, hopefully destined for
publication in a few years' time.
CONCLUDING STATEMENTS
As an exegetical statement this Essay has for the most part been put together subsequent to completing the poetry, short fiction and the novella, *Afterwards*. I am always happy to be clear about a writer’s critical stance and to share his or her ideas, where they energise the writing itself. Yet I originally felt a strong disinclination to extend one of my own poems (or stories) by commentary, other than to provide brief prefatory remarks similar to those authors use at a reading. The latter have a special and justifiable function to establish rapport and a mindset that will assist an audience, who most times find it challenging to be limited to aural access of a literary artform. People in this situation cannot rescan a line or glance at a footnote or, perhaps, indulge in several re-readings of a particularly challenging passage. On the other hand, an audience does have the author’s actual presence, which (even if he or she is only an adequate performer) is usually a rewarding experience. The author’s phrasing, intonation and emotional engagement with the text, together with facial expression and other body language, all contribute to the experience in ways the reader of the text can only uncertainly surmise. Regrettably, my Essay is necessarily presented for examination in my physical absence and therefore merely as a document, i.e. what we refer to with unconscious irony as a ‘hard’ copy. Yet I do acknowledge that the obligation to offer in this accompanying essay some indirect commentary on the body of creative writing (constituting the substantial outcome of my four years’ work) in some measure can compensate for authorial ‘invisibility’.

Readers or poetry and prose fiction mostly have a normal human interest in the biographical context of the author’s inventions, the circumstances and motivations which may or may not add colouring to the experience of sharing the resultant poems.
and stories which would be inappropriately digressive at a ‘live’ performance. Throughout the ages, writers of note have rarely been separated from the most exciting contemporary developments in religion, politics, philosophy or science (or all of these). Often, of course, writers have provided leadership in the development of ‘schools of thought’ associated with one or more of such areas of contending ideas. They frequently have sought to extend the technical possibilities of their craft or even take it in entirely new directions, sometimes working with an informal cohort of like-minded colleagues. Certainly this is the way I have worked these past four years with fellow postgraduate students and long-suffering writer friends and, of course, my academic supervisors. This seems to be the way that all artists, not just writers, have enjoyed a sense of participating in the creation of ‘new knowledge’, both in the sense of technical skills and the expression of worthwhile ideas and beliefs.

The evidence of my own excitement to be associated with advances in ecocritical theory and the exploration of the ‘poetics of space’ is in part what I have presented in the preceding chapters of this Essay. Having been a teacher of writing of long standing, I have also wanted to reflect in this work on my new role as a writing student, if you like. And in this respect I do feel justified in reporting certain revisions to my opinions of the pedagogy, especially in a university setting. I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to respond to the ‘stimulant’ of close proximity to the ideas of postmodernist theoretical exponents such as Deleuze and Guattari, Bachelard and Lefebvre, as well as landscape or environment theorists of the calibre of Aldo Leopold, Lawrence Buell, Harold Fromm, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon Schama, David Summers, Edward Casey and Terry Gifford. In Australia I have been indebted to our own theorists, including George Seddon, Barbara York Main, Stephen Muecke, Rod Giblett, John Kinsella, Hugo Bekle, Quentin Beresford, Kevin Brophy, and Paul Dawson. It is
disappointing often to find myself resorting to listing but in an essay scarcely the length of one chapter of a critical PhD dissertation I feel I have no alternative if I wish to acknowledge where my research in this field has taken me.

Following my detailed introductory chapter, I provided in the second chapter what was, in essence, a narrative of my apprenticeship in ecocriticism. Additionally, I sketched in broad-brush outline my extended interest in the traditional modes of the ‘pastoral’ and ‘anti-pastoral’, including mention of how they have been adopted by non-indigenous Australian writers. In the third chapter I outlined my exploration of the ‘palimpsest’ as a developed writing technique and explored some of the implications of this to a theory of landscape expression. This was based on the metaphor of the palimpsest as a legitimate marker of change. I tried to extend the concept of the palimpsestic process in order to come to terms with the poet’s role as both witness of and participant in the ecological changes that continually re-shape the Earth’s landscapes. These can be delayed or given alternative direction, even (vide Shelley’s unacknowledged legislators), but in essence are irreversible. In the fourth chapter, I switched back to certain pedagogical issues and the important and consequential issues of the publication of poetry and fiction produced by university students of writing courses. Naturally this included me.

What I have told about landscape in this Essay, clearly has been related to three geographical regions: my Western Australian homeland and my ‘adopted’ or ‘foreign’ locations in Italy and China. The writing set in these locations constitutes more than two thirds of this submission. Reluctant as I have been to intrude upon the readers’ responses to the seventy five individual poems, ten stories and the novella, I feel that the thirty thousand words of the ‘exegesis’ offer a helpful context to the above, whether or not entirely adequate for the individual reader. Naturally, I am indebted to many
colleagues in the writing world and within academia for much encouragement and inspiration but have confined identities and details of the help given to a separate acknowledgment statement.

Looking back, finally, on the long way I have come, it seems clear to me that my poems, first of all, are the most obvious component to show the influence of my theoretical interests. It is not only the landscapes *per se*, but what I have called 'the learning of landscapes' and my parallel metaphor of the learning of 'first' and 'second' landscapes (which I notionally compare to language learning). In itself, the poetry has been the principal path I have swept—to take up one of my own images—towards a greater familiarity with my first landscapes at home in the Wheatbelt and my 'second landscapes' abroad. Writing prose fiction has been the new area for me as an author and I found myself more challenged to embody landscape theory in this part of the work. The reason, I suspect, is the distraction of narrative itself. At present, at least, I find the role of story-teller strangely seductive. Certainly, I derive some satisfaction from the immense range of landscapes which form the backgrounds to the stories, but in the poems this variety seems to challenge me to continue to develop and refine poetic techniques and to match the many subjects I wish to express to appropriate imagery, often of highly specific landscapes.

In my prose fiction, I consider I am still at the stage of working through a lot of the traditional story forms and exploring techniques of narration and point of view rather than discovering the prose style that will become natural to me and really identified with my writing. Nevertheless, in the one short novella presented, I feel I have begun to discover some of the challenges of writing a longer prose work while still giving attention to the settings or backgrounds for character action. In the novella, my setting
was in the main a ‘cityscape’ rather than the kind of rural landscapes characteristic of most of my poetry. Perhaps this, too, is no bad thing in terms of a process of development.

I have little to say about the style or form of this Essay except to observe that, blemishes aside, I have achieved my initial objective of declaring ‘where I am coming from’, theoretically speaking, and at the same time have provided an informative background (but hopefully not a superfluous commentary) on what should be the real focus of this PhD endeavour, the body of creative work which must finally speak for itself.

It has been a very positive experience to discover a body of critical theory, which is both recent in origin and entirely suitable to my preoccupations with landscapes. I am delighted to be able to link my poetry and prose fiction writing to the exciting developments in world eco-theory and in particular the ecocriticism movement in its United States and British manifestations. And I have been challenged, I believe, to seek answers to the dilemmas that face all environmentally conscious persons in our globally warming landscapes. I am sure the individual poems and stories in the creative component of this doctoral submission have been well informed by my critical studies and I feel I will go forward with a more developed sense of direction as a result. I recall a statement made by Deleuze and Guattari that seems fitting:

One can back away from a thing, but it is a bad painter who backs away from the painting he or she is working on. Or from the ‘thing’ for that matter: Cezanne spoke of the need to no longer see the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself without landmarks in smooth space. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p 493).

I leave readers with these landmarks, my ‘Poetics of Newplace and Birthplace’, confident that the Essay will enhance my ‘Land Whisperings’. But as an Afterword, I do
want to repay a debt to one of my mentors already mentioned, Dr Barbara York Main, whose final words to her much loved *between wodjil and tor* (York Main, 1967) take me back to the virtual essence of my origins in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia:
AFTERWORD

And there at last, out of the east it came again—from darkness and the east—the salve of the night wind which rallied the withered landscape into a false surface animation; it rattled dry leaves, shook torsels of bark, tussled hummocks of litter; it tumbled and rolled over a wide, undulating landscape, of wodjil-grown ridges, pine groves, sandy slopes of low, straggling heaths, and across the swales with their open spaces and timber stands and to the peak of the countryside which was the great granite tor, to the shrinking salt lakes beyond. It rolled out over the whole wide, withered landscape, beneath whose mask life itself was held deep in the fastness of the earth. (York Main, 167, p 151).
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REFERENCES AND WORKS CONSULTED


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APPENDICES
Appendix 1
INDEX TO THE ‘ROCK DRAGONS’ SHORT STORIES

(stories selected for the creative component are marked with an asterisk)

Rock Dragons Australia, north west of Perth, c1942. A retired married couple camp in an old mining town and are taken by the ex-headmaster’s former favourite pupil to see a giant rock monolith. While climbing the rock he stumbles against the ex-student and is accused by her of molestation. (3100 words)

The Lie Italy, Agrigento, c1965. A Sicilian boy is accused of lying and so takes a day off school to work for a stallholder catering for the tourists at the local Greek temple ruins. He learns that adults lie too. (4470 words)*

The Good War Club Australia, National Service training camp, c1955. Young men training to be killers are distracted by competition for the high moral ground in the treatment of women. (2270 words)

Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder Italy, Perugia, University for Foreigners, c1975. A student of Italian from Australia is missing his fiancée while studying overseas at Perugia but becomes distracted by other women in the course. (2770 words)

The School of Urbino Italy, Urbino, c1980. A young Australian academic is invited to be a visiting poet at an Australian Literature conference in Italy. He almost falls into the hands of the Red Brigade after failing to impress the delegates. (4900 words)*
**Prova**  
*Italy, Milan, c1958.* A British engineer is having a love affair with the wife of an Italian engineer developing a new model at a major car factory. The jealous husband’s attempt at revenge by a hit and run attack goes horribly wrong. (5040 words)

**Happy New Year**  
*China, Beijing, c1985.* An unmarried couple join the first China tour to be organised by an Australian national airline. Their Beijing official tour guide is an admirer of Western democracy, but the young Australians are oblivious to his overtures. (7250 words)*

**Road Kill**  
*Australia, Pilbara, c1995.* Two older iron ore miners boast to a youngster about their ‘good times’ when down in the city on vacation. One of them offers to take the young man on the 1200 km trip to the nightclubs to ‘initiate’ him into Australian ‘redneck’ culture. But the car breaks down outside a roadhouse in the desert. Here the young guy loses his appetite for city life after meeting an Asian ex-classmate in trouble. (3000 words)

**The Exchange**  
*Australia, Adelaide, a college of advanced education, c 1990.* A middle-aged woman lecturer who never married has recently had to cope with her mother’s death. She accepts an offer to go ‘on exchange’ to teach in an institute of foreign languages in south China. Before she can leave, she has a car accident but still decides to change her life and go to China. (5000 words)

**All the Way Home**  
*Australia, ‘a state capital city’, c2000.* A Vietnamese immigrant looks back on her successful married life so far in Australia. She recalls when she once worked in a supermarket as a young university student and fell to the charms of an Italian ‘lover boy’ only to find she had made a serious miscalculation. (4400 words) *

**Crushed Red Geraniums**  
*Australia, a farm in the Wheatbelt, the provincial city Perth, c1915.* A farmer’s wife decides take her two very young daughters to the city for a ‘holiday’. It is their first trip in a train and first experience of a big city. With recruitment and war news as a background, the girls are told they must be sent back to
the farm alone when the mother falls ‘ill’ and must remain in the city to recover from a medical event. (5825 words)

**Just a Pair of Old Shoes**  *China, Guangdong Province, at a foreign language institute, c1980.* An ageing professor and his wife come to take up his new post, teaching in a foreign language institute but find the local party secretary unfriendly. Unpacking belongings, they find an old pair of patent leather shoes, which recall for him a time when he was in love with a young colleague who became pregnant. She went or was sent away to a distant province. His wife is unaware of this past event. (4690 words)*

**Supervisor**  *Australia, a college examination room, c1970.* A lecturer is supervising his students when in the middle of the writing their exam papers one student seems to be in some distress. The reason only emerges at the end of the examination. (500 words)

**Peace Maker**  *Australia, Perth’s new suburbs, c1960.* A bachelor who collects colourful beetles moves into a new beachside suburb with his cat. The next-door neighbour wants to make him a confidant regarding her marital problems. Eventually she brings him the body of one of her husband’s prize pigeons and asks him to bury it. (1240 words)

**The Psycho**  *Australia, Melbourne, a small hotel, c1995.* Two veterans of the Vietnam War are staying at their usual hotel opposite the repatriation hospital. They have both come for medical treatment, one for his war neurosis. The proprietoress serving their dinner is an old lover of one of them. A new guest arrives, a part-Aboriginal, who tells them the story of his own military service in the Psychology Corps. The veterans are suspicious of him now. In the night there is a tragedy. The woman is found dead where she has apparently fallen from a landing on the stairs. The narrator, who is buddy to the mentally affected veteran, has a stroke and doesn’t find out what has really happened until later in hospital. (3250 words)
Cruiser  *Australia, Fremantle, a boarding house, c1939.* A young woman comes to the city from a country town to take up a clerical job in the port city. While living in a boarding house by the sea, she meets up with a Royal Navy sailor and they fall in love. Some months after his ship leaves, she attracts the attention of the local tennis club’s leading player and is raped by him after a club dance. Next day she joins the Women’s Army Service to change her life but then she learns that her British sailor has been killed in action. (5700 words)

What I Mean to Say  *Australia, a wheat farm, c1955.* One morning a young lad staying at his grandparent’s farm is invited by his uncle to go rabbit shooting. The uncle wants to show off his new Holden car. The boy is left with a rifle while his uncle answers a ‘call of nature’ but the boy has no talent for rabbit shooting. The uncle finally has to teach him how to kill. (3300 words)

Not the Chinese Way  *China, Hongkong and Guangzhou, c1986.* An Australian gem merchant is summoned by his business partner to join him at the Canton Trade Fair, where they have a display. When he arrives, he finds his ex-Austrian partner has disappeared. Their Chinese assistant warns her Australian boss that the partner has got mixed up with the local criminal gangs. Ultimately the partner makes an appearance drunk at the Trade Fair. They take him back to their hotel, but he is being pursued by gang members. Ultimately the Chinese woman arranges with a police contact for the Australian to escape alone from the city via the Pearl River and get back to Hongkong that night. Later he learns the fate of his business partner but is surprised by a final development. (10,630 words)

I Danced With a Girl  *Australia, an outback sheep station, c1995.* A novelist rents an old homestead attached to a sheep station so he can get on with writing a novel without distraction. The wife of the pastoralist takes a fancy to the writer but a Polish woman traveller arrives in her Kombi and also takes a room in the old homestead. Meanwhile the station owner returns and at a barbecue is attracted to the young woman. That night the traveller tells the novelist she is too frightened to sleep alone in her room so joins him using a spare bed. The next day they all go out for a picnic and the various parties separately pursue their previous interests in each other. During the next night the
nove1ist receives an unexpected visit from the station owner's wife to tell him her husband is coming after him with a gun after she had confessed to their adultery. The Polish woman agrees to drive the writer to the nearest town and they sneak away from the property only to realise they are being pursued. There is a further surprise in store for the novelist when they reach the main road. (8925 words)

On Monte Amiata     Italy, a small town near Siena, c1985. A storm is coming and a young Australian is waiting at a cafe for his fiancée to return. When she does arrive, returning from a weekend workshop, she is extremely upset. Meanwhile, the guy has been recalling how they first met up as a group of foreigners living together in a local 'art colony' under the leadership of an older Australian. Eventually the young guy and his girl decided to leave the group and set up as artists on their own. They have lived several happy years together. Now he learns from his girlfriend that she had met up with the former leader of their 'colony' while at her weekend workshop and was invited to take a trip to see the summit of Monte Amiata. But here something has occurred which will change all their lives. (5400 words)*

Like Rabbits      Australia, a small outback school, c1928. The teacher's pregnant wife has been encouraged by her husband to learn to use a rifle. At this bush location with the house next to the school she can shoot rabbits easily without leaving the property. This day she finds she has shot a doe rabbit, which spontaneously aborts its foetus. The woman is upset and when she goes back in the house a tragic event occurs. (1500 words)*

Hunting the Qualup Bell     Australia, south west coast holiday hamlet, c1960. A naturalist comes to stay in the empty beach house loaned by a friend so he can search for a rare species of wildflower. His car gets bogged out in the bush hunting for the flower and he ends up at night walking all the way back to the settlement. Here he gets help from the part-Aboriginal caravan park caretaker. The naturalist has a marital situation he is trying to resolve and the long walk back helps him to make a decision. Certain other issues are also the subject of reflection and change for him. (7160 words)*
Fugitive  China, Guangdong Province, a provincial university, c1990. An Australian ‘foreign expert’ employed as a lecturer at a small foreign studies university is invited home to dinner by a Chinese colleague. The latter’s pregnant wife has gone to have their first baby in her hometown with her mother. At the dinner the Australian meets a young poet friend of the colleague and learns he is a refugee from the 1989 Tiananmen incident. He is begged by his friend and the young poet to take some ‘sensitive’ poems back to Australia. Helped by one of his postgraduate students, the Australian learns next day to his surprise that the poet had been apprehended at the instigation of the Chinese colleague. (8500 words)*

Salty Jerusalem  Australia, a Wheatbelt town in the Great Southern district, c2000/1940. A middle-aged traveller enters an old fashioned hotel in a small outback town and talks to the barmar/proprietor about a photograph posted there of a local Aboriginal champion footballer. Meanwhile he recalls a long-ago incident where racism in the town had led to a prejudiced reaction to an Aboriginal. This had been witnessed by the protagonist when only a pre-schooler. (1500 words)*

Barn Find  Australia, a Wheatbelt town in the Avon Valley, c1980. A country schoolteacher is a classic motorcycle enthusiast and collector, an interest shared with the local policeman. His friend the policeman tells him of a previously unknown cache of vintage motorcycles kept in a shed on a remote farm. The policeman invites him to come and view this so-called ‘barn find’ that collectors dream of. When they arrive at the farm the reclusive owner agrees to let them look at his collection. However, unbeknown to the teacher, there is a very serious reason for the farm visit, involving more than a touch of what has been called ‘the Gothic pastoral’. (4300 words)
Appendix 2
LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHS by the author

1. Antony Gormley sculpture Lake Ballard (*frontispiece*)
2. Tuscany: le Crete, fields near Asciano
3. Granite formations Pilbara, Western Australia
4. China: women washing, Shaoxing
5. Granite tors: Western Australian Wheatbelt
6. Italy: sunflowers near Siena
7. China: Shaoxing, East Lake
8. Western Australia: gnamma hole near Hyden
9. Tuscany: ploughed fields
10. China: Wuzhou Bridge
Tuscany: Il Crete, fields near Asciano
Granite formations Pilbara, Western Australia
China: Women washing, Shaoxing
Granite tors, Western Australian Wheatbelt
Italy: Sunflowers near Siena
Western Australia: Gnamma hole near Hyden
Tuscany, ploughed fields
China: Wuzhou bridge