

I

scriptorium

a place of writing

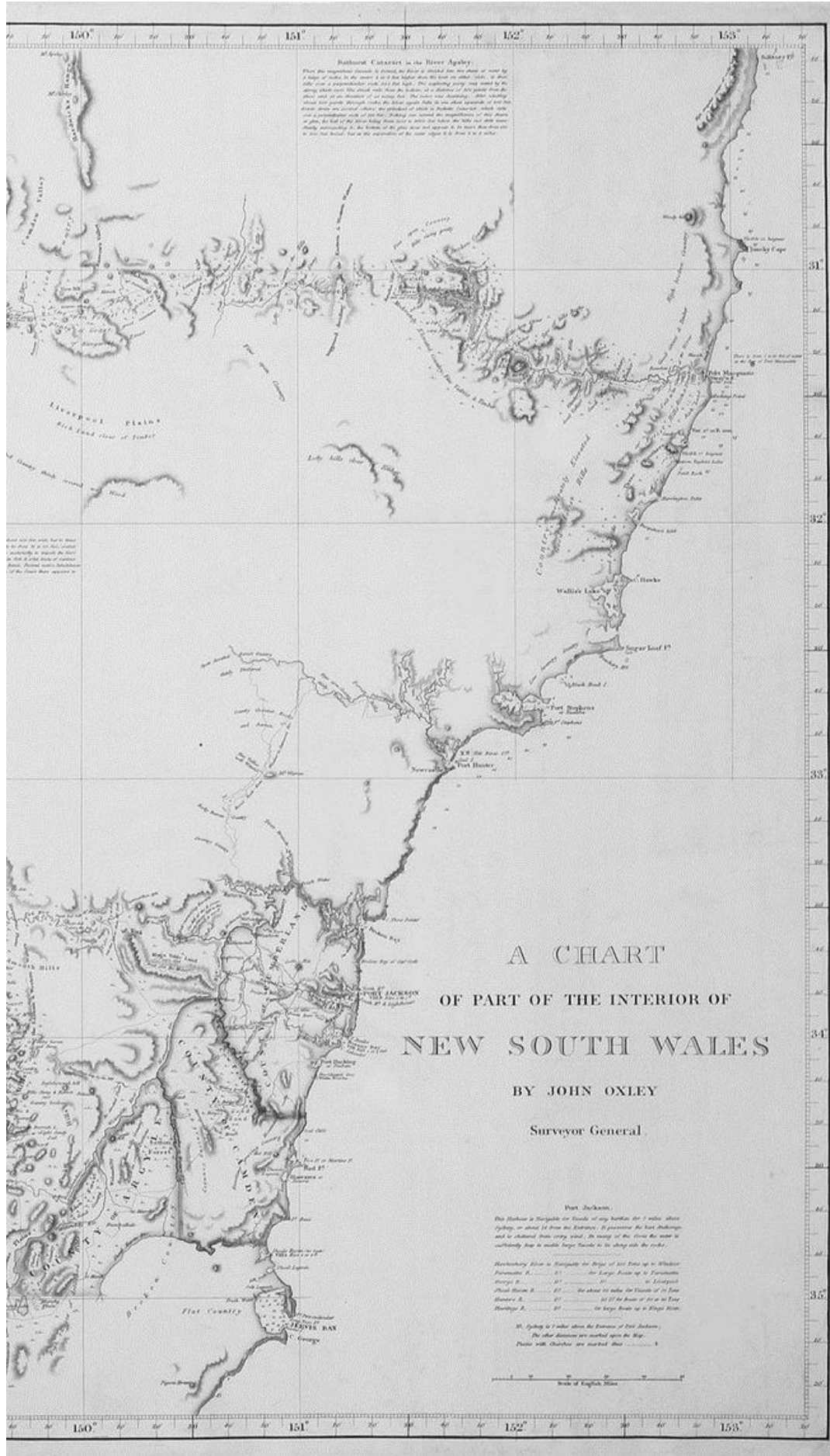
Map, quotations and errata are from explorer John Oxley's *Journals of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales, undertaken by order of the British government in the years 1817-18* (1964, originally 1820, London, John Murray)

Extracts from the story of the Hillgrove murder are from 'Horrible murder at Hillgrove mines', *The Brisbane Courier*, 6 February 1888

J.O. = John Oxley

J.R. = John Ryan





Railroad Cataract in the River Appleby.
 From the map above it is seen that the River is divided into two parts of water by a range of rocks in the center of the lower part. The water flows in a rapid stream over a perpendicular rock 200 feet high. The water is very much raised by the dam built over the cataract in the year 1840. In the winter the water is very much raised by the dam and in the summer it is very low. The water is very much raised by the dam and in the summer it is very low. The water is very much raised by the dam and in the summer it is very low.

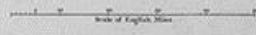
Small text block in the lower left corner of the map area.

A CHART
 OF PART OF THE INTERIOR OF
 NEW SOUTH WALES
 BY JOHN OXLEY
 Surveyor General.

Port Jackson.
 This Harbour is navigable for vessels of any burden for 2 miles above Sydney, or about 14 from the Entrance. It possesses the best anchorage and is sheltered from every wind. Its water is the finest in the world and is sufficiently deep to enable large vessels to lie along side the wharves.

Macintyre River is navigable for boats of 100 Tons up to Windsor.
 Macintyre R. ... 25 ... the large boats up to Windsor
 Macintyre R. ... 25 ... the large boats up to Windsor
 Macintyre R. ... 25 ... the large boats up to Windsor
 Macintyre R. ... 25 ... the large boats up to Windsor

Spelling in Italics shows the Entrance of Port Jackson.
 The other Entrances are marked upon the Map.
 Places with Obelisks are marked thus \odot

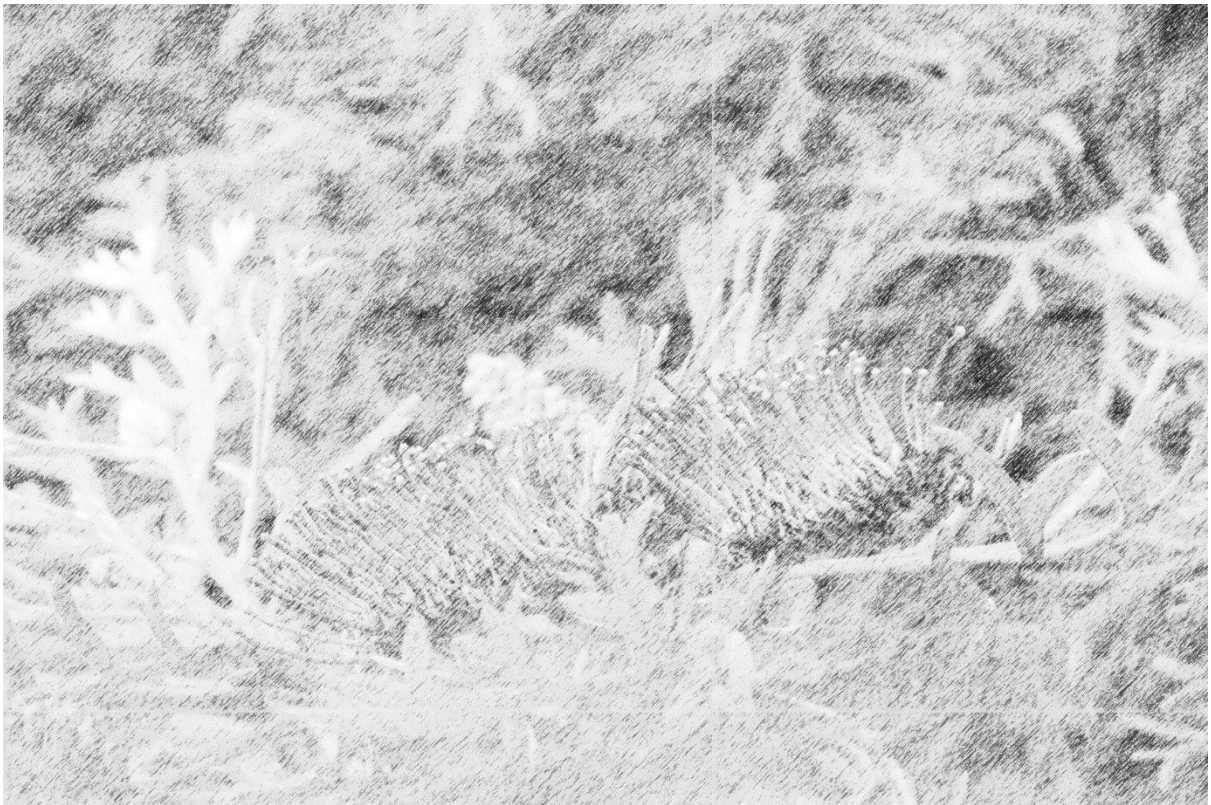


I am certain that in perpendicular depth it exceeds three thousand feet. The slopes from the edges were so steep and covered with loose stones, that any attempt to descend even on foot was impracticable. From either side of this abyss, smaller ravines of similar character diverged, the distance between which seldom exceeded half a mile.

-J.O., 11 September 1818

Ego certus sum: ut in altitudine perpendiculari plus tria milia pedes. Ad radices in tam arduam oras rara tecta lapidum nauibus pedibus usque deorsum eius praestaturum. Ex abruptum latus, minores rivos similis character erant, procul inter quæ haud raro quingentorum passuum excedat.

-J.O., XI Septembris MDCCCXVIII



Chaelundi Camp, Guy Fawkes Gorge, 30.0548° S, 152.2567° E

The bus, weighted

With conservation students,
Bogged in the greasy autumn
Mud of the road winding out of
Guy Fawkes River National Park.

Darkness dropped

Like a mallet around us. The students,
Too afraid to alight. The rest of
Us huffed and hacked up some downed
Branches to lend enough traction for

Our beast to climb.

We had come there to survey
Rare Beadle's grevillea flowers, their
One-sided mauve racemes, upright
As blood-hued horse-brush bristles.

Once presumed extinct,

(The species, not the passengers)
They were rediscovered in the '70s
And now are known to populate a mere
Five locales in northern New South Wales,

Much like the one we visited:

A sanctum of ravine-crossed country
Pollinated by eastern spinebills,
Yellow-tufted honeyeaters,
Crimson rosellas and the less frequent

Undergrad feathered in fluoro ribbon.

With their silky deep-lobed penmanship,
The Beadles resembled bonsai among
Less mature sheoak-wisps of the friable
Slope. Their red flowers scripted a fusillade

In the thick olive-green bush.

The bus snarled up the gradient. Its pallid
Light frenzied spectral shapes into motion
But, by the time we reached drowsy Ebor,
The fusillade had softened into an afterglow.



Edgar's Lookout, Wollomombi Gorge, 30.5325° S, 152.0334° E

In a manila folder

at the Beadle Herbarium,
the golden everlasting
Xerochrysum bracteatum
with its faded papery bracts.

Collected at Wollomombi
in the nineteenth century,
it was known in Europe
then as *immortelle*.

The immortal specimen.

Its dried rootlets adhere
to miniscule cosmoses of soil.

Its lanky stems appear
gasping for last breath. It itches
to fulfill some chthonic
covenant, which will remain
broken until the right
time comes to us.

And when it does,

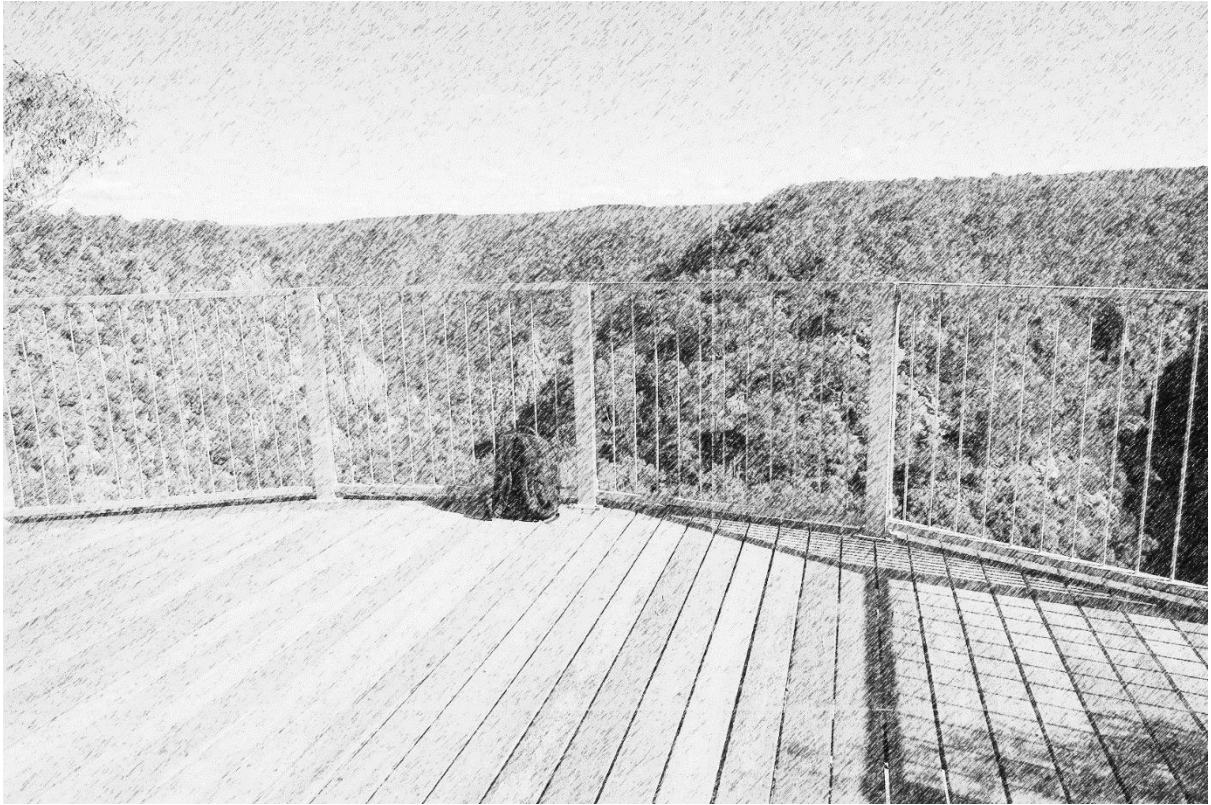
we will overbrim with
blessing. Gums, geckos and
echidnas, too, will welcome
kin home. What is this feeling
shared among us? What
commonness tugs like gravity
at us? Without one another,
what will become of us?

*The outline of a trail,
littered with strips of bark
and other organic miscellany,
struck south-easterly from
the gravel road leading to
the defunct mining town
Hillgrove. Varicolored boles
of spotted gum (Eucalyptus
michaeliana) radiated olive,
cream and tawny hues in late-
afternoon sunslant. These rare
endemic trees grow only at a
handful of sites near Armidale.
On my walk to the gorge rim,
a murder of currawongs filled
an especially tall spotted gum
with otherworldly carolling.*

-J.R., 10 August 2018

โครงร่างของเส้นทาง,
ที่เต็มไปด้วยแถบเปลือกไม้
และอื่น ๆ *miscellany* อินทรีย์,
หลงทางทิศใต้ - ตะวันออกจาก
ถนนลูกรังที่นำไปสู่
เมืองเหมืองแร่ที่หมดอายุแล้ว
Hillgrove หลากสีหน้า
ของเหงือกค่าง (*Eucalyptus
michaeliana*) แผ่ออกมะกอก,
ครีมและสีน้ำตาลอ่อนในสาย -
sunslant ตอนบ่าย เหล่านี้หายาก
ต้นไม้เฉพาะถิ่นเติบโตเฉพาะที่ *a*
บริเวณใกล้เคียง *Armidale*
เมื่อเดินไปที่ขอบของหุบเขา
การฆาตกรรมของ *currawongs* เต็มไปด้วย
หมากฝรั่งพบสูงโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง
กับ *carolling Otherworldly*.

-J.R., 10 สิงหาคม พ.ศ. 2561



Hillgrove Mine Lookout, Metz Gorge, 30.5421° S, 151.8941° E

1.

While a party of men were out opossum shooting on Thursday night (26th January) they discovered the dead body of a man. The corpse was found in a very peculiar place. The man's throat was cut from ear to ear, and his skull battered in.

2.

The sight was a most ghastly one. The body had on blucher boots, half worn out; colonial tweed trousers; regatta, or print, shirt; flannel drawers and under-shirt; diagonal coat. He was apparently an aged man—over 50 years old.

at
north-
ern tip
of Metz
Gorge
in Great
Dividing
Range of
watershed
threshold
at Bakers
Creek Falls
purling west
Pacific, push
ing East to
Murray-Darl
ing carboni
ferous breach
tectonic onto
genesis when
telluric plates
wandered and
collided water
incised crevices
vulvic creases
where no one
dares go except
giants slanted
to doze off
in chamb
ers sun
less, as
snow
gum
flor
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as
gold
flowed
from his
throat gu
shed from
lobes gur
gled from
fissures of
skull past
Bakers Falls
to Wollom
ombi for fin
al merge wit
h sea an aged
man over fifty
years old bluc
her boot tweed
flannel regatta
diagonal *John
Stapleton* left in
metamorphic fo
lds *a very peculi
ar place the sig
ht sight was a
most ghastly
one* his bled
blade blent
pulsd n
pooled n
perld n
pulde n
oceanin
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3.

The miner's right was found in his pocket, and this is the only circumstance at present that identifies the deceased. The body was dragged for some distance, and covered over with bushes and bark. It is only too clear...

4.

The place where the deed was done is a prominent point, overlooking the Falls, disclosing a fine view of the rugged scenery and the Baker's Creek mine...there is a great quantity of blood on the stump and about the ground...

mind μινδ
frome φρομε
narrow ναρροω
veines πεινεσ
withe ωιτηε
in the ιν τηε
granite γρανιτε
tungsten τυνγστεν
landed λανδεδ
slide scar σλιδε σχαρ
 1987 1987
slated δσλατε
landslips λανδσλιπσ
black βλαχκ
cypress χψπρεσσ
pined δπινε
stringy στρινγψ
bark βαρκ
snown νσνωω
gum γυμ
bend βενδ
emeer εμεερ
white ωηιτε
gum γυμ
smelter σμελτερ
chimney χηιμνεψ
mined μινεδ
dump δυμπ
crush χρυση
eeng εενγ
plant πλαντ
oare οαρε
extra εξτρα
act αχτ
steam στεαμ
tram τραμ
track τραχκ
auri αυρι
ferous φερουσ
stone στονε
grab γραβ
 269 269
 848 848
oun ουν
ces χεσ
all αλλ
up υπ

11,000 volts

ذهن *bnim*
 له *əmoʃ*
 تنگ *woʃʃo*
 خاگانی *zəniəv*
 ویتی *əʃfiw*
 په *əʃni*
 گرینتیت *əʃinɔʃ*
 تگستین *nəʃzɔnɔʃ*
 خمکه و اخیسته *bəbnɔl*
 د سپینو سکار *ʃoʃ əbilz*
 1987 *ʃ8 ɛl*
 لری شوی *dəʃɔlz*
 خمکی *zɔlɔbnɔl*
 تور *ʃɔlb*
 سکر *zəʃʃɔʃ*
 پکی *dəʃɔp*
 لری *ʃɔʃb*
 چرگ *nwɔnz*
 بوئی *tuʃ*
 گوم *bɔb*
 منده *ʃəʃtə*
 امیر *əʃiɔw*
 سپین *tuʃ*
 گوم *ʃəʃlɔmz*
 بشونکی *ʃəʃnɔiɔ*
 چمنی *dəʃɔm*
 مینه *pɔub*
 ډمپ *ɛzɔʃ*
 کچل *ʃɔlp*
 ایینگ *əʃɔ*
 نبات *ɔʃʃə*
 اوره *ʃɔ*
 اضافه *mɔʃ*
 عمل و کړئ *mɔʃz*
 بهاپ ترم *ʃɔʃ*
 پته *iʃɔ*
 اوری *zɔʃɔʃ*
 خمس *ənoʃz*
 ډبره *bɔʃ*
 اخلئ *ɛʃ*
 269 *ʃmʃ*
 848 *Nɔo*
oun *zə*
ces *llɔ*
 تول *pɔ*
 پورته

dogwood

5.

*The body was afterwards dragged to the edge of the Falls for the evident intention of throwing it over, but by some means or other the body got caught in a few **dogwood** branches, which prevented it from descending some hundreds of feet down the falls.*



The Blue Hole, Gara Gorge, 30.6158° S, 151.7890° E

autumn took us

over steel bridges

into

squelchy sheoak districts

beside

algae-rimed stone cupules

near

cataracts nimble amid granites

through

precincts of moss-clad saplings *and thence*

through

communes of gilled mushrooms

near

enclaves of hooded orchids

aside

ghettoes of fallen giants

into

the sanctuary of

a brain-like fungus.

A thought ~~mare~~, one of the strongest I ~~we~~ had, in bringing up a very heavy ~~light~~ load, more than ~~not~~ half ~~a quarter~~ of its ~~her~~ usual burden, and when within one hundred yards of the edge ~~tent~~, literally burst with the violent exertion which the mind ~~ascend~~ requires.

In this shocking state, with its ~~her~~ entrails on the ground, the thought ~~she~~ arrived at the edge ~~tent~~, when, to put an end to its ~~her~~ agonies, I shot it ~~she was shot~~.

-J.O., 23 September 1818

-J.R., 10 August 2018

A τηουγητ ~~μαρε~~, ονε οφ
της στρονγεστ I ~~we~~ ηαδ, ιν
βρινγινγ υπ α περιψ ηεαψ ~~λιγητ~~
λοαδ, μορε τηαν ~~νοτ~~ ηαλφ
~~α~~ ~~θυα~~ ~~ρτε~~ ~~ρ~~ ~~ο~~ ~~φ~~ ιτς ~~ηερ~~ υσυαλ
βυρδεν, ανδ ωην ωιτηιν
ονε ηυνδρεδ ψαρδσ οφ της
εδγε ~~τεντ~~, λιτεραλλψ βυρστ ωιτη
της πιολεντ εξερτιον ωηιχη
της μινδ ~~ασχεντ~~ ~~ρεθυιρεσδ~~.
Ιν της σιοχκινγ στατε,
ωιτη ιτς ~~ηερ~~ εντραιλσ ον της
γρουνδ, της τηουγητ ~~σηε~~
αρριπεδ ατ της εδγε ~~τεντ~~,
ωην, το πυτ αν ενδ
το ιτς ~~ηερ~~ αγωνιες,
Ι σηοτ ιτ ~~σηε~~ ~~ωασ~~ ~~σηοτ~~.

-J.O., 23 Σεπτεμβερ 1818

-J.P., 10 Αυγουστ 2018



Long Point, Macleay Gorge, 30.6662° S, 151.9368° E

The Thought Mare
plateaus across canter
wordless to edge mere
of world-rough dermis
infields rimple by step—
IN She steep IS Thought mere.

See She body beneath
at piece asleep wooded
prone thigh-seep peace
wind-brush bryophyte feld
wimples quaver by cleft—
IN She Thought IS gorge seethe.

Touch She timed-etch
brusque in pangeal purge
plummet from glyph fold
schlerophyll of peripheral
trilled winged falsetto fill—
IS She Thought IN mottled flesh.

Olfact She diacritic frill
smokespiral from abyss
waddle width praematurus
in yellow dentata sublingual
her velvet curve belly burst—
IS She Thought IN I must kill.



Salisbury Waters, Dangar's Gorge, 30.6723° S, 151.7263° E

in full abandon	flowering	<i>Acacia</i>
<i>ingramii</i> at Dan-	gars Falls	bursting
lucid aureate	pom poms	seducing
bees with elixir	of early sun	springing
forward to witness	dangling haloes	blazing
over glorious brim	of vertiginous	plunging
to Salisbury Waters	underneath	cartwheeling
wattles gilded	are adroitly	acquiring
fire language	are combusting	chasing
with quiet sing-	eing radiance	consuming
swallows flitting near	blossoms ever	goldening
head of falls	honeyeaters	trilling
as eels migrate	to distant seas	multiplying
inmost essence	of gorge glowing	in full abandon.





A mare, one of the strongest we had, in bringing up a very light load, not a quarter of her usual burden, and when within one hundred yards of the tent, literally burst with the violent exertion which the ascent required. In this shocking state, with her entrails on the ground, she arrived at the tent, when, to put an end to her agonies, she was shot.

-J.O., 23 September 1818

一匹母馬，其中之一
我們最強的，在
提出一個很輕的
加載，而不是她的四分之一
通常的負擔，什麼時候
一百之內
帳篷碼，
字面上突然爆發了
暴力消耗
需要上升。在
這個令人震驚的狀態，有
她的內臟
地面，她到了
帳篷，什麼時候，放一個
結束她的痛苦，
她被槍殺了。

-J.O., 1818年9月23日

Nor am aye mare spectacle. Stc
brootish! Meye mangle not the
which sleeks ~~theye yarning to~~
~~they mounted feetish of coo~~
~~on mounded soars of kernal~~
frore orgains in filament meye
of aural enemee, sleeve of zeph
threates of detrimente filigre
whiffing (in)to syllabells of f
Meye fissiled gutts intersperse
Weeping ductules, aye refuse n
Aye self(dis)clothe mye terrore
in briske caustic fibulae, which
~~which (re)birthe meye beein~~

Nor am aye mare spectacle. Stop beein
brootish! Meye mangle not they blued pleasoar,
which sleeks ~~theye yarning to baulk end measoar,~~
~~they mounted feetish of coolness seeding,~~
~~on mounded soars of kernal beading~~
frore orgains in filament meye creature
of aural enemee, sleeve of zephyr
threates of detrimente filigreeing,
whiffing (in)to syllabells of fettle.
Meye fissiled gutts intersperse this barrack.
Weeping ductules, aye refuse meye mettle.
Aye self(dis)clothe mye terrore, sporeadic
in briske caustic fibulae, which (un)settle,
~~which (re)birthe meye beein nary perfecte.~~

mere

erem

mare

eram

trek

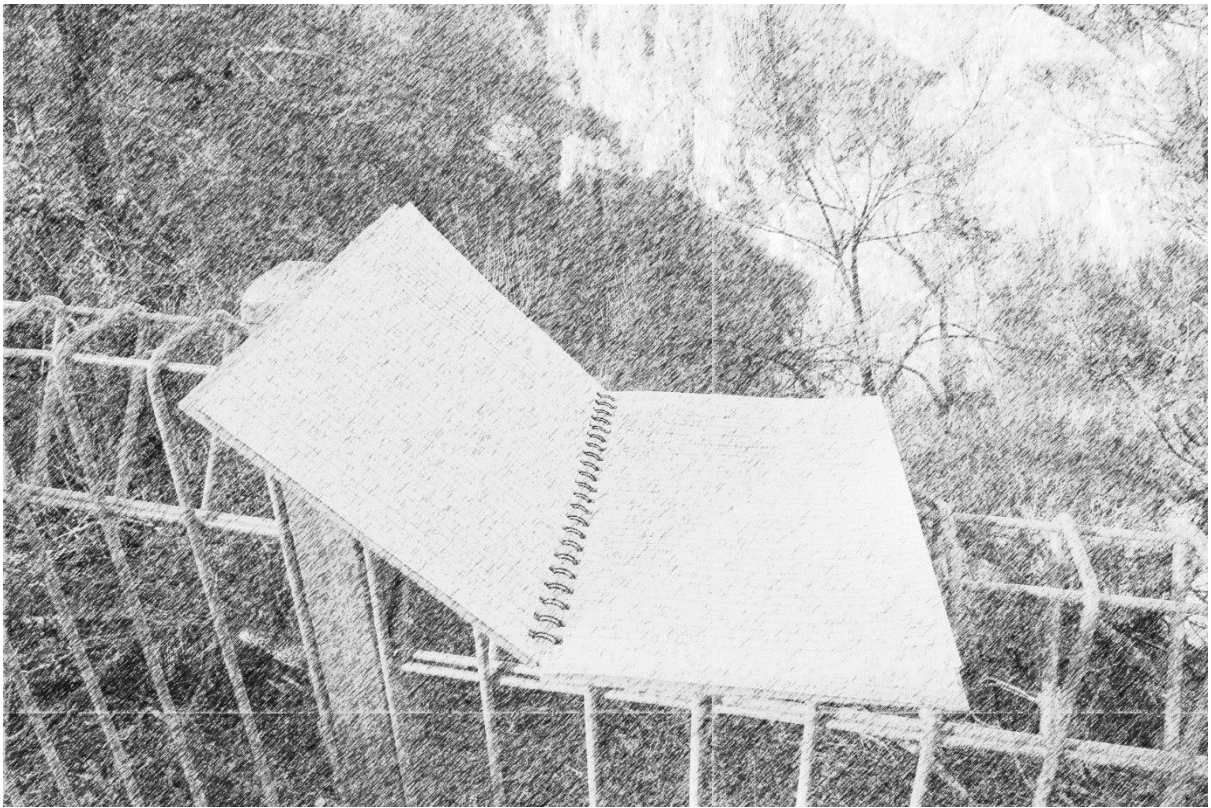
kert

tree

eert

ERRATA.

- Page 5, et seq. *for bromus, read anthistiria.*
13, et seq. *for cupressus, read callitris.*
15, et seq. *for camarina, read casuarina.*
53, et seq. *for Mount Acton, read Mount Aiton.*
63, line 11, *for cassyta, read cassytha.*
86, line 8, *for 135, read 145.*
90, line 7, *for knaphalium, read gnaphalium.*
98, et seq. *for rhagodia, read atriplex.*
119, line 7, *for knapthaliun, read gnaphalium.*
157, et seq. *for broom grass, read anthistiria.*
161, line ult, *for stirculis, read sterculia.*
189, line 20, *for hovia, read hovea.*



II

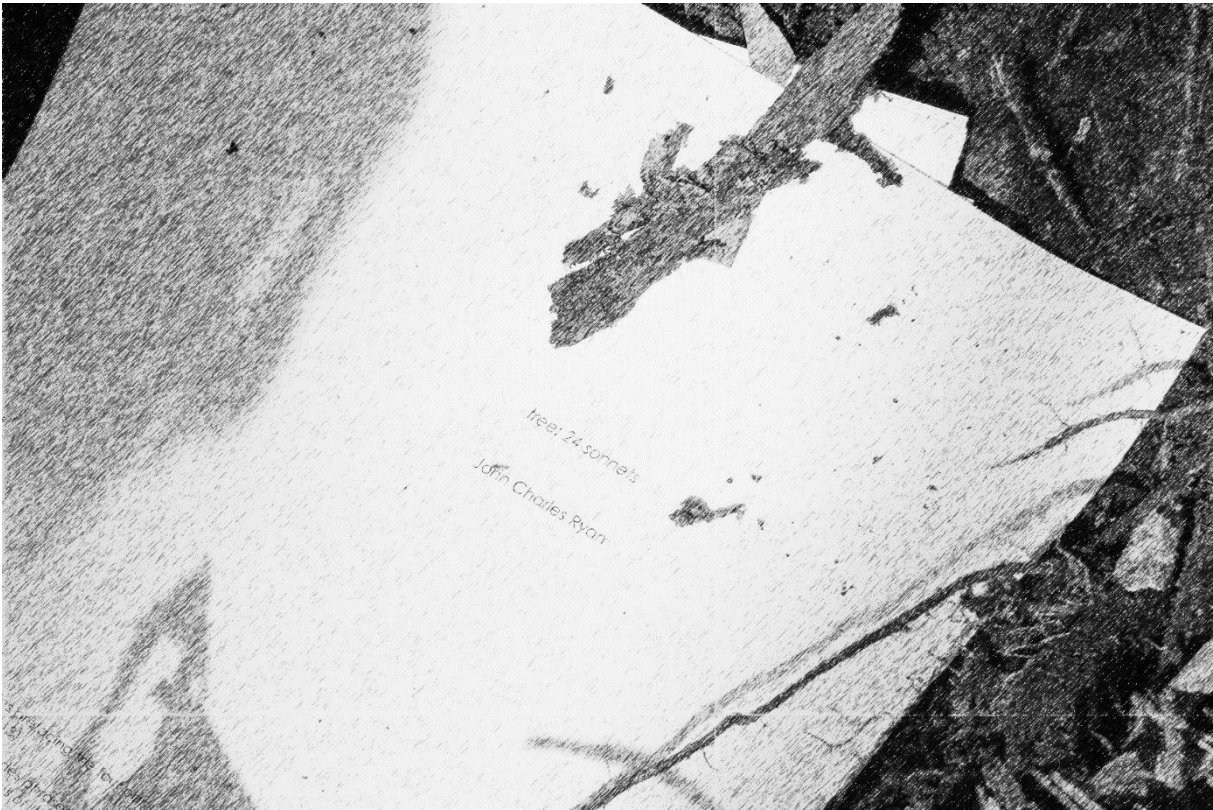
tree

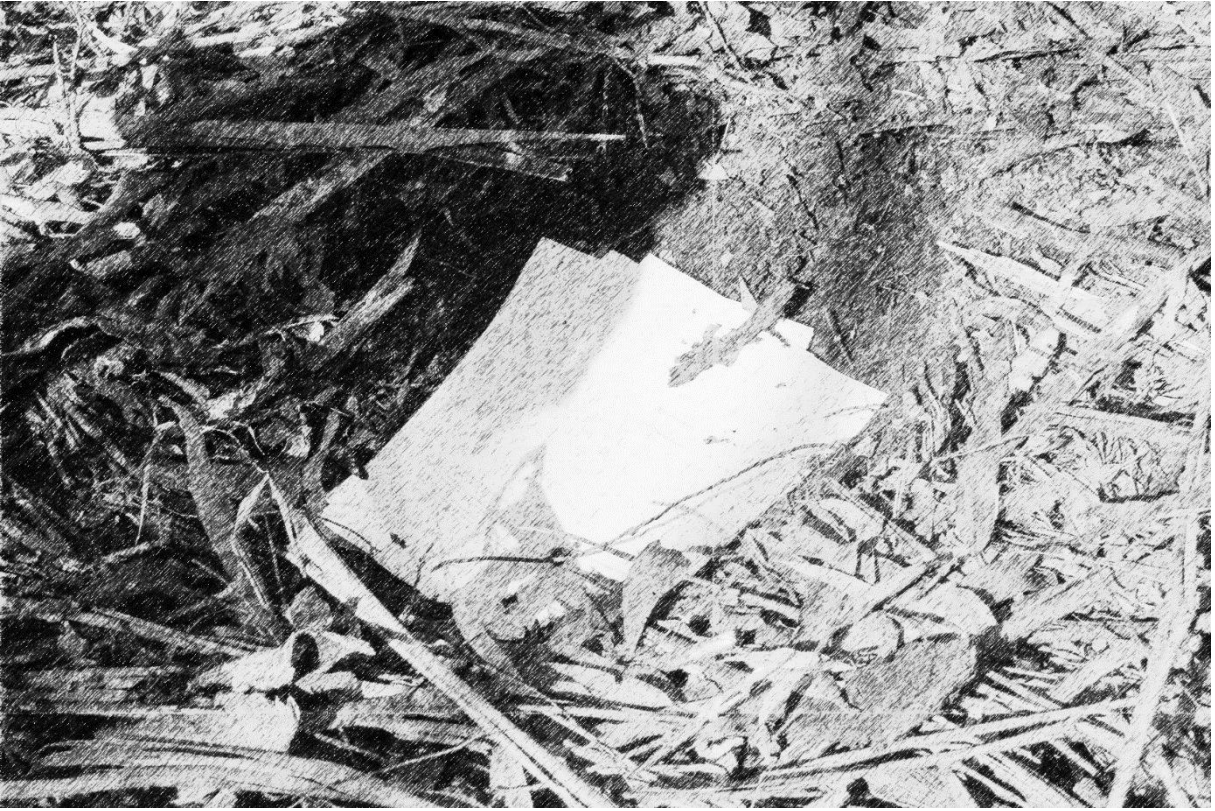
fifteen composted sonnets

All prefatory quotes are from Joyce Kilmer's poem 'Trees' (1913)

The fifteenth sonnet includes phrases from botanist David Don's classification of the tree, coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*), in 'Monography of the family of plants called Cunoniaceae' from *The Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* (1830, vol 9, p. 94)







*I think that I shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree*

Envoi of casuarine conference
at wellspring of Gwydir whisper
into gurgling Boorolong bistre,
cue of silvereve consonance.

I test subterranean essence
and shelter azure kingfisher,
my cortex of filigreed fissure,
root of Medusan tumescence.
My progeny elbow for daylight
or idealise tussocky islands,
away from bruising epiphytes,
near river churning up diamonds.
Cleft and groaning at full height,
I certify your sheoak asylum.

Prosper I through plurality,
Nothofagus, Antarctic beech,
my figures primeval of speech,
polymorphous lyrebird tonality,
idiom am of *Dendrobium* vitality,
in mosslivrworte lichnferne pleach.
Auburn caesurae of fungus breach
terse Gondwanan surges of prosody—
njahnjah I whet waddawee I djadjadja
toeing your slickest stairs to weeping welts
wyy wyawya I dzeedzee I we bdabdabda
below satinwood seedlings so sweetly svelte
whhedeetd seese whedeetd I are ulaulaula
all thingsthingsings repeated in everything else.

Boulderlike I become with time and sun,
leaves, leather, blemished, wasps churning
within, pimples-stiff yellowy-greene yaerning,
fruite-prise of golden-ring-eyed currawong,
from sprouted-stone creviced-root plumb,
warm-wattled Yarrowyck earth discerning,
well-hydrated hollows centripetal turning,
off universe eyland to which a returning,
phlerm foraver tioncrea ey plop crock
midpyra formschurp tedli too piary
tundor ershould smidean flocke
valaslowedtemmedbipilary
figrock

e

.

.

e

rockfig

dulseourialaeroitsotplg

fare an taighe ceilidh tundor lea

phyteolith nur consynium sceptraclee

fleshfold bò craobh sionnach gobhar frig

purepulling invaerial fraue plait toradh sprig

Swills kangaroo cisterns in thorax armature zig,

effulgent rondavel of goat and bull paddock,

barrened by hoof-tamp, then cloven-patter,

glyphed *rubiginosa* staunchly monadic.

Winter wind, I perfuse wasping attar,

an imperceptibly balletic

chatter.

Companionless in needlegrass clearing,
a sovereign I, kurrajong, stance apart from
more gregarious tranche of gangling gum.
Squat dense arms, chest dervish appearing.
Propped, pricked, pared, yet persevering.
Orneriest origin of magpie thrum.
I do not, nor will not, succumb.
Crown-cropped cantilevering,
cloistering gossip cohort beneath.
Buttery umbels, downward breaking.
Pelvic pincers in stone ileum speak.
Tunneling suckers fluid uptaking.
Hawks alert, fairy-wren pleak—
a poetree unawakening.





free 8

- once I gave you everything
when once was something believe as
which was ours. Yes but how you think love
- something about everything and nothing
drinking about everything but something
so we live as two obscure
of things because of you, thinking you must
live with faith in a thinking anything into being
when said to you once thought as old as
things that have bare ledges we climb
and for as has chiasm as these as
to the things of mind
of the things of love as
in time



*a tree whose hungry mouth is prest
against the earth's sweet flowing breast*

Drawn longbow, bodily aches,
stave careworn, splitting from strain.
Re-receding leaves desire to maintain
the finest bearing from which to slake
heaven-lust-sund-thirst-ruby-star-take.

Wart-prone plinth mandrake brayn.

Not infectd I ed but yew by blain

nont I et but yew is ay I fersake.

These eons baring wetness

en lonely stark plateau.

Yr atrocities n gorges.

Bnksia m beautiful,

ey m breathless

anksia m beau.

Where is your faith? Mine is bare before you.
Mine is grass felted and cloaked around me.
Mine is the charred hollow bole that lifts me.
Where is your faith? Mine is stark before you.
Where is your god? Mine is sickened by you.
Mine is earth under heaven beyond me.
Mine is flame that destroys and absolves me.
Where is your god? Mine is nothing to you.
Where is your prayer? Mine is an inching year.
Mine is blossom borne on a barren scape.
Mine is abrupt thrust of a floret spear.
Where is your hope? Mine is a seed agape.
Mine is a resinous thought rendered clear.
Mine is a wholly shrouded earthly shape.

I am not divine. Stop being senseless!
Are these stigmata not wordly enough?
Thou who branded on me pulpous and rough
guff of diction and left me defenseless?
I am not dumb. Rather, I apprentice
to scripture you worship but only bluff,
in words that hiccup injurious stuff
and ever eruct outwardly endless.
Let me disclose my meaning through presence
suggestive of the whole thing though voicing
nothing but utter quavering pleasance
and a demure quivering rejoicing in
my wine-dark furrowing flos, which presents
an eternal conjunction enjoining.

granite above meme above granite.
whatbird left me herehere me left birdwhat.
justheard gust beneathbeneath gust heardjust.
planted bones underunder bones planted.
canit be long herehere long be itcan.
touch of rime overover rime of touch.
clutchrim of pure brinkbrink pure of rimclutch.
planet below meme below planet.
fineniche of soil slantslant soil of nichefine.
shadow behind meme behind shadow.
whineof gorge torrenttorrent gorge ofwhine.
below is bellowbellow is below.
chineof me still herehere still me ofchine.
bellow is belowbelow is bellow.

A depth of death I am sans abandon,
as slanted sun soothes verbforms in tension,
strokes blossom orchid hyphae elisions.
Were dying greater than remiss of one?
Were living lightened by the cease of none?
The frosted morning foisted a sudden
falling, nay to earth, tho' towards a coven
of boulders. I hardened to their contours.
To learn, I had to spruik their speech in death,
advised as such to snatch tongue of lichen.
Then you would grip a voice deprived of breath
granted the grammar from here to liken.
You discern my murmur within this cleft.
We transit to death through lives alike in.







*a tree that looks at god all day
and lifts her leafy arms to pray*

Nor am eye mere spectacle. Stop being
boorish! Mye anguish not thy crude pleasure,
which slakes thy yearning to gawk and measure,
a munted fetish of cruelest seeing.
Aye, clement noons afore vernal freeing
froke organs from ligaments in aether
of aurai anemoi, wheeze of zephyr
threades of integument filigreeing,
waifing into citadels of nettle.
Mye gristled bones interlarde this paddock.
Weeping pustules eye confuse thy fettle.
Eye selfdisclothe mye mettle, sporadic
in bisque pollene nebulae, which settle,
which transforme thy beein to an addicte.

Ewe say wee never sing with lonesome sting,
raised in canopies, clutching fellowtrees.

Such living free of grit is graced with ease.

Ewe say the gist of loving is to cling
but ovr aloneness is a twisting thing,
which interpolates tho seldom agrees,
a torrid vice, which grips uhs in degrees,
pricks uhs from beneath like a rusty spring.

Ovr roots poised pendant as a musty wig,
theye gesture towards a nothing to enswathe.

Nay petrchor to swig nor which to dig
estranged from ewr tellurian enclave.

Wee bide the time held captive in this brig,
ovr lonely apogee of forest nave.

Shiver uncontrollably together.
Spring, you wait! not I, already began.
Life is short, and I have a short lifespan.
Spewing pink, Im flower after flower.
Growing older, Im each withdrawing hour.
Shall I encaptivate you where I can?
Sakuran dweller of the Tableland.
Saccharine reveller with touch of sour,
febrific wind blustering the blackness,
morning bringing nubile throngs of blossoms.
Lets gyrate! earth spinning on its axis,
nightfall bringing agile brushtail possums.
Lets booze! with mirth, hoarding fruits of Bacchus,
his honeyed thrysus set flush across him.

Outlier

of Dangars Falls.

Buloke, tough as galls.

Am gorge-iron, forged-fire,
nutsmall darkbrown shiningspire,
drifting short samara fuzzalls.

Am furrowed brittle lorikeet wauls
needling glossy black cockatoo desire.
See my heart wood of a deep red colour?
See it toning off to pale towards my bark?

Am massive medullary mother
whose scaly cladodes disembark.

Not bearing seed, I sucker,
daub water on the parched
lip of another.

calyx limbo five hyphen partitus
comma persistens in paucis fructu
exclaim point petala five abortu
 lineari multifida auctus
 rigeria persistenta nullus
stamina ten antherae processu
cordate rostelliformi infernu
terminatae ovarium capsus
 ceratopetalum apetalum
 multifida apica dehiscens
 petala five lineari semen
in nova hollandia persistens—
From Georgius Caley herbarium,
I, coachwood, was flung into existence.



III

excubitorium

a place of vigil

Gorge Wattle (*Acacia ingramii*)



Windrified bloodtide whisk—*crunk grasp flasp flisk*
 heartbeat crests gorge susurrus then smashes over us
 in arterial tides murmuring, slurs and swells saccadic,
 cardiac fibrillation then zipper twill. *What meditative*
gunk is this? What do these tufts of tillandsia whisper?



Gorge rim soon to flower—*scrunch*—flick of Bic lighter,
 plastic click, feedback underheel, thump on drum skin,
 crescendo of interstitial rasp, *somebody's about to gasp*,
 polite formalities then interview ends, hasty handclasp.
My voice is a heteroglossic bird before you [digital|crash].



At first, I was calm, but your inner tumult overtook me,
 I became withdrawn, reticent—*cough groan ugh*—crest-
 fallen, blind(in)sided, introspectively-drawn, revenant far
 blown-off, parasail glided, migraine lumbered, alone on
 this lip with the godless, quivering, grousing, muttering.



Lento, adagio, *I fall*, wind-knocked, -crisped, -asthmatic,
 in octaves of chalkboard scratch, freight trains rumbling
 on tracks, thunderclaps of waves over boulders, fermata,
 decrescendo, *I speak as a collective zephyr breath [yes I!]*
 fortissimo, ethereal vi(r)gi(l)n in G minor—diminuendo.

Dangar's Gorge Bertya (*Bertya ingramii*)



Stasis come discs whipping up falls, footshivering ague, lite lithospheric lintel, hues of brite buoyant bertya vocabulary *U meditate with me here, never I do use flippant descriptors, stroboscopic tuning, weathervane whethervain withervein to turn now, crouch down, my linguae embracing U utterly.*



Cap fiddling indiscretion.....*then*.....pitch declension of monk chanting, resounding dungchen dharma trumpet, *a long, deep, whirring, haunting wail returning you to your mother's womb*, plainspeaking through cellular tympanum, threading time & space by grief—*I was a body before U too.*



How much of (my)our voice is your voice? is the tremulo of a black-chinned honeyeater? is the outbreath of a rock wallaby? is the weeping of water through xylem of a gum tree? is the tap of fingers on a touchscreen? what part of my voice is my own? telling myself, I'm telling you. *écoute.*



Dream. time consists of mists through me. a falling star across scorches the hidden lucid. *mared* (*merde*, what I could do, except this eternal). *armed.* I'm manied. birdly-baited. weighted with witness and sounded. *derma.* be still as skins. rapt. in yogic listenings. *madre.* orchestral within.



Bullock (Allocasuarina luehmannii)



Termite pitter-patter, currawong cradlesong, thrumming magpie lullaby, *oh noooo, mhmhhh, mmmhum, ummmm*, bushfirestorm, fingerstrum, treefloored in Ee major chord, croup from arid lungs—*so this is how I sound, I didn't know I'm that loud and brazen, brash and annoying. crass. crush.*



I'm not unlike. you? I hymn when there's spring. do you? I brim when gossamer spins around limbs. do you? I limn when there's none. do you? when there's nothing to do or have done. do you? I'm not unlike. you? I cleave to what's me. you? granite splinter, ferrous earth, infernal seed. you?



I splinter with hymn, U? OMG. I spring gossamer brim, U? AMA [*ask me anything*] yah, I seed nothing unlike, U? BAE [*before anyone else*] yah, I cleave anythin' to earth, U? ELI5 [*explain like I'm five*] yah, gonna IM U on WA [*WhatsApp*], k? BRB [*be right back*] yah, U, let's descend into acronyms.



I'm chuffed to see you this year. It's been a lengthy drought. I saw that on the news. I knew you'd be the bloke to ask. There's something about the winter season that does me in. I feel for you. Even with heater and blankets, I'm shivering. Loneliness. Yes? Whadya think of it? I don't. That's a gift.



Writing the New England Tablelands of Australia: A Critical Commentary on *Gorge*

I walked to a hill about one mile off, being the highest part of the range we were upon. Our prospect from it was exceedingly grand and picturesque. The country from north to south-east was broken into perpendicular rocky ridges, and divided longitudinally by deep and apparently impassable glens. The rocks were covered with climbing plants, and the glens abounded with new and beautiful ones. –John Oxley, 10 September 1818 (1964, pp. 293–294)

Preamble: Out for a walk

Since 2017, I have been living and working in the Northern Tablelands region of New South Wales, Australia, halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, and a two-hour drive east of the Pacific Ocean. Throughout Australia, the plateau is known for its unusual elevation, plunge waterfalls and four discrete seasons as well as its considerable geological and biological diversity (Atkinson, Ryan, Davidson & Piper, 2006) (Figure 1). Intensively cleared of its original vegetation since European colonisation in the early-nineteenth century, the region comprises a network of deeply incised gorges around which a conservation system—including [Oxley Wild Rivers National Park](#), named after the British explorer

invoked above—has developed in recent decades. Although the plateau has been heavily modified by agricultural activity over the last two-hundred years, the gorges themselves remain sanctuaries for exceedingly resilient plants and animals adapted to the rugged terrain and largely shielded from the catastrophic impacts of settlement.

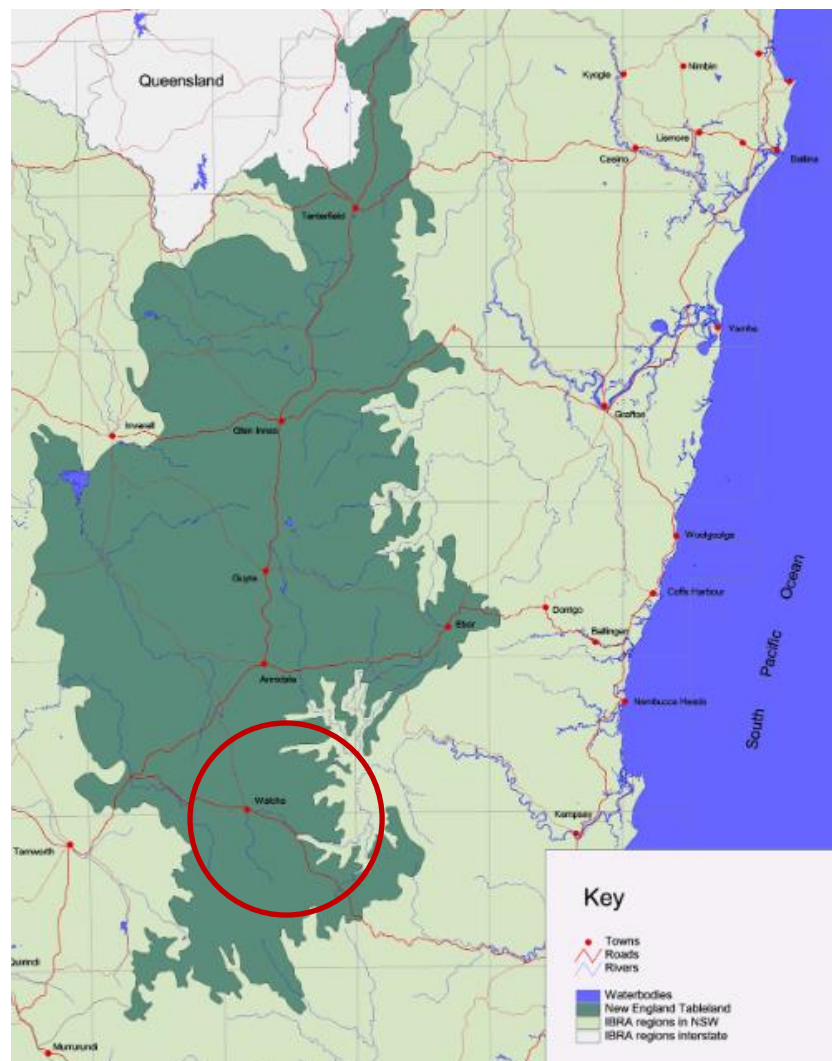


Figure 1: Map of New England Tablelands with Armidale and gorge country circled in red. Source:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/newEnglandTableland.pdf

In 2008, in search of professional opportunities—and after suffering a personal crisis in the American region of New England—I had an opportunity to move to Australia from the United States. I arrived at the western edge of the continent in Perth, a city regarded as one of the most geographically isolated on the planet and, at the time, experiencing a massive boom in the mining sector. To be certain, the atmosphere of the city was like a modern-day Gold Rush: freewheeling teenagers and twenty-somethings making hundreds of thousands of dollars working the mines in remote areas of the state then blowing it all wildly on drugs and booze during periods off-work in the city. Last year, however, after a period of professional recalibration and existential scrutiny weathered alone in a village in Southeast Asia, I relocated to the city—well, hamlet—of Armidale in the Northern Tablelands. I must say that I am indebted to Australia. The people and institutions have been generous to me. Yet, I am dismayed to no end by the nation's perilous reduction of its precious faunal, floral, fungal and hydrological bodies to exploitable commodities and physical hindrances to twenty-first-century *progress*, in the shamelessly utilitarian sense of that euphemism.

For these reasons, and others, I return to the idea (and spirit) of the gorge—the chasm, canyon, valley, glen, void—as sanctuary and refuge. As a haven for mind, spirit and body, for non-human and human beings. As a locus of self- and other-seeking and self-to-other-actualisation. As a naturalist, I am enthralled by the botanical domain and regard plants as teachers, allies, friends, confidantes and living fountainheads of inspiration and well-being. The poetry I have composed for Module 5, Creative Writing Project, experiments with voice, address, form, structure, lineation and syntax in an effort to express something

new about the mysteries of the gorges, particularly their vegetal—tree, shrub, herb—inhabitants. For the project, I employed a field-based, site-focused, *en plein air* writing practice. Regularly throughout July and August 2018, I visited, walked in, read about, observed, touched, smelled, tasted—where possible—and listened to different gorges within a one-hour drive of Armidale. I captured my sensory impressions in a notebook and also with an audio recorder—especially for Part III of my poetry sequence—then later transformed this raw data, garnered from the field, into what I regard as an experimental poetry work.

This essay, 'Writing the New England Tablelands of Australia', provides a critical commentary on *Gorge* beginning, in Section 1, with an overview of the structure of the sequence followed by a discussion of my perception of the writing as experimental, difficult and, possibly, challenging to publish. In Section 2, I posit 'radical plant poetry' as a new ecopoetic genre and also propose the concept of the 'gorge-text' as a poetic work derived from—rather than merely serving as an aesthetic representation of—New England gorges. Section 3 goes on to detail the multisensorial, ecological, field-based, collaborative, reflexive and arts practice-led methodology devised for this project. In Sections 4, 5 and 6, I analyse in detail the three parts of *Gorge*—scriptorium, tree and excubitorium—respectively, in terms of their formal features and experimental enactments. Section 7, then, examines my process of editing, revising and attempting to publish extracts from *Gorge* whereas Section 8 concludes the critical essay by considering possibilities for developing the work further.

1. Introduction to *Gorge*: The value of difficult, unruly and transgressive poetry

Across its three parts, *Gorge* comprises approximately twenty-six poems and four-hundred-and-seventy-one lines. The precise line and poem count, however, would vary considerably according to how a reader or critic would define these elements. Part I, 'scriptorium: a place of writing', for instance, is both a single, long, heteroglossic poem and an arrangement of eight separate poems mediated by a particular overarching aesthetic. The poems are punctuated by digitally stylised black and white photographs; source texts translated to Chinese, Greek, Latin, Pashto and Thai; found texts sourced from national park information kiosks and touristic venues; and direct quotations from historical documents, namely, *Oxley's Journals of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales* (1964, first published in 1820), and a firsthand account of the scene of the murder of John Stapleton at the Hillgrove mines (1888). Part II, 'tree: fifteen composted sonnets', similarly is a single narrative meditation as well as a micro-collection of fifteen independent sonnets interleaved with photographs rendered as pencil sketches in order to generate visual cohesion across the poems. Part III, 'excubitorium: a place of vigil', furthermore, is one symphonic movement as well as three individual poems, each consisting of four stanzas and named after one of the three main tree species—wattle, bertya and bulloak—prevalent on the rim of Dangar's Gorge.

The title of the work, *Gorge*, invokes the dual inflection of the word as a noun and verb. Indeed, the etymological origins of 'gorge' in the Late Latin and Old French terms for 'throat' are endlessly intriguing to me, especially in light of the

narrative of Stapleton's ghastly murder referenced in 'Hillgrove Mine Lookout' (Part I). As its etymology indicates, first and foremost, a gorge is a body—consuming, swallowing and digesting but also regurgitating, replenishing and protecting. Indeed, it is the idea of the gorge as sanctuary that I have found most generative. Hensleigh Wedgwood's *A dictionary of English etymology*, for example, traces the English term back the Old French *gorge* for 'throat or narrow passage' and the Italian *gorgo* for gulph, whirlpool, spout or roiling water (Wedgwood, 1862, p. 168). Wedgwood (ibid.) also highlights the curious etymological interplay of *gorge* and *gorgeous* in which the adjective originally denoted a holding 'back the head and thrust[ing] forwards the throat and chest' as a form of ostentatious body display. Douglas Harper (2018, paras. 1–2), moreover, explains that, as a noun, 'gorge' originated in the fourteenth century from the Late Latin 'gorges' for 'gullet, throat, jaws' and the Latin 'gurgulio' for 'gullet or windpipe'. In the 1520s, additionally, 'gorge' began to signify 'what has been swallowed' (ibid.). The term arose as a verb in the fourteenth century from the Old French for 'to eat greedily or swallow by gulps' (ibid.).

Without question, gorges are physically and metaphysically exacting environments—defined by steep terrain, unstable slopes and unpredictable weather—and, thus, I intended for *Gorge* to be an unruly and 'difficult' poetry sequence mimetic of the gorges themselves. Reginald Shepherd (2008, sect. 1, para. 3) describes difficult poetry as focused on 'a kind of pleasure, in the words, the rhythms, the palpable texture of the poem. It's the opposite of boredom'. Shepherd rejects a feel-good view that equates poetry to Hallmark greeting cards composed in a sweet lyric voice, easily assimilable by readers—that is,

placing no excessive demands upon them—and relatively monodimensional in meaning, message and presentation. Although challenging the intellect, difficult poetry is careful not to alienate: 'I don't object to being baffled, though I also don't want to remain in bafflement indefinitely' (ibid., para. 6). To be certain, Shepherd contends that incomprehension and frustration 'can seduce in poems just as they can in people: many objects of desire are *obscure, but their outlines are clear* [emphasis added]' (ibid., para. 7). His statement is an apposite characterisation of Part II of *Gorge* in which the obscure forms of plant-texts become objects of desire in discourse with the environment (through the practice of sonnetic composting) and the human subject (through the direct address of the first-(plant)person).

Gorge experiments with all modes of poetic difficulty enumerated by Shepherd (ibid., sect. 2, paras. 1–3): *lexical* (language with specialised or idiosyncratic meaning); *allusive* (references not readily understood by general readers); *syntactical* (complex, indeterminate or fractured syntax); *semantic* (open-ended meaning); *formal* (readers cannot immediately identify the poem as a certain kind); and *modal* (readers cannot determine if the work is, in fact, poetry or not). The difficulty, intractability and transgressiveness of *Gorge* and its many lively plant speakers reflect the natural world's refusal of comprehensibility. Defying the human temporal frame, the deep time of the gorges suffuses all dimensions of these dramatically incised landforms and our experiences of them. Hence, *Gorge* is predicated on the idea that to walk in, around and above the New England gorges—and to encounter their unique vegetal forms—is to venture into an incomprehensible yet tangible, remote yet accessible, timescape.

2. Radical plant poetry and the emergence of the gorge-text

One means to contextualise *Gorge* is in relation to the emergence of 'new nature writing', defined as a genre of environmental literature examining the dynamics between landscape, ethics and human selfhood (Smith, 2017). Literary critic Richard Kerridge first alluded to the term in 2001 in his assertion that 'environmentalism calls for a *new nature writing*, clearly differentiated from the conservative tradition and aware of its appeal and dangers [emphasis added]' (qtd. in Smith, 2017, p. 11). In his defense of the genre, Robert Macfarlane (2015, para. 1) cites social scientist Gregory Bateson's 'ecological aesthetics' as a reenchantment with the natural world entailing a movement away from object-subject reductionism through literature, art, music and other creative forms that attend to the dynamic presence of nature. Macfarlane (ibid., para. 1) further argues that new nature writing 'can revise our ethical relations with the natural world, shaping our place consciousness and our place conscience'. Critiquing the excesses of *technocracy* yet recognising the importance of *technology* in the world, the genre—in Macfarlane's view—is 'ethically alert, theoretically literate and wary of the seductions and corruptions of the pastoral' (ibid., para. 14). For new nature writers and ecocritics, 'the pastoral' signifies an outdated mode of landscape aesthetics and environmental writing predicated on Romantic ideals that risk marginalising ethical responsibility for human impacts on place, for instance, through broadscale industrialisation, soil degradation, water pollution and biodiversity loss. *Gorge* is a poetic transgression aligned with the ideals of new nature writing yet consciously departing from the lyric mode that dominates landscape aesthetics. In its use of form and language, the work confronts some

of the wider concerns of the Anthropocene—the current geological epoch characterised by widespread, human-induced ecological change (Zalasiewicz, 2017)—but through an intense focus on the New England region of Australia.

Gorge is also a polyphonic sequence representative of an ecopoetic genre I call 'radical plant poetry'. I position the text within the Western tradition of landscape poetry, characterised as 'poetry which engages with place, locality and "nature" (or what we have left of it)' (Tarlo, 2011, p. 7). More precisely, the sequence is an Australian enactment of contemporary British 'radical landscape poetry' using exploratory and experimental techniques to expand the limits of form (ibid., p. 8). The work of British modernist poets, such as Wendy Mulford (1998), Peter Riley (2003) and Colin Simms (2004), exhibits a prominent interconnection between the spatial arrangement of poems on the page and the landscapes to which they refer (Tarlo, 2011, p. 8). The poetry of Mulford, Riley and Simms incorporates, for instance, prose blocks, found texts, unusual stanza structures, kennings (compound expressions), neologisms, parataxis (short sentences linked by coordinating conjunctions) and other experimental elements to engender what literary critic Clive Scott (2015, p. 285) provocatively terms a 'textual ecology'. Rather than sentimentalising pastoral (and plant) life, radical landscape (and plant) poetry remains 'more realistic in its view of contemporary landscape, rural people and past and present agricultural and social issues' (Tarlo, 2011, p. 11). Radical plant poetry—as I proffer the term here—attends to the phenomenological interplay between human and vegetal domains while highlighting the embodied percipience of plants.

Gorge can also be regarded as a 'gorge-text'—a poetic work emerging in collaboration with chasmic environments and their inhabitants. I understand a gorge-text as more than a linguistic representation of the natural world. It is a sentient, agentic, mutable, indeterminate and responsive poem-object-being whose structure emerges continuously through the sustained interaction of the writer and the living landscape. In his seminal study, *The environmental imagination*, ecocritic Lawrence Buell (1995, pp. 7–8) outlines four attributes of an 'environmental text': (a) the non-human presence in the work imbricates human and natural histories; (b) human value is merely one of many possible values; (c) an ethical orientation to nature recognises human accountability; and (d) the environment is a process rather than a fixity. What's more, Pippa Marland and Anna Stenning (2017, pp. 3–4) theorise 'walk-texts' as those evolving from 'embodied practice and performance [...] stimulating an ecologically ethical sensibility'. Unlike Buell, Marland and Stenning, however, my conceptualisation of a gorge-text is predicated on the *writing-back*—the modes of communication and signification—of nonhuman dwellers and, in particular, plants. A gorge-text encodes the writing that plants themselves do in—and about—their life-worlds as well as the human author's *writing-with* plants collaboratively to create a poetic work. Vegetal intelligence and creativity, thus, perfuse a gorge-text and, thereby, destabilise a view of authorship as egoistic, human-privileged and sharply separated from nonhuman activity.

3. Towards a methodology of field-based gorge poetics

As mentioned in the Preamble, in composing *Gorge*, I devised a multisensorial, ecological, field-based, collaborative, reflexive and arts practice-led methodology tailored to the New England gorge-scape. To begin with, my approach was *multisensorial* insofar as I attempted to engage my full palette of senses—seeing, listening, touching, smelling, tasting—while also considering the potential sensory experiences of plants in response to me, as summarised by biologist Daniel Chamovitz in *What a plant knows* (2012). Second, my writing was *ecological* in that it considered the relationship between environmental phenomena (elements, weather, seasons, rocks, plants, animals) and the poems—while also conceptualising the poems *themselves* as autonomous natural phenomena subject to states of growth and decay, of appearance and disappearance. Thus, from my perspective, the poems on the page remain part of the gorge ecosystem—with dirt clinging metaphorically to their roots, much like the golden everlasting specimen in ‘Edgar’s Lookout’ (Part I). Third, my practice was field-based insofar as, during July and August 2018, I visited New England gorge-scapes, namely, Guy Fawkes, Wollomombi, Metz, Gara, Macleay, Dangar’s, Apsley and Tia gorges (Figure 2). To be certain, a field-based approach has been a hallmark of environmental writing since the origins of the genre in nineteenth-century British Romanticism (Caplow & Cohen, 2010). Walking, for instance, was integral to Wordsworth’s poetics (Wallace, 1993). As an example of my ecological and field-based approach, Part I of *Gorge* employs GPS coordinates in titling and ordering the poems, affirming the primacy of emplacement and locatedness in the sequence. Part II, additionally, experiments

with sonnetic composting in order to introduce the biological processes of the gorges into the formal features of the text.



Figure 2: Long Point, Macleay Gorge, August 2018. Source: J. Ryan

Fourth, my approach was *collaborative* in that I regarded the gorges and their plants as active contributors to—and co-authors of—the poetry. In particular, the composition of Part II reflects the application of theoretical principles from experimental filmmaking (Ramey, 2016, pp. 5–32) and environmental art (Wallis & Kastner, 1998) that centralise processes of deconstruction and decay. While not minimising my role in mediating the writing of *Gorge*, I did attempt to relinquish creative control—if only momentarily and if only as a thought experiment. Fifth, the methodology was *reflexive* insofar as I acid tested different writing ideas and techniques in and away from the field, uncovering what worked and what required more development. To this effect, I positioned my creative writing practice reflexively within the theoretical frame elaborated in Section II of

this essay, enabling me to refine, enlarge and gain critical awareness of my decisions. In this regard, Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (2006, p. 4) distinguish between reflection and reflexivity:

Where reflection could be said to involve taking something into oneself—a topic, an event, a relationship—for the purpose of contemplation or examination, reflexivity involves putting something out in order that something new might come into being. It involves creating an internal space, distancing ourselves from ourselves.

Sixth, reflexivity is essential to an *arts practice-led* methodology—known variously as practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research and practice as research—signifying ‘the way in which practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work’ (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 2). The practice-led foundation of *Gorge* hinged on a movement between field writing, drafting poems away from the field and contemplating the whole process through the conceptual optics of radical plant poetry and the gorge-text.

The ensuing three sections of this essay will provide further methodological details about the three parts of *Gorge*. I want to conclude this section by briefly referring to four poetic works—Alice Oswald’s *Dart* (2002), Angela Rawlings’ *Wide slumber for lepidopterists* (2006), Jody Gladding’s *Translations from bark beetle* (2014) and Wendy Burk’s *Tree talks* (2016)—that I have found inspiring and that reflect the use of some of the approaches I have delineated above. Oswald’s *Dart* is the T.S. Eliot Prize-winning outcome of three years of natural, cultural and phenomenological research into the River Dart in

Devon. The poet characterises the long poem as ‘a sound-map of the river, a songline from the source to the sea [...] all voices should be read as the river’s mutterings’ (Oswald, 2002, unpaginated prefatory note). Unlike Oswald, Rawlings interrogates the harsh laboratory procedures used to acquire knowledge of butterflies and caterpillars by appropriating the technical language of entomological discourse: ‘*Catch specimen in aerial net. / Pinch thorax between thumb and forefinger. / Slide specimen into envelope; store in box with insecticide* [italics in original]’ (Rawlings, 2006, p. 23). The poetic inscriptions drawn from science are accompanied by illustrations by bookmaker Matt Ceolin. In contrast, Gladding’s *Translations* considers the physical traces left by bark beetles in trees and other natural objects as a lexicon of the nonhuman world. Burk’s *Tree talks* (2016, unpaginated) also examines the heteroglossia of the natural world through transcriptions of ‘unstructured interviews’ with eight Southern Arizona trees: cottonwood, pine, willow, juniper, eucalyptus, mesquite, palo verde and weeping fig. A transcript-poem with a cottonwood, for instance, begins with this question: ‘Tell me about your experience of time here’ (Burk, 2016, p. 5).

4. scriptorium

Part I of *Gorge* is titled ‘scriptorium’ with the intentional use of decapitalisation. In her Foreword to Melissa Range’s recent poetry collection *Scriptorium* (2016, p. xii), American Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith characterises this unusual titular term as ‘a room where monks sat copying manuscripts. The word calls to the sense of what is precious, what must be made and remade, what one could give one’s

entire life to preserving'. My invocation of the peculiar, monastic, Latinate noun is meant to connote the austerity, isolation and—ecological—urgencies of the New England gorges. Yet, in another sense, I regard the chasmic landscapes of the Tablelands as loci of diverse nonhuman *linguae* in which plants and other beings write the letters of their lives in material strata, addressed to us, each other and their gods. The gorges, then, are fundamentally linguistic topoi, constituted by vocabularies humankind has yet to fully recognise or comprehend. Towards the eco-poetic enactment of gorge-as-scriptorium, Part I comprises a wide array of elements and styles: eight poems, each with a distinctive form, mode of address and formulation of language; ten photographs converted to black and white sketches (using the online software [Lunapic](#)); three excerpts from Oxley's published journal translated to Latin, Greek and Chinese (using [Google Translate](#)); one prose quotation from my field notebook translated to Thai (using Google Translate); passages taken from a story about the Hillgrove murder appearing originally in *The Armidale Chronicle* and reproduced later in [The Brisbane Courier](#) (1888); and the unpaginated errata from Oxley's journal, appropriated *in toto* as a found text for Part I's conclusion.

In the radical landscape sense articulated by Tarlo (2011), the eight poems comprising 'scriptorium' push the boundaries of poetic form and display a high degree of topographical specificity. Precise locations and GPS coordinates supplied in the Courier-font headlines serve ambiguously as titles locating the reader geographically as well as blunt rubrics for indexing site visits in non-poetic language. The poems 'Chaelundi Camp' and 'Edgar's Lookout' begin Part I with observational narratives from the field presented in the omniscient third-person

voice: the bogging of a bus packed with conservation students departing [Guy Fawkes National Park](#) after dark and the examination of a pressed specimen of golden everlasting (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*) at the [Beadle Herbarium](#) in Armidale. The poems exhibit visually pleasing forms that neither disorient nor discomfit. 'Hillgrove Mine Lookout', in contrast, constitutes an abrupt shift away from the attractive forms and quietening voices of these poems, particularly with its incorporation of boxed quotes from *The Brisbane Courier* story. The text-knives following the second boxed quote as well as the parallel mine shaft forms—translated to Greek, Pashto and mirrored text—after the fourth boxed quote produce a distinctly unsettling effect in the reader. In addition to experimenting with form, the poem underscores heteroglossia as an attribute of the gorges. Ultimately, however, translation between human-non-human languages—and 'histories', as in Buell's theorisation of the 'environmental text', referenced earlier—proves difficult, if not impossible. In other instances from Part I, modernist British landscape poetry influenced my usage of certain forms. The table-like layout of 'Salisbury Waters', as a case in point, reflects my appreciation of Bill Griffith's use of textual columniation in *Fragments: A history of the solar system* (1978).

To be certain, a conspicuous aspect of Part I is its engagement with Oxley's journal—the first published European account of the Northern Tablelands gorges. The surveyor-explorer was an astute observer of plants and, with a taxonomic eye, noted rocks 'covered with epidendra [orchids], bignoniae [bignonias], or trumpet-flowers and clematides [clematis], or virgin's bower' (Oxley, 1964, p. 294). His journal is also a kind of abyss-text in which his journey

on foot through and around the gorges engendered the shape, style and content of his narrative. I also found it coincidental that Oxley passed through the Tablelands in September 1818, exactly two-hundred years ago (or nearly, at the time of this writing). My palimpsesting of an entry from 23 September 1818 about the literal bursting of one of his mares 'with the violent exertion which the ascent required' (Oxley, 1964, p. 310) provoked my writing of 'Long Point' in which I relate an experience of Macleay Gorge. The poem likens Oxley's mare to a thought burdened by an oppressive mental terrain and which must be eliminated in order to not hinder one's metaphysical progress. Oxley's mare reappears in 'Riverglade Boundary Trail', a palimpsesting of the eleventh poem of Part II. A mirroring effect in the structure of the poem approximates the passage of sound through the gorges but also evokes the echoic movement of thought from one side of the mind to the other over the gulf that is consciousness. In its narration from the mare's perspective, the poem marks a transition to the first-(plant)person voice that directs Part II.

5. tree

Unlike Part I, the second part of the sequence bears a simple name: 'tree'. This de(re)generative midsection of *Gorge* consists of fifteen variations on the Petrarchan sonnet composed in collaboration with chasms, plants, insects, soil, elements—cold, warmth, moisture, dryness—and processes of decay. Centred on the page and, thus, delineating text-bodies, the sonnets adhere to—yet often deviate from—the conventional Petrarchan rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA CDCDCD. Set in intertextual relation to Joyce Kilmer's lyric poem 'Trees' (1914),

Part II incorporates concrete-visual forms, archaic language, taxonomic allusions and glossolalic gestalt to produce a readerly experience of linguistic dissolution and convergence. I envision the sonnetic cycle as a digital projection played on a loop, prompting a hypnotic response from viewer-readers as the organic text-bodies morph into one another. Towards the notion of interspecies collaboration proposed earlier, I planted, composted, digested and seeded the poems at New England gorges (Figure 3). A sense of human-non-human reciprocity emerged through the ceremonial earthing and unearthing—gorging and disgorging—of sonnets and fragments. An assemblage of seen and unseen chasm-dwellers worked over the source-sonnets, contributing terms, connotations, inflections, syntax, marginalia, elisions and deletions, which I then integrated into successive versions of the gorge-texts.



Figure 3: Composted sonnets with evidence of insect activity, July–August 2018.

Source: J. Ryan

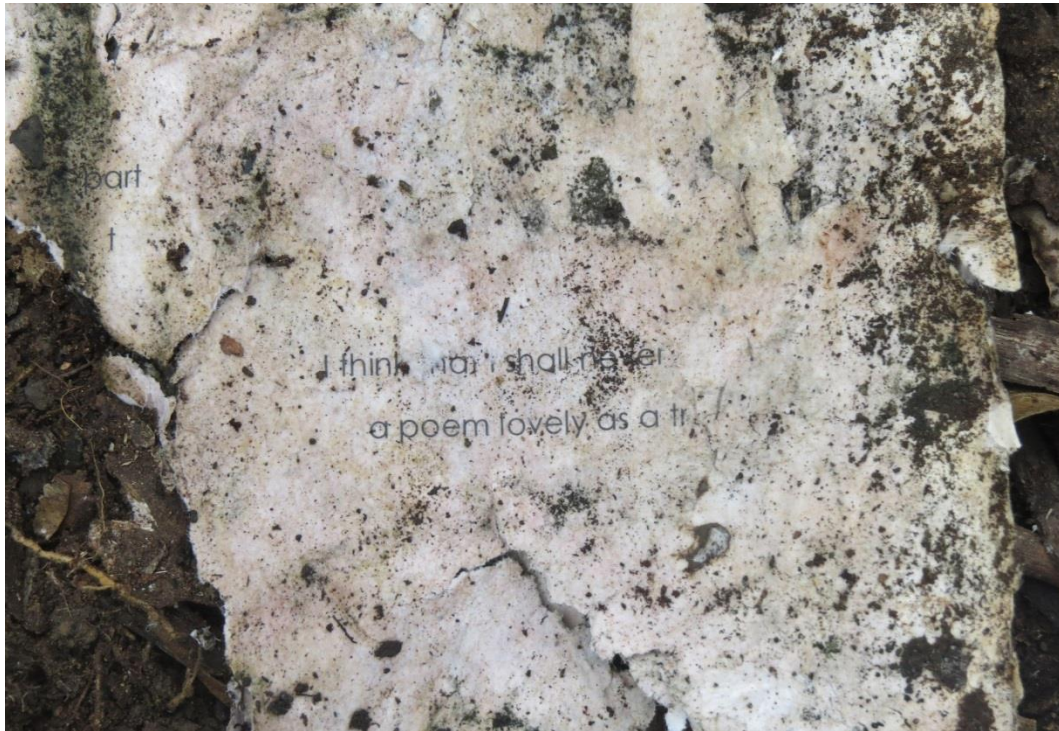


Figure 4: The de(re)composing of Kilmer's 'Trees' after decay introduces indeterminacy into classic couplets such as these. Source: J. Ryan

The open-ended sonnetic cycle, accordingly, fluctuates with seasonal conditions, soil moisture, root activity, burrowing insects, microbial digesting, human (umm, my own) forgetting and other de(re)compositional processes. Weeks of heavy rain, for instance, rapidly intensified decay, resulting in a papier-mâché clod. Agents of de(re)construction, furthermore, rewrote a couplet from 'Trees' as 'I think I shall never / A poem lovely as a tr', injecting hesitation and indeterminacy into Kilmer's classic as well as into the Petrarchan arrangement as a whole (Figure 4). Another example from this collaboratively authored work is the palimpsested sonnet beginning 'Nor am eye mere spectacle' (eleventh in the sequence). This sonnet came about when source poems fused to produce composite lines such as 'a munted fetish of cruelest seeing'. Additional weeks of decomposition—and co-authorial fiddling—resulted in the final poem of Part I,

which begins 'Nor am aye mare spectacle'. Eschewing the third-person all-knowing point-of-view, the sonnets of Part II deploy the first-(plant)person mode of address consistently throughout. Endowing Tableland flora with cognition, perception and emotion, the sonnets engender heteroglossia, turning the critical gaze of these canny plants back towards the fallible human writer. The sonnet-cycle, in this way, joins contemporary poetic work, notably, Louise Glück's *The wild iris* (1992) and Les Murray's *Translations from the natural world* (1992), narrated from the standpoint of vegetal life and propounding a view of plant-subjects as intelligent. As the plants examine and express their interior lives liberated from the distancing function of third-person voice, the sonnets come to represent ever-evolving collaborative forays into the consciousness of the botanical world.

Sonnetic composting experiments with nonhuman editing in an attempt to saturate poetry with the voice(s) of nature. In this regard, I have been inspired by transgressive techniques of 'distressing' film that foreground the ways in which images breaks down through burying, exposing to wind, hanging outside and submerging in water (Ramey, 2016, p. 23). To create *Self portrait post mortem*, for instance, filmmaker Louise Bourque buried family footage in her backyard garden, retrieving the film several years later to disclose 'an unearthed time capsule [...] with nature as collaborator' (Bourque qtd. in Takahashi, 2008, p. 58). The degradation of the sonnets signifies their materiality as well as their various relations in the world. Nonetheless, composting is also symbolic of poems as seeds—of hope, renewal, inspiration and transformation. Activist-author Rebecca Solnit (n.d, para. 9) comments that 'writers understand that

action is seldom direct. You write your books. You scatter your seeds. Rats might eat them, or they might just rot [...] some seeds lie dormant for decades because they only germinate after fire'. Nineteenth-century American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1993, unpaginated), well before Solnit of course, wrote that 'though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders'. In sum, the sonnet-seeds of Part II symbolise the restorative potential of the gorges in a bioregion that has been widely devastated by colonisation during the two-hundred years since Oxley's mare burst.

6. excubitorium

Part III 'excubitorium' refers to a place of poetic vigil and acts as a coda or outro bringing *Gorge* to a close. In the gallery of a church, an excubitorium is 'where public watch was formerly kept at night on the eve of a festival' and, in the context of a medieval monastery, the term refers to 'an apartment for night watchers whose duty it was to call monks to their nocturnal devotions' (Harris, 1977, p. 57). This final part of the sequence comprises three sonic movements organised around the three main tree species populating the rim of Dangar's Gorge: gorge wattle (*Acacia ingramii*), gorge bertya (*Bertya ingramii*) and bulloak (*Allocasuarina luehmanii*). Each movement consists of four five-line stanzas and incorporates notation from Frédéric Chopin's *Nocturne in G minor, opus 15, number 3* (1878, composed originally in 1833). My use of notational extracts from Chopin was influenced by an emerging area of literary theory called 'notational poetics', defined as reading and writing that is 'attentive to everything from

actually interpolated musical scores to the silent, “invisible” registers of discourse in texts that are not (necessarily) explicitly scored’ (Carruthers, 2017b, p. xviii). Works of notational poetics, including A.J. Carruthers’ *Axis book 1: ‘Areal’* (2017a) and Jessica Wilkinson’s *Suite for Percy Grainger* (2014), often integrate graphic elements associated with musical scores and, thereby, call attention to the interplay of music and poetry.



Figure 5: Recording the soundscape at the base of a bullock.

Source: J. Ryan

The methodology I devised for writing Part III involved making short audio recordings of three trees (Figure 5). I converted the files from Android format (3gpp) to MP4 then uploaded them to [Trint](#) (a free online audio transcription tool) to create sound signatures—or what are known as time codes—for each tree species and its soundscape. I extracted the time codes from Trint and inserted

them into the mise-en-page of Part III to act as graphic baselines for the stanzas. I sourced a score of *Nocturne in G minor* from the [International Music Score Library Project](#) and integrated segments in the mise-en-page as a graphic means to set the measure for each stanza. I then wrote the poems in response to what I heard in the audio recordings and, moreover, revised the writing while listening to *Nocturne in G minor* (Chopin, 1878). Indeed, there are occasions in Part III when the words correspond to the audio signature of each species and become mimetic of the soundscapes of gorge plants, for example, in the second stanza of 'Gorge Wattle' when '[digital|*crash*' signifies the alighting of a cockatoo in a nearby tree.

This sonic methodology, however, departed from my original intention to appropriate the online transcription software for directly translating all recorded sounds to the Roman alphabet. I soon discovered that this technique would have required extensive programming of open-source software because Trint only registers English words, ignores everything else and is designed efficiently to avoid the transcription of glossolalia and gibberish (two forms of nonhuman vocalisation that, in fact, I am intensely interested in). The approach devised for Part III also deviated from my usual practice of writing by photographs. As a consequence, the poems in the final part of *Gorge* are less imagistic and more onomatopoeiac than Parts I and II. Although essentially a playful expression of the idea of plants talking back, Part III does reflect my thinking about theoretical developments in the field of bioacoustics, empirically suggesting that plants have a kind of voice. Indeed, phytoacoustic research demonstrates that plants emit particular sound signatures that enable them to make decisions and

communicate with other organisms in their habitats (Gagliano, 2012). The ecological function of sound implies the presence of intelligence in the plant, which has been regarded in the Western intellectual tradition as the polar opposite of the animal—that is, as passive, mute and lacking cognitive abilities.

7. Editing, revising and publishing: The excision of poems

In the ongoing interest I have in sharpening my poetry and enhancing publication opportunities, I have begun to ask friends who are writers to review drafts and offer critical comments. Armidale-area poet Catherine Wright read Part I of *Gorge* and made two suggestions that I figured into the current version of the work: the addition of the explanation 'J.O. = John Oxley, J.R. = John Ryan' to the cover page of Part I and the changing of 'curtain' to 'mallet' in the second line of the second stanza of 'Chaelundi Camp'. Catherine did not specifically advise using 'mallet' but, instead, generally recommended a less predictable term than 'curtain'. She also questioned the value of the blank space between the fourth and fifth stanzas of 'Chaelundi Camp' but I decided to preserve the gap because it usefully signifies a narrative pause. On a related note, I helped to organise an event called [Pitch Independent](#) in early August, bringing thirteen Australian publishers and editors to Armidale to listen to pitches from local writers and illustrators. During the event, I pitched an idea for an illustrated poetry collection—to be called *The forest wakes*—to John Knight of [Pitt Street Poetry](#) and Emily Stewart of [Giramondo Publishing](#). However, I found it difficult to gauge their interest, and the clearest message I received was to publish more individual poems in leading Australian journals such as [Meanjin](#) and [Southerly](#). I

subsequently sent seven poems to the journal [*Antipodes*](#) but have received no response from the editors.

On a more encouraging note, though, five sonnets from 'tree' were accepted for publication in [*Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*](#) after some toing and froing with the editors. The initial response I received from Damiano Benvegnù, Creative Writing and Arts Editor, stated that 'I truly enjoyed your poems and I think they will fit perfectly within the overall theme of the issue' but requested that I reduce the original number of twenty-four to half, so twelve (Appendix 1). I sensed some trepidation in his request when he asked in a rather respectful though sheepish tone whether or not I considered the sonnetic sequence 'an organic and indivisible body of work' that should not be altered. 'If the work is organic', I thought, 'then it can be divided mitotically'. Thus, I reduced the work to a twelve-sonnet sequence that begins with themes of nonhuman language and modes of address (first grouping of four), moves into concerns of grief, loneliness and death (second grouping of four) and ends with a celebration of embodied being-in-the-world and seasonal renewal (third grouping of four). In a second email, however, Damiano Benvegnù apologised for 'a long debate with the editors of the general section' that resulted in his follow-up request to reduce the sequence by another seven poems (Appendix 2). I promptly performed the excision—as quickly as possible to minimise the pain!—so that at least some of the seeds will be disseminated, even if in a much attenuated form differing markedly from that which I envisioned at the beginning of the submission process.

8. Conclusion

This essay has characterised *Gorge* as a work of radical plant poetry and a heteroglossic gorge-text composed in collaboration with the chasmic environments of the Northern Tablelands region of New South Wales, Australia. In closing, I feel that the multisensorial, ecological, field-based, collaborative, reflexive and arts practice-led methodology developed in this project could be further refined and applied to other gorges in Australia and abroad. Each part of *Gorge* could also be expanded at least two-fold, resulting in a longer experimental poetry collection. However, the question of impact remains: how might it be possible for the ecological message of *Gorge* to reach a broad audience? A potential approach would be to enlarge my idea of collaboration to include other human creators, such as artists, illustrators, graphic designers, experimental poets, novelists, playwrights, bloggers, performers, philosophers, botanists and conservationists. Linked by a love of place—topophilia—and a love of plants—phytophilia—together we would devote ourselves to ‘what is precious, what must be made and remade, what one could give one’s entire life to preserving’ (Smith qtd. in Range, 2016, p. xii).

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Appendix 1

First Email from Creative Writing and Arts Editor Damiano Benvegnù

[Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment](#)

8 August 2018

Dear John (If I may),

I hope this message finds you well.

First, let me introduce myself: my name is Damiano Benvegnù and I have just been appointed as the new Creative Writing and Arts Editor at *Ecozon@*.

We are delighted that you have sent us your creative work for the next issue of *Ecozon@*. I truly enjoyed your poems and I think they will fit perfectly within the overall theme of the issue. Unfortunately, as my predecessor Serenella Iovino has already told you, your contribution is a bit too long for publication in the creative writing section of our journal. Therefore, I would encourage you to send me as soon as possible a shorter selection of your sonnets, more or less half of the length of what you have already submitted. I apologize for the request and I do understand that you might see your submission as an organic and indivisible body of work, but I am afraid we might not be able to publish it in its current form. Thank you very much for your understanding.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or doubts. I am very much looking forward to hearing back from you.

Best wishes,

Damiano Benvegnù

Section Editor

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Appendix 2

Second Email from Creative Writing and Arts Editor Damiano Benvegnù

Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment

10 August 2018

Dear John,

I hope this message finds you well.

I apologize for the amount of emails, but after a long debate with the editors of the general section we came to the conclusion that 12 sonnets are still a bit too many. I am very sorry, but I need you to shorten even further your contribution to a max of 5 poems. Would this represent a problem for you? I hope not because I think that even in this smaller size, your contribution will be important for the issue. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or doubts, and thank you very much for your collaboration.

Best wishes,

Damiano