Music matters in fiction: Creative and critical reflections

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any other tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This thesis comprises two components: a creative piece, titled Impromptu I—X and a critical dissertation. Both pieces endeavour to investigate the use of music in fiction, and attempt to answer the following questions: What is the relationship between music and literature? What is the role of music in narrative fiction? How can reading a work from the perspective of music enhance our understanding and interpretation of a text? Within a musico-literary framework these questions seek to highlight key aspects of human experience, relationships and stories and thus enrich the interpretative potential of the verbal narrative.

Impromptu I—X, from which sections I-V are included in this thesis, is a creative piece that harmonises on two story lines. One line unfolds in contemporary Park, a fictitious inner city suburb of Perth, and the other unravels the past of Mena, an industrial town of Western Australia, purpose-built in the early 1950s to house European migrant workers and their families. Impromptu I—X encompasses a variety of moods, manipulates patterns of time and rhythm, and evokes a narrative of familial and social relationships built from distinct voices and unique characters. The musical form, impromptu, is the organising principle of Impromptu I—X, while at the narrative level, music is represented as integral to the characters’ lives through dance, song, music works and their cultural histories.

Adam Ewing”, and Tim Winton’s *Dirt Music* (2001). The musico-literary analysis opens these texts to larger socio-political, historical and cultural contexts and questions, and in doing so enhances the power and significance of human expression and experience represented in fiction.

This thesis thus demonstrates how fiction can be transformed by the interplay between music and literature, and it encourages readers to listen and respond imaginatively to the music in fiction.
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Impromptu I—X
You looked half-pissed walking across the busy street singing Amy Winehouse’s hit “Rehab” loud enough for me to hear you’ve a jazzy voice. Your pitch black beehive buoyed high was trimmed with a red flower to match your red lips. Your off-the-shoulder blue cocktail dress with jewel accent and all-over ruching was right out-of-place for the time of day. You were trying to get a beat on the street and you’d have no trouble. You reminded me of Minke Van Der haak, a Dutch girl I knew in Mena. Minke had a baby boy early on but he was soon adopted out. I never heard she had a daughter. I stood and watched you tottering past The Bent Spoon right opposite my house. It was closed but would open later for dinner. You looked like you needed a sleep but wanted another shot in a glass. It was late afternoon, too early for your get-up. I’d just arrived home from school, tired, after a busy day teaching music. As you staggered toward my fenceless front yard, I looked down to check my letterbox for mail.

You were on a collision course with the high school students waddling home from school. They noticed you, and giggled at each other, before they saw me. Splitting into groups of twos and threes, they steered clear of you. You were bold though and asked them for directions; none of them answered. You laughed a nervous laugh. Out of ear-shot; they fell about laughing. I answered for them and pointed you in the direction of Lichfield Street, a bit further up.

—You’ll need to go up another street to get onto The Boulevard strip.
Plenty of competition for you on that stretch of road, I thought. Street walkers and kerb crawlers were turning Park into a hell on earth; community protest meetings were planned. What are you doing, girl? What are you thinking?

On and off for a whole year I’ve noticed you, and noticed changes in you. You hover alone, you stand in the lane that skirts my house and hides you from smirking eyes. In the beginning, you were naive. Now you wait by my vigorous climbing Pierre de Ronsard rose blooming in spectacular fashion over the side fence that stretches the length of my yard. You wait, smoking and listening, as if to the *du chant* of Ronsard’s poetry.

> *Your beauties, although they are in full bloom, in a short time will wither away and fall, and, like flowers, will perish in an instant. Time passes, time passes, my Lady.*

You seem more mature now, like ripe fruit with soft spots. You take your time and smoke a Virginia Slim. You’ve tried Eva, Kiss Lady, Camel, but you favour Virginia Slim, the cigarette that appears narrower and longer than other brands. You smoke a stick and send an sms.

In less than a minute, a white battered Toyota Camry with Mena number plates edged into the lane out of nowhere. I was shocked to see the MA 125 registration plate. I peered at the young male driver’s face. Would I recognise him? With Mena plates, I might know his family. Mid 1950s to ’60s, I knew everyone in Mena. Any earlier, and it
was all swamp and dairy farming. Mena’s funky, but bust. Just another spit-in-the eye-
left-to-die-by-the-government-kinda town. I’d left home to study music.

My students take me to hip hop; they want me to listen and play, cut and sample.
There’s a hip hop hit playing the rounds called “Cool Town”. It’s about a boy called
Mena; the song doesn’t mention where he lives, except it’s a happening place. Much
to his dissatisfaction, Mena can’t attract girls. He attracts men instead, until he scored
a hot-blooded, honky tonk woman in a blind date competition. Mena, the song says,
thinks he’s no good for her but he’s all right now; he thinks about her day and night,
even when he’s dreaming.

Like the song, Minke was looking for a hit. While I was learning the piano, she played
kissing games with the other teenagers—Friday after school on Mena oval. At first,
Minke said, they were simple games with eyes wide open, kissing your partner for as
long as you could until one or the other blinked. In a short time, the games progressed
from Truth and Dare, to Guess Who?, Havick, Hide-Go-Get-It, and finally Hide-and
Make-Out-In-the Dark where all of the players wore blindfolds to hide their identity.

Most of the girls in Mena were up the duff in a hurry. I didn’t have a boyfriend but
always worried about getting pregnant. Minke never knew who the father of her baby
was, or what he looked like, but she told me she’d memorised the sounds of the boys’
voices. Now I stared hard at the young driver’s face in the car with the Mena plates,
but I didn’t recognise him. Perhaps his family had moved into Mena after I left town.
The driver waited in his car in the shade of the Moreton Bay fig tree, alongside Dave’s state-owned house, and opposite Maganzia’s Italian-pillared villa. Dave’s yard is littered with washing machine bodies, fridges and machine body parts, a haven for vermin. A neighbour once reported him to the council because she thought his workshop was an eyesore. Machine bodies lying alongside machine bodies like homeless men in a park. But Dave is artistic, and creates new machines from those old bodies. His yard’s a gallery of naked exhibits, but there’s no funding for fringe art. He lives off the pickings of Park council’s junk collection, that and his pension. On The Boulevard he trades his innovative machines for cash at the second-hand white goods store next to the post office. He never drives to other suburbs’ junk collection days, that’s off Dave’s radar. He worries about the police, worries they’ll slap a yellow sticker on his red truck. Everyone knows Dave’s truck, including the local cops. Dave thinks the police in Park say—there goes Dave in his red truck, not going too far or fast—and they’ll turn a blind eye.

I went away on a summer holiday a few years ago, and paid Dave to watch my property and water my roses. I returned home in the dark, like a thief without a warning, much earlier than we’d arranged. The amber-coloured light of the street lamp, made my roses look dead. I was overwhelmed, sat and cried. Dave heard and came over, wanting to know what was wrong.

—Look at my Sissinghurst rose, it’s dead!
—It’s the street light, Lettie, said Dave in a fretful voice, makes everything look dead.
I’d read about the Sissinghurst rose online—an Old French Rose of the non-climbing summer-flowering variety—not one stocked at rose farms—you had to make a special request to have one grafted. I waited a whole year for my order. The catalogue said it was a gorgeous rose with semi-double plum-coloured blooms with light magenta-crimson flecked-tipped petals that contrasted with its golden stamens. (It was an old Gallica with small sharp thorns and linked to the memory of Joséphine de Beauharnais, Napoleon’s first empress. Vita Sackville-West and Harold rediscovered it when they were clearing land for the rose garden at Sissinghurst castle.)

Not pacified by Dave, I went on and on and on about the rose and about Vita, until Dave had had enough.

—Your rose, said Dave, will be green in the morning. Voilà, he said, then laughed, stretching his arms wide and flapping his hands like phoenix’s wings intimating that my rose would rise and flower again.

Dave was out and about in Park, slowly being poisoned by friends at The Hill Hotel, when Maganzia looked out of her kitchen window at the driver in the parked car waiting. He had a dark mop of curly hair, and leant his shoulder against the car door window, then lifted a hand toward the fading light. Neither she nor I could see his phone or read his text message. But in less than a minute, he’d started the motor, and driven his car slowly into the lane behind Dave’s house and then into my side lane. I wondered what he was up to. Maganzia is a neighbourhood watch and suspicious of everyone, but not afraid. She saw me and waved. Maganzia is from Salerno and
remembers hiding in the railway station bunker from the German soldiers marching down the main street shooting civilians. After the war, her father Joe, who’d been incarcerated on Rottnest Island, organised for his family to join him in Australia.

Maganzia, her mother, three elder sisters and two younger brothers, arrived in the port city on board the Australia. As the gang-way hit the wharf, Maganzia romped off carrying the wooden elephant she’d bought in a Colombo bazaar. It stands by the front door of her Park villa with its trunk up ready to protect her.

Without a word of English, Maganzia started school and left, just as quick, to baby-sit. Her brothers finished school. The elder became a doctor, and the younger, Tony, helped in his father’s business by building wrought iron balustrades for verandahs and balconies of hotels and houses in Park. Maganzia accepted a position sewing for an Italian tailor in the city located on the second floor of a shopping strip near the Wesley Methodist Church. Sewing all day in a one room store for the Italian who became her husband. It made learning English words difficult. Fifty years on, Maganzia still struggles to find the right word then fit it into a sentence.

—Dumb! I’m dumb, mumbles Maganzia, dumb forever. She laughs then. Vera prompts words for Maganzia, because she’s an English language coach. They’re both widowed and have been friends for years, although Vera’s a decade older.

Vera lives down the hill in Lichfield Street. She worked as a tailor for Boans’ department store on Wellington Street and specialised in trousers, taking three years to finish her apprenticeship at Parker’s exclusive menswear store in the Trinity Arcade.
She says she made trousers for Frank Boan and Sir James Mitchell, one of the early governors. Jimmy, as Vera called him, would walk up and down the Terrace in his new trousers, saying ‘hello’ to everyone. Vera giggled then, and in a voice that suggested it was a secret that few knew, she said Jimmy was so polite that the government named a freeway after him.

You were in my lane again by early evening. You weren’t cut out for street walking, that was plain. After the community meeting of residents and the government’s threats to push brothels into the suburbs, you’d been quoted anonymously in the local newspaper: *No, no, no! I’d prefer to take the risk street walking, and have the money than be demeaned by somebody sitting on their arse all day taking more than half of my money.* I can see that, now. You’ve pride; you’re your own boss.

I heard, through Dave, you’d rented a room in a tradesman’s weatherboard house off The Boulevard. You told Dave, it’s less like work than entertaining a friend in your own home.

I imagine the men who call on you, caress your breast, nibble your nipple, see you stripped bare. I picture your customers as they circle dance around you. You circle and dance too, and make their circle smaller. They disguise their voices trying to fool you, they want anonymity. But, just like Minke, you’re cunning. She musicalized sounds as if she were a blind woman, kept the tunes in her head as a melody to faceless men. She played their tunes over and over, until she’d learnt their voices by heart. She inherited her musical gifts from her dad. Art was a guitarist in a Mena rock ‘n’ roll band, said his
style was influenced by Segovia. I’m influenced by my dad. Fred’s a fan of blues and pop now, but he’s been a chorister, ensemble conductor and trumpeter. Very musical. He said to me once, Louis Armstrong’s music’s like an imaginary kiss, a song to build a dream on.

I once thought, even a single kiss could make me pregnant. One hot summer’s day, I was sitting on the jetty eating hot chips soaked in vinegar and peppered with salt. The jetty overlooked the causeway at Long Beach. Minke was there and said to me — sounds escape thin lips. True, she said looking over the ocean, I never date men with thin lips.

You peer through my climbing de Ronsard and blush when your eyes meet mine. You turn away, while I turn my thoughts inward. Be kind, I hear Pierre sing, be kind. I see subtle differences, since I last saw you. Your hips are wider and your waist’s grown thicker; your skin has lost its pink glow, and your breasts are no longer pert. And soon, de Ronsard said, we shall be stretched out beneath a tombstone. You already look half dead to me. The light has gone from your eyes leaving pinpricks, tiny holes, black holes, blind spots. You’re always staggering. We’ve never shared a word, since those first words. I don’t even know your name. It’s been easy come easy go for both of us.

My time’s my own outside my job. My musical children have left to play in other fields; my fly-in and fly-out husband, Paul, works for three weeks, then he’s off one, trying to make money before we retire. In school, I’d never noticed him, I was too busy out and about Mena, with Minke and Tor Wallace. Didn’t notice Paul’s soft, plump lips until I
was fifteen, ready to sit the Junior School Certificate and we played spin the bottle at a party. When the bottle stopped spinning, the neck was pointing at me. He kissed me in the dark, his soft, moist lips on mine. That’s all I remember. Now, all my time is for dad, old but happy living down the road.

In Park, I garden or sit on my front verandah listening to music. I people-spot, write letters, read the paper. News journalists are like birds circling for titbits. There’s always a story. You’re a story, I’m a story. Our two-bedroom brick house was built by the government for a soldier returning from the First World War. Vera says the war veteran’s family included a boy who played cornet and a girl who played piano and sang.

—A musical family, she said.

The wife, I discovered, was Gladys Moncrieff, but not Australia’s most treasured, who should have been a Dame. This Gladys was a soprano and sang “Love Will Find A Way” from The Maid of the Mountains at Vera’s wedding. Vera thought Gladys’s singing was dreadful, she sang like a warbler.

—Vera, her mother said, it’s the heart that matters.

Gladys’ daughter, Marie, was the first Western Australian schoolgirl to win a national singing competition.

—Idol and Xfactor, scoffed Vera, it’s nothing new, all recycling.
When Marie went to her Sydney audition, travelling with her mother, the original Gladys Moncrieff, the Queensland darling of Australia’s musical comedy, was in the audience. As Marie and her mother made their way to the exit Gladys moved out of the shadows and said to Marie:

— you’ve a good voice and should go far.

Perhaps the mother and daughter rekindled a childhood memory. Apparently Gladys’s mother had approached Nellie Melba, years before, saying:

— *Forgive me for speaking to you, Madame Melba, but I have a daughter with a fine voice. I would give anything if you could find time to hear her sing.*

But Nellie Melba was on a concert tour of Queensland, and replied

— *I’m sorry, I’m singing tonight and I mustn’t talk.*

A few years later, after Melba heard Gladys sing the “Jewel Song” from *Faust* at the Theatre Royal in Sydney, she plonked herself at the piano and took Gladys up the scales.

— *Higher, higher, higher,* demanded Melba, until Gladys imagined her voice would break glass.

— *Come on,* said Melba, *you can do it. You have a good voice and should go far,* she said, when she stood up.

I am leaning over Vera’s front fence to chat.
—On the back of her win, Vera said, Marie got a scholarship to study at the New South Wales Conservatorium. The world was teetering on war. Reg, the elder of the two children, had already left home to join the Royal Australian Army band. Marie would often sing with Gladys in city competitions, and at the annual Park eisteddfod, Taff Moses, a local widower and trained pianist accompanied them.

—All things being equal, said Vera, it was a strange coincidence that Taff Moses was infatuated by the famous Gladys and collected all her vinyl recordings. He was lucky enough to be in the same audience as the famous Gladys for the infamous Pat Hanna’s Digger’s Show.

After living in England and performing in Europe for an extended period, Gladys had yearned to return to Australia and when the Moldavia, on which she was a passenger, sailed through the heads of the port city, she thought her happiness complete.

—Tonight, she said, I must go to a show in Perth!

It was in the middle of the show that Pat Hanna suddenly appeared on stage, saying:

—Ladies and Gentleman, we have a distinguished visitor and old friend of ours here tonight.
The spotlight fell on a woman sitting in a box, then after the initial gasp of recognition, the squeals, yells, and cheers of delight Gladys Moncrieff stood up and wept, before making a short speech and bursting into “Home Sweet Home”.

—It was overwhelming, said Taff, as he shared the moment with Park’s less famous Gladys during Vera’s wedding rehearsal. Gladys and Taff were practising the song from *The Maid*, when Vera heard Gladys moan with disappointment that she had not been there too.

Vera fills my head with stories and I never know what to believe. My scepticism doesn’t put her off; it’s like she’s running on a treadmill, and when she works up speed, she’s difficult to stop. Listen Lettie, she’d say.

One day as Vera was digging over a garden bed near her front gate I stopped to chat, as I often did.

—In the early days of Park, said Vera, people in cars could not drive up and down your side lane. Oh no!

—Why not? I asked.

—Because Mr Gladys Moncrieff, as we called the veteran behind his back, put an iron gate at the end of the lane, close to his house to stop the traffic, including bikes. Every time anyone wanted to use the lane they had to get him out of his house to unlock the gate. It was like his job. He was the lane gatekeeper.

—The old goat, I said and laughed.
Vera ignored my amusement and continued on to Luigi, the Italian bottle-o who lived further up my lane.

—One morning, Luigi was in such a hurry, he couldn’t wait for Mr Moncrieff to toddle out of his house to open the gate. So he drove his truck into the gate and knocked it flat, then backed right over it. Mr Moncrieff went berserk. In court, Luigi pretended he couldn’t understand English, and made rude, aggressive hand gestures at the veteran. Mr Moncrieff, who had survived the great war, was not having any of that. He called Luigi all sorts of names: alien, ding, dago, sausage-sucker, garlic-muncher, enemy. All in front of the judge. The judge threw the case out, but not before a court journalist had the story printed in *Park Weekly Times*. The story spread over the district like the pox. That gate, said Vera, was a landmark, until it was stolen.

She chuckled like a cuckoo laying her eggs in the nest of another bird.

One Saturday, another neighbour, Rafiq, wandered down my side lane, while I was working in my front garden, to ask me whether the traffic noise bothered me. It definitely bothered him, he said. Rafiq is an Indian immigrant who settled in Park during the 1980s; we know each other well. I looked up and down the street. Our houses are on a main road, but at one end the traffic’s regulated by lights, and at the other end by a roundabout.

—If I were in London, Rafiq, where would I live? I wouldn’t want to live in a backwater, I’d want to live on Bloomsbury Way or on Gower Street. Tavistock Square or Russell
Square. I might live opposite Euston railway station and train spot. I’d live next door to Buckingham Palace and watch the changing of the guard. In St James Park, I’d sit in a deck chair and watch runners getting fit. I’d love to live in the West End on Carnaby Road or on Bond Street. Though I’m not into fashion, I have my own dress sense. In Trafalgar Square I’d count the pigeons, or join a protest at Piccadilly Circus. I’d stand in Shakespeare’s shadow at Leicester Square, but I wouldn’t want to live on Oxford Street, too many stores.

In this round-about-way, I say,
—no, no, no Rafiq, the noise doesn’t matter.

He frowned and reminded me that Park’s not London, and I agreed but I tell him,
—Rafiq, when I’m sitting on my front verandah during peak hour traffic, I hear at least five different songs as music blares out of cars’ subwoofers as they wait in line for the lights to change. Yesterday sitting in my chair, I heard “Lost” by Gorilla Zoe. Bup-a-bup smash-bup-a-bup-smash-bup-a-bup-smash-bup-smash-a-bup … the low bass made the windows in my house vibrate. I had to get up, and walk around like crazy, but the glass never shattered.

Rafiq waved his hands at me like he’d heard it all before.

—Everyone on earth listens to music, he blurted.

Then he walked off in the direction of The Bent Spoon which Dave says is a pick-up joint for druggies and a gambling den for taxi drivers.
—Years ago, Dave said, a young sheila disappeared after getting into a taxi outside the restaurant. They never found her body, and no one was ever charged.

Dave has a tape of the CCTV footage of the scene of the crime they played on the television news. He watches it repetitively. He says he’s in the foreground of the footage which shows a man joking with the young woman.

—Be careful, Dave, I’d said to him, the police might take you in for questioning.

Whenever there are more crime-stopper-media-reports of disappearances and unsolved murders of young girls, Dave is paralysed and can’t work. He sits on the long, wooden bench of his front verandah, playing his guitar. When he gets exasperated with his music, and nothing soothes his anxieties, he phones the police to offer his evidence. They warn him, any more calls and he’ll be charged as a hindrance to the investigations. When I hear “Duelling Banjos” riffing on “Yankee Doodle” coming from his direction, it’s a warning. Soon Dave’ll be banging on my door, like I’m in-charge of criminal investigations. It’s better news when I hear a guitar riff I don’t recognise being played over and over and over. That’s Dave cobbling a new piece.

I’d never seen you on the street at noon before but one sunny day, when I was walking down The Boulevard to buy the paper and pick up my mail from my post office box, I saw you. You were wandering in and out of the traffic lanes, oblivious to everything. It was frightening to see you, just a poor girl talking really loud and throwing your arms about as if you were auditioning for a bit part in a play, performed for a small
audience. Then I realised, you were on a hands-free mobile acting with emotion to an invisible someone. There was no beehive, or flower-trimming in your hair. No Virginia Slim between your painted red lips. At first, I hadn't recognised you in your short blonde wig going on and on, getting into someone's ear. It was your long neck that gave you away.

I hurried home, where I'd left the paper and my mail unopened on the top step, to retreat into my front garden to pull the weeds growing in between the vincas that border the path near the bottom step. Plants get crowded, and need shaping and pruning.

I know every rosebush in my garden by name and each links to people and places. Mr Lincoln stands as tall as six feet and his fragrant scented, dark-red velvet, high-centred symmetrical blooms are hard to resist. Saint Cecilia sang a song to God before she died, but now her rose spreads in silence. Jude the Obscure blooms golden flowers as large as chalices, without spilling a drop of amber nectar near Thomas Hardy. I even know Abraham Darby's iron foundry once bordered David Austin's nursery. Princess Elizabeth is now a Queen; Mary Rose was King Henry VIII's flagship, the first in his fleet to fire a bomb at the French. The ship rests in a Portsmouth dry dock; its rose scent is sweet like white wine, or fruity guava.

The first flush of roses has faded and I dead-head their tips, otherwise their hips will swell and there'll be no more flowers, just pregnant red bulbs full of hairy seeds. I pull at the weeds, thinking about you twisting and turning in the street. I trim Mary Rose's
wild canes to control her growth and hand-rake the ground under her drip line. My garden is filled with prejudice and sex. I look at the sky and wonder why I didn’t see the signs, or heed my mum’s words. It’s too late now. I cry.

My crying is interrupted by loud voices shouting obscenities. I look up from under Mary Rose’s thorny bush to see he has you by your arm. Trying to push you down the lane. He looks taller and stronger out of his car.

—Put me down.
—Fuck you!
—Let me go.
—Put her down, I shout, interfering in an argument that has nothing to do with me.

He let you go. My thundering voice must’ve startled him. He sat down on the bitumen, in the shadow of the Ronsard rose, and sobbed into his hands. You ran away. He looked such a sad sight. I walked over to him and knelt alongside.

—I love her, he whispered.
—You can’t make someone love you, I whispered back, and jealousy burns like fire. He looked at me like a lyrebird caught in a thicket. Soon he was gone.

Turning around, I see you are back. I think of others like you setting up in the street, in houses as if one likes what one sees. A quick way to make money to feed a habit, but it breeds violence. You’re quiet now and still. You stare at a bloom. It’s not a mirror, I want to say, but I keep my mouth shut. The Ronsard rose sings
You lift a cluster of creamy white blooms to your mouth and lick a petal. You press your nose into the floribunda roses like a bride scenting her bouquet, and rub your nose in its scent.

By the time I sit down in a chair on my front verandah to read a letter, it’s late afternoon. As I open the envelope, I notice Rafiq, walking on the other side of the street, looking to see if I’m in my garden. Peering through the lattice of creepers that hide my verandah to see if I’m sitting there like a wall flower. He spots me and crosses the street.

—Lettie, Rafiq says, Lettie. He repeats my name, laughing just in case I hadn’t heard. Tell me, what’s happening with the politics?

—Gone to the devil. The Prime Minister’s trapped.

I shimmy my feet down the front steps, the letter from my friend in my hand. I move to the right and then to the left like I am dancing. I like Rafiq.

—Ha, Rafiq laughs with exuberance, looking me up and down and getting into the spirit. How things change, so quickly, he says.

He beats his hands in the air, getting into a groove without moving his feet, wiggling his right hand back and forth across his chest.
—Prime Minister like snake, like Hindi god in corner. Silent, but colourful. Have you seen cobra?
—Only in books and movies.
—They are kings in my country. If I had musical cobra in Australia, I would be rich quickly, very quickly.

Rafiq muses aloud, looking to the sky.

—How is it possible for the Prime Minister to escape without damage to his reputation.
—How can this happen? Ha, Rafiq laughs again and continues prophesying—what does Prime Minister do? He calls debate, not election. Very clever. Ha.

As quick as lightning, Rafiq moves his upturned palms in front of his belly, and with palms facing, he shakes them up and down like a colander as if sifting the possibilities of what might happen to the Prime Minister.

—It’ll be a slanging match, I say.
—Ha, Rafiq laughs again, then snorts, the opposition leader has Prime Minister by snout, but the opposition is so negative.

Then Rafiq looks at the fruit trees in my front garden.
—You have fruit tree?
—Yes.
—What sort you have?

—Nectarine. Plums, fig, mulberry, mango.

—I love mango, Rafiq said, interrupting my list. Ha, he laughs.

—in India, I picked big bucket, full of mango. Rafiq gestured a massive bucket with his arms—I found stool, sat down near tree, and ate lot. He laughs in disbelief at the memory.

—Beautiful, he whispers. The word blew out of his mouth, out of his thin lips.

—I had juice running streams down chin to foot. He then cries, as he bent down to touch his shoes, as if he were touch-remembering the spill of the fruit. He straightens up, and asks me a question.

—How you go to specialist doctor, Lettie? You need paper?

—Yes, you need a referral.

—I thought this.

—Are you sick, Rafiq?

—Old problem, Rafiq squirms, pointing with a finger in the direction of his frustration.

By the way, what you think of woman with long neck?

—Like a giraffe.

—No, like swan. There is myth about swan and woman.

Without adding another word, Rafiq walks off in the direction of The Boulevard.
Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the vainest of us all, dad would chortle, skewing the line from *Sleeping Beauty*. He wouldn’t have a mirror in our Mena home. There was no loitering about, no wasting time, no gazing, preening, or muttering at your reflection in the hallway or bathroom. A teacher once told me that I looked like a monkey. People tell you all sorts of things about who you are and what you look like but I learnt this: if you only become what people see in you, you’ll never recognise yourself.

I thought it was mum’s fault we didn’t have a mirror, because one day she stopped putting make-up on, and let her hair grow long. I thought she’d become a feminist. I’d read about Irene Greenwood in the newspapers, and about the rallies across Australia. Mum used to catch the 119 to the hairdressers in Long Beach every Friday afternoon to have her jet-black hair trimmed and set. She looked beautiful when she came home. But then the hairdresser’s appointments stopped, and gradually mum’s hair grew.

—It’s easier to grow hair long, than waste an afternoon sitting gawking at yourself in front of a hairdresser’s mirror, said mum.

That’s the only time she sounded like dad.

Mum would brush her long hair, hard, pull it together like a tail, and twist it with her fingers until all the bumps were smoothed out. Then she’d roll the pony tail round on her head to form a bouffant. She held her top knot in place with bobby pins.
—Mary you look gorgeous, like Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady*, said Fred.
I can still hear mum laughing, and see the dimple crease in her right cheek as she smiled. Years later, after the premature birth of my fourth baby, I was shocked to see mum arrive with short hair.
—Mum, you’ve had your haircut, I said in disbelief, from my hospital bed.
—If you ever get sick, mum said, repeating her mother Alice’s words—and you have long hair, you just can’t do it. You don’t have the strength.
—Are you sick? I asked.

I never had long hair and once I had all my hair shaved off.

—Your hair wants cutting, Lettie, dad said, after a long time of not paying me much attention. He pulled me out of the deli he managed with mum, and into the Italian barber’s shop three doors down.
—Vince, cut this young un’s hair, dad said, before hastening back to the shop.
When mum saw my No 1 haircut, she cried. If you were looking at me, you’d see me as my father’s daughter. It was as if I was born straight out of the top of his head, like an Indian goddess. But dad wasn’t a god and I’d a navel.

These days, when I take dad on outings, I often catch him looking at his face in the sunvisor mirror, or in the metal reflectors when we’re going up an escalator in the Park’s shopping arcade. After tottering off the top step and standing still for a minute, dad turns and looks at me—looks me in the face like I’m a mirror—and asks the same question, he’d asked the week before, and the week before that.
—Do I look old?


Fred and Mary once worked together in a city bank. Before they married, Mary resigned (’cos of government regulations) to work in a mattress factory. Denise was born the next year, and I arrived two years later. By then, Fred was topsy turvy because his mother, Anna, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and had two years to live. Fred became unwell, and thought he was terminally ill too. He had to have a week off work. Just to say the word cancer made the blood drain from his face. Mary thought his behaviour most odd.

Anna’s cancer was diagnosed as the result of a prick from a rose thorn. The thorn pierced her finger as she pruned the spent branches of a rambler growing over a trellis in her Park yard. It was a time-consuming and prickly job, and the poison caused the knuckle of her right index finger to swell. Her finger throbbed for weeks and stopped her from sleeping. The swelling prevented her from playing the piano, and her aching finger all but sent her mad. Tests were recommended to ensure there were no free radical cells in her blood. After the diagnosis, Anna wrote a brief note to her son.

My dear Fred

I do feel sorry for your head. Since my illness you’ve just gone bats, going on and on about yourself. Poor Mary. I’ve got a festered finger and it’s a bit of a job to write. Our dances start up at the church next Monday and I’m the pianist still but Taff Moses might have to do.

Your loving mother

Anna Miles
Early on, when a bank customer, Jack Gaggs, mentioned to Fred that he was tendering for the first butcher’s shop in Mena, Fred showed some interest. It distracted him from worrying about his mother.

The idea sat in Fred’s head like a wobbly tooth. He kept touching it, pushing it down and bringing it back, back into line with all of his other thoughts. One night, he broached the subject with Mary. What happened next was like a line in a play.

Fred: I’m planning on tendering for the first deli in Mena. I’ll have an interview with a retired army colonel. If I’m successful, I’ll leave my job with the bank. We’ll be forced to sell our house. You can’t own a home and rent a government house. Mary he went on, the houses in Mena are beautiful, colourful, brand-spanking new in virgin bush four miles from the sea. A garden town—especially built for management and skilled migrants from Britain and Europe. Some of the workers can’t speak English.

Mary: NO. NO. No, no, no. No, no. No, no, no, no.

This dialogue spread out over months until Mary thought it was Fred who didn’t understand plain English. But, eventually, Mary came round to Fred’s thinking.

Fred, Mary, Denise and I, loved our freshly-painted, doll-pink asbestos, Plunkett-built house. The pink colour was vibrant, loud enough to scare a dark night away, said Fred. Fred shook his body, acting as if he were frightened. Mary ignored his antics. Her eye for business was beginning to see the viability of a deli in the housing estate.
With us in tow, Mary walked through the development looking at the houses, they were all more colourful than she had imagined. Homes branched away from its spine-like main avenue built along its femur, tibia and ribs. The Ways, Circles, Crescents, Roads, Avenues and Streets were named for the passenger list of Captain Stirling’s ship, the Parmelia.

The Miles’s house stood in the middle of one such Way shaped like a dog’s leg, next to a vacant green weatherboard house set aside for Monica and Heinz Heinrich. They were living with their sponsor family then, learning to speak English, before moving into town.

With bush reserves—behind and opposite—and a lane running down the side of the house, Mary felt as though she were back in her bush childhood. The Dutch Van Der haak’s occupied the blue asbestos home on the other side of the lane while the Scottish Wallace family (numbering ten) lived down the lane; Tor, the youngest, was still being breastfed when the Miles’s arrived.

By late autumn that year, Mena was steaming like a sauna in an Indian summer. Due to the unseasonal weather and the late completion of the shops, Fred and Mary had special permission to open their business a day earlier than the bank, newsagent and chemist. That day, as the front door to the deli opened, a crowd burst in like a wave. A sea of foreign faces searched for ice cold drinks and ice creams to beat the heat and quench their thirst. White light caught the wet glass of the soft drink bottles pulled by busy hands from bath-like refrigeration units. Light split into colours which danced like
ribbons across the floor and up onto the walls before throwing a rainbow across the shop ceiling. Refracted watercolours washed the interior of the shop and painted ripples on the walls. The ripples teased Mary’s eye and, looking up from the till, she saw Fred looking at her. She winked as he threw her a grin and they settled into their routine of long hours and hard work.

When I was young, I knew everyone in Mena and where they lived, knew all the streets by name. If an out-of-towner called at the shop looking for a friend, I’d sketch a map of Mena’s streets on the tissue paper we used as wrapping for small blocks of cheese and sliced meat. I’d draw a little square box with an X for the house they wanted. I loved the feel of the tissue paper. I still do. Just the thought of it makes me rub my thumb over my finger tips. When I had nothing to do at the deli, I’d cut a piece of the paper, wrap it over the outside of a clean comb to play a tune sitting on the lid of the steel rubbish bin, in which we stored sugar. The sound vibrations of the paper on my lips made my nose and ears twitch. I can still feel the sensation.

To save mum and dad employing extra staff, Denise and I would stack shelves with groceries, fill fridge units with soft drink, dairy products and smallgoods from Watsonia and D’Orsogna, tick off newly arrived stock from invoices, and pack groceries in boxes for local delivery on Fridays. The only full-timer was Evelyn, an Englishwoman from Bolton. She walked in off the street one busy day, and asked for a job. Mum and Evelyn were a team, baking sweet pastries, pies, pasties, and sausage rolls in huge ovens behind a partition at the back of the shop.
Late on Fridays, dad would deliver the grocery orders in his green, Ford Prefect ute. I’d jump out of the passenger seat side as the ute idled, to run a box up onto a wooden verandah. The ute didn’t have a radio, so when we drove around the town we’d improvise old and popular songs. “Wish Me Luck”, ran into “Blueberry Hill” became “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree”, then “Alexander’s Ragtime Band”. “Jambalaya” rolled into “I’ll Fly Away” and, “I Was All Alone and Drifting”, before “I Saw the Light”. We’d harmonise our voices on the third and fifth intervals. Dad said, Hank Williams wrote so many songs on one chord that he joked: I’m like Irving Berlin stealing from himself. We sang on: “This Little Light of Mine”, “You are My Sunshine” then “Dayo”. We never let up on the singing; as soon as one tune finished we’d launch into another, jamming our voices in a medley. As soon as I ran the last order onto a porch and jumped back into the ute, dad’s tone changed. He would start a slow-plodding-melancholic song. At the time, I didn’t know that Taff Moses had played “Goin’ Home” on the organ at Anna’s funeral at St Peter’s in Lennard Street, Park. It wasn’t until I left Mena to study music, that I discovered the rest of dad’s family. Names written in pencil on manuscript paper and a photograph tucked in an old song book.

Born in Jamaica, Anna had musical and literary parents and grandparents. They knew Charlotte Brontë, Anton Dvorak, Harry Burleigh, and William Arms Fisher, too. Fisher, Anna told Fred (years before dad told me), liked to add his own beatitude to St Matthew’s singing—*Blessed are the music makers, for they shall uplift and unite the earth*, and there’s the picture of Anna’s grandmother with Charlotte. Singing in tune was natural to me, and to my sister Denise. I could sing descant but I couldn’t yodel
like dad. I tried, but my sound didn’t fluctuate quickly enough over the yodel-ah-ee-oh calling from high to low and back to a higher pitch.

—Lettie, the sound is in your head, explained dad.

Singing in unison, our voices would become one, but when dad launched into “She Taught Me To Yodel”, I stopped. Dad sang falsetto long before Tiny Tim, or Barry Gibb.

Besides music, Fred loved maths, history, geography and baseball. Rainfall and temperature graphs—like imaginary lines of latitude and longitude—shaped the horizons of our conversations. Dad threw questions like baseballs at Denise and me, then sat back like an umpire to listen to our answers. One at a time we would step up and strike, poke or prod at his questions. Some questions were direct, but many were curly. He ruled Denise out early, she didn’t want to play. But I gave him a run for his money.

—Lettie, Fred would begin, what is the most important feature of a river?

—The source.

—Strike one.

—The flow of the water.

—Strike two.

I’d back off, shimmering like a mirage on a hot day. My eyes would roll around in my head, sifting through a mass of stored information in search of an answer. I hated being beaten. A pall of silence fell like a shadow. This was my cue for dad to give the answer.

—Have you thought about the bank?
—Why?
—It channels the water.
—What sort of answer’s that?
—A fact.
—So were mine.
—I’m the father!
—So what?

Then I’d run off and dad would chase me, running with outstretched arms, arms as wide as the Swan River. He’d catch me as if I were a balloon, snatched me in mid air, all to explain his answer.
—The bank contains the water, you silly donkey. Rivers have a lot of energy, and if there’s no bank, water wouldn’t flow and meander.
But more than anything, Fred loved imagination.
—Imagination feeds the mind, he’d often say.
Later, he worried about losing his.

—Imagination is not like shopping, Lettie, dad said. You can’t go into a shop and place an order for imagination. You can’t say to Harry the butcher, I want a pig’s snout of imagination, thank you very much. Imagination is like mothering. It has to be nurtured.

I think of dad these days when I use my imagination to enhance vocal development and musicality in my students. Dad expected his choristers to stand still. I imagine our minds affect our bodies, and our bodies affect our minds. I want expressive, confident
singers, not totem poles. As my choirs warm-up, we rehearse, as we rehearse we perform.

Wiggle your hips side to side. Then right side step-clap; left side step-clap; right-right clap, left-left clap. Standing tall, bend at the knee. Straighten, bend, straighten, bend. I tell my students, there’s a lot more to singing than remembering words and sight reading.

—Listen my darlings, I say, it’s luv not lov.

Each year, my students stand in rows, while the accompanist plays “Advance Australia Fair” over and over without a pause. The students sing the words as I walk up and down the aisles listening to their voices. As I walk I whisper: soprano, alto, alto, soprano, soprano, soprano. It’s important for me to keep a tally to balance the sections. Sometimes, I nominate a talented soprano to sing with the seconds, or an alto monotone to sing soprano; this can effect a beautiful choral tone. You might think a soprano singing next to a monotone alto is bizarre, but standing a tuneless chorister alongside a vocally gifted student is a benefit to all.

Vocal warm-ups in my classes begin by jamming nursery rhymes and tongue twisters. Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard, she went to the cupboard did old Mother Hubbard. Betty Botter bought a bit of butter, but the bit of butter Betty Botter bought was bitter. These are exercises for lazy mouths and tongues. After I have the students’ focus, I direct the ensemble to the more serious exercises of breathing, posture and intonation.
Fred has his own way of conducting ensembles. In Mena, he organised a few vocal men—which gradually grew—for the first rehearsal of the Mena Male Choir. Being a band man he always had baton in his hand. Dad and I still argue over method, but it isn’t spiteful. He has words for everyone, and doesn’t care where people come from or what they look like. His talk is still as tight as a skinny bum, rules mostly—crisp, and curt. But when Fred was young, rules never bothered him. He did whatever he wanted, he told me.

In Park each day I take The West down to dad’s house, so he can keep up with the news. But back in Mena when I was young, we’d argue over the paper. I’d undo the stack of newspapers thrown onto the pavement off the back of the express truck from Newspaper House, and take one. But dad wanted the first copy. Every day he’d chase me around the counters, through the shop and out the back, shouting and grabbing. He’d never yell: Give me the paper or I’ll tear you apart like a fish, like Franz Kafka’s father, Herman. Herman was in retail, just like Fred. Fred was all pretence, but in the end he’d have his way. I never learned my lesson, and we argued over the paper every day. Drove mum mad. But, I liked to read the news. It’s how I developed my views on life, reading the paper from cover to cover, but not in page order.

First, I’d read the sport section, then the local stories, followed by the news of the world, then the advertisements, obituaries and biblical text. I liked to read about India in the 1950s and ’60s. I was fascinated by Prime Minister Nehru. His face, his hat, his dress on stamps. Stamps dad collected, then I collected. It was only years later, studying the sub-continent’s history, that I made the connection between Nehru and
Indira Gandhi. Rafiq my neighbour, says he’s not interested in Indian history. He waves me off like an annoying gnat if I ask him questions about the Partition, the Indian Mutiny, or the Raj.

I read everything: of England’s ‘wild cat’ industrial strikes, America’s civil rights riots, the assassinations of JFK, Martin Luther King Junior, and Robert Kennedy. All the schools in America were closed the day JFK was assassinated, and the national flag had black bunting sewn around the edges. For a month, the flags flew at half mast.

Simultaneously, I studied the hit parade charts, and followed rock ’n roll like a drug addict. We’d a juke box in the corner of the deli and the local bodgies and widgies would jive dance all over the deli’s lino floor in their leather moccasins, before heading up to the Police and Citizens Hall to dance to The Sceptres. The Sceptres were a Mena band breaking onto the city scene. Minke’s dad Art played bass guitar in the group, the older Wallace boys played guitar, and Cameron Wallace sang and drummed occasionally. We didn’t know the boy we knew as Bon would become an Australian music icon.

Minke and I were mad on the pictures. That is, Minke was mad on everything. Minke loved Elvis, yeah, she idolised him; yeah, his movies; his voice, yeah, his hip moves; his face plastered all over her bedroom walls. She loved him and The Beatles. But when Minke heard Marlene Dietrich sing, “Falling in Love Again” in The Blue Angel, she was seduced. If we weren’t allowed to go to the film, we’d stand on boxes in the lane that separated the deli from the Mena Cinema Gardens, and peep at the screen through
nail holes in the asbestos. We’d watched Marlene through those holes. I preferred Rock Hudson in *Farewell to Arms*. He was handsome with a big smile, even if you could never tell what was going on in his head.

One afternoon, Georgina, a tough Scottish girl from Aberdeen who was a few years older than me, caught my attention as I was walking back to the deli after a piano lesson. She said she had a vinyl record she wanted me to hear, a new hit. I liked George, that’s what Minke and I called her as she didn’t like being called Georgina or Gina; she was no teen angel, more like a queen bee. I followed George into her front yard, up the wooden steps and into her lounge. Then she slid the single from its paper sleeve, and put the record on. We listened to the track. After the song, George asked —Do you think it’s a man or a woman singing?
—It’s Helen Shapiro.
—I know, laughed George, but when I close my eyes she sounds like a man.

“Walking back to Happiness” was number one in the British charts for three weeks.

Back at the deli, my juke box favourites were “Cotton Fields” and “Running Bear.” The last one had a boom chucka rhythm, that dad called jungle beat. The Big Bopper had died with Buddy Holly in the air crash by the time I’d discovered them. It was hard to believe they were dead, listening to them sing.

My life and my reading went on. I sailed around the world with Francis Chichester, scrounged the Yorkshire moors looking for human bones buried in peat. In a nightmarish period close to home, I trawled for six weeks through swamps hoping to
find the boy Graeme Thorne alive. His parents won a lot of money in a lottery, then,
days later, while Graeme was on his way to school, he vanished.

The ups and downs of the news stories kept me reading the paper. I saved ‘til last the
little boy wearing a striped skivvy and his dog with a waggly tail in the cartoon on the
back page.

Fred said he was been born in a tent in Bridgetown and his family had close friends in
the soldier settlement community, but they had nothing else. After a storm, they
returned to the city and he grew up in Park where I live now. When the war broke out,
he was fourteen and too young to enlist. He had to wait until he was seventeen. His
father died of a heart attack before he was discharged, before he could get home for
his mother’s birthday. Anna was 52 and so sad. Poor soul, said Fred.

When Fred was demobbed, all he wanted to do was make money and get married.
One afternoon when he invited Mary to a yacht club dance, he was very surprised
when she said, yes.

While Fred waited for Mary at the Stirling Street bus station, he tried to imagine the
colour of her dress. Perhaps it would be navy blue and white, teal or mauve. He could
not imagine her in yellow, and he loathed black. She stepped down from the bus
dressed in red and he was taken by her beauty. Her calf-length evening dress was
made from yards of mosquito netting she’d bought from Boans with coupons; a white
fur cape, borrowed from her sister Thea was draped around her shoulders. They
walked into the city following Stirling Street into Beaufort Street, over the Horseshoe Bridge and down the length of Barrack Street to the jetty. Mary was taller than Fred and as they walked toward the river, he thought she was more beautiful than any girl he had ever seen.

Now dad’s back in Park living down the street and mum’s been dead for years. I check on him in the morning before I start teaching, except Wednesdays when I conduct the ensembles, or I’ve a concert. On my visits, I make sure dad’s up and had his medication, check his letter box and buy the paper. The people I meet when walking down Lichfield Street takes the rut out of my routine. The street is like any other street on a roadmap, flat as a tray, but it’s a cartographic deception. As I set out Lichfield rolls into view like a wave, soaring high, tacking low, and tunnelling back, up and out into another rise, before opening onto a colourful bank of shops, restaurants, and stores. Pedestrians flood, and traffic clogs at the bottleneck intersection. I take no notice of the undulating course, or the level of difficulty accessing the shops. I walk this street, step by step. There are cracks in the footpath, weeds poking their unwelcome heads out of the flower beds. Olive, mango, orange and lemon trees dot driveways, houses stand for sale, or are flattened by progress, leaving their memories in the sand. Backyards subdivided; town houses are built, new tenants move in, or owners out. That’s how I discovered Dan, my local MP, moving house but with no FOR SALE sign pegged to his fence.
—Online sale, it’s the go, said Dan. Saves time, cost and fuel, you can surf the net, and move without getting out of your car, your feet wet, or taken in by a shark. Whatever you want to know, it’s all in your face. No book, just a gallery of rooms to visit.

Quite a mouthful I thought, as I watched Dan juggle boxes onto a trolley, up a ramp, and into a For Hire, move-yourself truck. He’s not moving far, he says, staying in the district, but he needs a backyard for his kids.

Sometimes I wonder where technology will end? Where’s the future? Life’s virtually good for nothing but sitting in front of a laptop. That’s the price you pay for not standing up to progress. Stand up for the environment, carbon-free and fresh, I say. I smile thinking of the march I went on in The Boulevard ten years ago. I marched to the beat of a drum with a group of other concerned residents, protesting in anger at the thought of a twenty-storey apartment block on the old cosmetic site. I haven’t marched since. The apartment building materialised, but it was cut down to size by the protests.

As I walk towards dad’s house, each step takes me away from the present. I’m lost in my own world until I near Vera’s home. Vera loves to laugh and chat, and lingers in her garden or near the footpath, waiting to attract someone passing by. She’s like a spider waiting in the corner of her window, feeling for a vibration. A slight sensation will set her off jerking and dancing to see who she’s caught in her thread-like spray. She hears me coming before I see her leaning over her front gate. Passersby like me bridge her day, tide her over with conversation and news, until she’s forced indoors by night.
Vera’s eighty-four and has only moved once, to marry. Different number, same street. What keeps her in Lichfield Street? She’s been nowhere, and Jack’s been dead for as long as they were married.

—Lettie, the world has come to me! Just look at Park. Which country do you think you are living in? India, Turkey, Somalia; it’s exotic.

Vera throws her arms up into the air, pretending she’s dancing a salsa rhythm.

—The British are a forgotten race, it is all over for them. Mind you, she continues, there was a time when I thought Park belonged to Italy. Speak of the devil, just look who it is, fancy seeing Maganzia, our little angel who’s fallen in love.

—Hello-a Vera and Letizia-a, Maganzia shrieks excitedly from high on the shoulder of the wave-like hill. She’s like a beacon, a lighthouse beaming good news, or warnings. Her bright face reminds me of a Sunday school story I heard as a child. Moses came down from the mountain top, in the wilderness, wearing a veil over his face and carrying a rock. Maganzia’s carrying a handbag and her face is round like the sun, and uncovered. Her smile’s a sun-cloud.

—Been to mass, Maganzia?

—Yes! I-a been-a to mass.

—Sounds like you’ve been in another country.

—Verrrr-a, says Maganzia, exaggerating her friend’s name— I pray-a for-a rain.

Maganzia stares at Vera as if put out by her comment, but only for a second, then she continues, flushed but unflustered.
—Maganzia is in love with the Archbishop, teases Vera, before singing, *Love unspoken, faith unbroken*—the line from *The Merry Widow*.

We burst out laughing—and the thought sets Vera off, buckling and squealing with delight. Vera likes to laugh at her own jokes. Maganzia laughs the loudest until she realises the import of Vera’s remark.

—I hate-a when you-a say that Vera.

Her switch of mood produces a subdued moment, but the pious rebuff soon passes.

—Phew, Vera says, and waves her hand about as if she’s brushing a sticky fly away from her face.

It’s late, too late for me to be hanging around Vera’s front gate. Dad will be wondering where I am, and what I’ve been doing. Without fuss, I move on leaving the older women to their moody gossip.

I pass Rafiq on his morning walk around Park’s streets.

He’s under a butterfly tree on Geddes Street, picking its flowers and leaves. He eats his medicine fresh.

—Old Indian practice, Rafiq says, the flowers and leaves from butterfly tree very important in my country, like chemo.

I’m in a hurry, no dilly-dallying. Once, I’d met Rafiq in the street and had to cut him short in mid-sentence, just like he does to me. He was most offended.

—You not want talk, he sulks today.

—No, no, no, of course I enjoy chatting, Rafiq, I said, but no time.

He’s heading in Vera’s direction, she’ll see him, and hold him up for a few minutes. Maganzia will use the opportunity to escape Vera, and scurry home. It’s a game.
As I scale the hill, my attention is drawn to an old red-brick house, where a song about promises and a rose garden permeate the air. It reminds me of the seventies. (The words sound out of place.) A young boy stands on the front fence of his house, rapping words and strumming his air guitar. His mother appears in the doorway, and notices me looking.

—He hates school, she shouts.

—Belongs on the stage, I quip, deciding the boy’s future, and his mother nods.

I walk on meditating on past conversations, and my first meeting with Rafiq. It drops like a knife into my thoughts.

I’d met Rafiq at the post office, near the intersection of Duncan Street and The Boulevard. I saw a man checking his post box, and blocking my path to my post box. There was nothing extraordinary, little to notice except the time I had to wait for him to straighten up and let me pass. I was surprised when he stood up and faced me. He was an Indian. A recent arrival, I thought, because I’d never seen him before. Without allowing me time to check my box, he asked me two questions in one sentence.

—What you think of Carmen Lawrence what you think of Simon Crean?

He then answered his own questions.

—I like Crean, he said, but he hasn’t, how you say ... Instinctively, Rafiq inverted his right hand so that all his fingers were pointing to the sky. Then he drew his fingers together as if he were holding an unspeakable gem between his fingertips and moved his hand close to his lips.—Charisma, he said. Carmen, he went on she has the brains to be leader, but is ruined by media.
He blew his fresh breath over his fingertips, as if he were drying ink, but that day, he had blown life into history.

Nearer my home, Rafiq told me he’s a Muslim, an Ahmadi from the Gurdaspur district in northern India.

—It is love for all and hatred for none, but it’s balance, he said, carefully enunciating the words, and gesturing balance by holding his hands in mid-air like a pair of scales.

He blames the British. The British left six months too soon, with blood on their hands.

I listened to his talk. It’s interesting. Maganzia always pretends she doesn’t notice him, but Vera’s fascinated. When he’s speaking to Vera, she’s captivated; silent not slavish. She follows his eyes as they wander up and down her body, reading her lines, mapping her history. At the same time, she’s reading his lines and history. Imagine, and she’s an old lady; vanity is ageless. She’s flattered by him, but we both know it’s just his habit.

As I approach Cavendish Way, I imagine dad sitting in his swivel chair at the dining table reading his old letters, a book, or looking for an article he’s misplaced. It’s within his hand’s grasp, but he can’t see it, and he’ll wait for me. He knows I’ll find it, and when he hears the glass door slide open, he’ll say: hello stranger, I’ve been waiting for you, I’ve misplaced a paper. It’ll be too hard for you to find.
I don’t retaliate, I understand his limitations. I don’t worry. I know he’s been watching morning television: *Sunrise, Today, Early News, and Mornings with Kerri-Anne*. He’ll have already checked the stock market report, his emails, and his superannuation fund, on the internet. Dad’s computer literate, and knows more news than there’s space to print in a newspaper.

As soon as I arrive he says:

—Sit down, Lettie. I’ve got something special to read to you. It’s The Nek.

—Your neck!

—Not my neck, the Battle of the Nekkkk, he exaggerates in his know-all voice.

His war stories never cease. They’re like a dripping tap: drop, drop, drop, up, up and up, until they’ve filled his day.

—Listen, he breathes, then reads: *The sun had not yet risen, the sea and sky were one, but on the shore, as the light from the full moon thickened, the first wave of Light Horsemen jumped up and ran ... the fourth wave of men lay in a trench, beneath the surface, unable to hear the commanding officer’s voice to call it off. They scramble up, thick strokes moving on a parchment, following each other, perpetually ... as the sun climbed higher and higher, a man raised one arm to the sky, a drink of water ...*

As his words drained away, *Gallipoli* lay open on his lap.

Silence punctuates our talk like a pause at the end of a symphonic movement. Through the glass door, Fred sees Rafiq carrying green shopping bags filled with flowers and leaves. Fred thinks he looks like an extra in a film. His words sound again in my head:

—Rafiq, why did you come to Australia?
—Do rich migrate?

A question, followed by a question, that’s how he communicates. A plosive consonant explodes from his lips:
—Ph, Rafiq blew through thin lips. I was youngest of thirteen living with family in Gurdaspur when war broke. My family big, many aunties, uncles, cousins. We help each other. Bakers, not doctors. Bake bread, always baking for people, even Hindus. They put their hands out too. Hindu same for Muslim, we getting on. Understand?
—Yes.

Rafiq gestured with his hands, his body moving up—down—across, like a snake moving to imaginary flute music. I stood speechless, motionless, standing in the stillness outside the Park newsagency.

—My father, Rafiq continued, my father, he repeated, was cutting to save brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, while my mother and my brothers and sisters and me, watch from behind door in bakery doorway. My uncle, he come later, and say to my mother, your husband, my brother, make noise like, ahhhhh. Your husband, my brother, he killed. Knife like this. Suddenly we no future. We stuck in India, not Pakistan.

Rafiq’s eyes, animated and swollen by history. He shook his head as he remembered the festering, festered time. He threw his empty hands into the air. The conversation was over, just like a performance.
—Futile, I said, returning to Fred.

—What?

—Gallipoli.

—It was a debacle.

—Come on, get up, let’s go, I said, trying to brighten his black mood.

—Let’s go to the Lighthouse café for a cuppa, said dad, rising.

When we arrived, dad made his way to a table while I placed our order with the assistant at the counter.

—We’ll have a flat white, and a pot of Orange Pekoe. No milk for the tea, but I’ll need an extra pot of hot water.

—Something to eat?

—Thanks, maybe later.

By the time I re-join dad, he’s engrossed in conversation with a fashionable, middle-aged couple at the next table.

—Lettie, they’re French Canadians, he beams. Born in Gaspé, they lived in Toronto, but when he was made redundant, they sold up, and bought a property in Nova Scotia. They’ve a house twice as large as the one they sold—and double the land—for half the money. Maybe we should move to Nova Scotia.

—You can, I laugh.

In quick time the Canadians discovered Fred’s mother Anna was born in Jamaica, lived in England, but migrated to Australia and settled in Park. Most of her family moved from Jamaica to London, then back to Jamaica, then on to Canada in 1966 to escape
the violence of the up-coming election and state of emergency. Fred tells them he’s been to every Canadian province except Nova Scotia. He loves Canada, he says. He loves, loves, loves Canadians. He has cousins in Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg, and once spent a day in the Butchart Gardens. He’s an aunt in Calgary, and has been to the stampede, railed across the Prairies, and marvelled at Niagara Falls, from both sides of the border.

When he was in Niagara with Mary in 1979, he thought of flying to Nova Scotia for the inaugural Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo. Fred and the couple criss-cross the provinces, and on into America on a journey of self-discovery from Halifax to San Francisco, while sitting in art deco chairs drinking Lighthouse coffee. They use Anglo-French language and a history you’d find in Volkswagen Blues. (Fred studied French at high school and loves to sing “La Marseillaise”) When the travelling hype comes to a standstill, the French Canadian woman turns to me, and asks me if I’ve been to Canada. I’ve been sipping tea, half-listening to their conversation and half to the music siphoned through the sound system.

—No, I said, but I love Canadian writers. They’re like big birds nesting in trees; their books are filled with lively experiences and plenty of political shit.
—Which authors? the woman asks in a soft voice.
—Atwood, Barfoot, Behrens, Cohen, Hills, Laurence, MacLeod, Munro, Ondaatje, Poulin, Shields. The authors run off my tongue in alphabetical order, like they’re lining up for a race.
Our conversation develops like a word game, and is full of concentration until the Canadian woman says she has cancer. Just like that. I am shocked, her words are unexpected, but it was as if they’d been waiting for the right moment to surface.
—It took my mum years ago, I tell her.
—Breast?
—Skin.
—Long?
—Short.

During the autumn of 1988, I’d been possessed by an inexplicable desire to have another baby. It was like an illness I didn’t recognise, and so powerful that I couldn’t understand its source. After the birth of our first child, Paul said he didn’t care if we never had another. He found the birth stressful, and the use of the vacuum extractor primitive. But my deep yearning had me thinking about when I was much younger, working in the garden with dad.

Dad had told me a story about a gardener called Pop, who, earlier in his career, had worked at Kew Gardens, London. Dad said, Pop was retired and living out of Long Beach, six miles west of Mena. To supplement his British pension, he grew gourmet lettuces, which dad sold in the deli. Pop was fascinated by the propagation and grafting of plants. His garden was a hot bed all year round producing seedlings in every corner. Not an inch of ground was wasted.
—A dying plant will automatically try to reproduce and throw a flower, Pop had said to dad.

—It will try to reproduce even in the throes of death, dad had repeated to me. Soil is like the mind, he’d added, it grows the seeds you plant.

Though there was no rhyme or reason, voluntary or compelling, for wanting another baby, I went on and on, and drove Paul into submission. He couldn’t see the sense. We had three children, and all the births had been difficult. By then we were living on the east coast, a continent away from family. But he conceded and I conceived. Without warning at the eighth week of pregnancy, I threatened to miscarry. I was distressed. With specialist care, the pregnancy continued, but as the birth drew near, my blood pressure suddenly soared. It was uncontrollable and I was hospitalised. My rising blood pressure disturbed me. Perhaps I had an underlying medical condition which hadn’t been detected; a tumour on my spine that was slowly killing me. Years before, one of Denise’s patients had had sudden, elevated blood pressure coinciding with the onset of labour, then it subsided after delivery. The condition flared again during the patient’s next pregnancy. An examination revealed a tumour at the base of her neck. A little imagination, coupled with a little medical knowledge, complicated by family history, and a voracious reading of women’s health magazines, created an anxiety in me that I couldn’t control.

The nursing staff tried to pacify me, as I hallucinated on birth and death. Death was wrapped in bandages and looked like a mummy sleeping by my side. Awake I’d hear
the nurses begin their observation rounds, hear the sound of the blood pressure
trolley wheeled through the wards. It was enough to dry my blood.

I came to an arrangement with the nurses. Instead of talking about my blood pressure,
we’d talk about the foetal heart monitor placed on my stomach to record the baby’s
heart. This took my mind off death. Learning how to interpret a foetal heart graph, I
became my baby’s doctor. It was when the graph drew a straight line before jumping
back into rhythm, that an emergency caesarean ushered a tiny boy into my arms.
Unbeknown to me, as soon as mum heard of my hospitalisation she left Perth by bus,
with a suitcase in her hand. She arrived in Sydney, two days after the birth. Her
appearance startled me.

It was late November and the nation was abuzz with bicentennial celebrations. Parks
and gardens across Australia were all blooming spring colours. I arrived home from
hospital with the luxury of having mum to myself for the first time in my life. I felt
cocooned in her presence. But my blood pressure remained elevated and I was
distracted by mum’s short haircut. I looked for signs of her sickness, as if I was looking
for rising damp. On a bright early summer’s afternoon, as mum prepared to return to
Perth, the sky became overcast and spilt a sun shower over our heads. It was
momentary, and we were surprised then thrilled to see a vivid double rainbow arch its
back like a cat across the sky. The rainbow replaced the sadness of our parting with
joy.
—The three older children sang: See you later alligator
—Mary sang: After ‘while crocodile
---Grandchildren: See you later alligator

—Mary and grandchildren in unison: So long, that’s all, goodbye.

Waving hands vaudeville-style they all blew kisses backwards and forwards as if kisses were ping-pong balls. Looking on, I saw mum in another time, a time when she was dressed in a blue, floral going-away outfit. I could hear the sound of her high-heeled shoes clattering across a hard surface, before the sound faded. She walked away towards the bottom right-hand corner of my vision, diminishing in size, becoming smaller and smaller until she disappears. When I look up, I notice the colours of the double rainbow have bled into violet, then red and violet, then everything was black, as if I have gone blind. I shake my head and respond in time to see mum sitting in a window seat, a third of the way down the bus. She waved. I kept my hand in the air as the bus moved slowly away and out of sight. She’s gone, I think. The dusk descended, fell like a veil over my head and overwhelmed me with an incomprehensible sense of loss.

The next time I saw mum three weeks had passed. We flew back to Perth for my youngest sister Mercy’s wedding. Dad’s minor heart attack in the October and the wedding were reasons why mum had not intended coming for the birth. As Paul walked with the older children, I carried the baby through the arrivals lounge. Then I saw mum. She looked so thin. I was alarmed.

She remained seated as her grandchildren flocked around her like baby ducklings. They huddled under her arms, holding her up like spokes in an umbrella, as if protecting themselves from a future storm. Denise moved away from the family circle and caught
my arm. I chatted about the birth, the baby’s progress. We spoke of high blood pressure, before Denise lowered her voice:

—Mum is dying.

—You’ve been wrong before.

—She has a shadow.

—Where?

—On her lung.

Denise’s words took my breath away. I looked at mum. She looked worn out. It seemed like yesterday she was robust and jovial, but here, sitting in the airport, she looked frail. I turned to dad and asked after his health. He looked thinner, but was sprite with energy, and good humour. Mum said nothing.

My thoughts are startled by a loud bang. Customers in Park’s shopping arcade look up to see an elderly woman in front of a shop window, with hands cupped over her nose. The Canadian man leaps to his feet, and moves quickly to her side.

—It’s Vera, I whisper to no one.

Vera had walked straight into a glass pane thinking it was the door to the little boutique selling hats and women’s accessories. She refuses the Canadian’s suggestion to sit a while, and disappears into *Hats ’n Things* to avoid the gathering crowd.

I observe the action in *Hats ’n Things* from my chair at the cafe. It’s as if I’m sitting in the front stalls at His Majesty’s Theatre watching the current opera: *An Italian Straw Hat*. It’s a farce. I can’t take my eyes off Vera. At first, Vera is unsure and develops an avid interest in the bright purple hat shaped like a gerbera. She lifts the hat off its
stand and walks gingerly toward the mirror at the back of the boutique. She places the hat gently on her head. She plans to check the damage to her nose in the mirror to see if there is any sign of blood, but instead she becomes fascinated with the hoop of feathers stitched like petals radiating out from the hat’s centre. She is transfixed by her reflection in the mirror.

Vera is like the horse in the comic opera, oblivious to everything but the hat. Her slender body moves unwittingly in time to the arcade’s piped music, but her feet are pegged to the spot in front of the mirror. Her elegant spindle-like arms track through the air, her dainty hand alters the hat’s position, a finger flick of a feather sets off a minute vibration too slow to hear. Tone-like feathers chime in time with the movement of Vera’s hands. Hypnotised, Lettie sees Vera swept high by unseen hands. Beautiful, beautiful, she repeats, enthralled at seeing her fragile, elderly friend anew. She wonders how her mother would have aged.

Vera continues to open like a bud warmed by the sun in front of the mirror. She’s bewitched by her own beauty. Tentatively, she lifts her right hand towards her face and with her index finger, touches her nose, before tracing the bow-like outline of her lips. Using both hands she stretches loose skin tight across her cheekbones, before pressing a frown crease from her forehead. She smiles at her own reflection and remembers the milliner in the one room store in Sheffield House creating miracles, converting tired-looking hats into something new. Spring fashion, Belle Gladstone’s millinery parades at the Savoy Hotel Ballroom. September 1945, and after the peace, an emphasis on brims with flowers and ribbons. Each memory took a turn in the
mirror. Vera steps forward reimagining herself as a young bride on the arm of her father, following Norma, her only sibling and bridesmaid down the aisle of St Peters, Park. Norma had worn the hat of blue on the back of her head. Vera wore a picture hat. Forward, forward and closer to the mirror, then quite by instinct Vera speaks:
—Norma.
Vera looks confused. She pivots to the right and circles to the left, but Norma has vanished.

Fred isn’t caught up in the emotion of Vera’s drama. He doesn’t recognise her. He is giggling over the smudge left on the glass by Vera’s nose and points it out to me, in a voice that sounded like a jack-hammer.
—When I was a naval seaman on the *Westralia*, out in the middle of the ocean during the war, birds flew straight into portholes. They’re stunned for a moment, but usually recover. The outline of their head and wings remain on the glass like frescoes painted freehand. Decorated faces, like angels reflected in the room by sunlight. They were beautiful, he sighs then laughs, they’ll have to clean the shop front window tonight, can’t have an old lady’s face scaring away customers.

Excursions are becoming more and more difficult as Fred’s mobility decreases, and his reliance increases. After the outing to the cafe, dad asks if I’m coming inside for a minute. Usually, I say, nooo; his life’s so fused with mine, but this time, I say:
—Yes. Just a quick chat.
Once inside, dad says he’s been having a recurrent dream about mum.
—Your mother’s always walking down Hay Street toward the Town Hall with a man.

I’m standing on the pavement dressed in my white apron, as if I’ve just stepped out of the Mena deli for a breather. I call Mary, Mary. She stares, and then looks straight through me. At first, I think she doesn’t recognise me. Hello, I say, It’s Fred, your husband. I ask her a question. What are you doing with him? I’ve never seen the bloke before, Lettie. Never in my life. I repeat, who is he?

—This is Charles, Mary says boldly, without a hint of betrayal.

—What are you doing with him?

—He’s a jeweller, and he’s asked me to work for him.

—I’m an accountant, I remind her, you can work for me.

—No you’re not, she says, you’re a shop-keeper, now get back to Mena’s deli and finish baking the pies.

—When I wake up, I’ve lost all my bearings. I don’t know where I am, says Fred. What do you make of that, Lettie?


I feel uncomfortable. It disturbs me to speak of mum in the light of romance and infidelity.

—Your dream isn’t about mum, I reassure him, it’s saying something about you.

That night, I hear “Shenandoah” on Classic FM, sung by the Mormon Tabernacle, a cappella choir in four-part harmony. I wasn’t expecting it. That’s the problem listening to the radio. Songs take you by surprise, sweep you up, carry your mind off. You find yourself in another place, without moving your feet. Music and song take you straight to people you’ve buried, places you’ve raked over. I never allow myself to listen to this
song. Usually, as soon as I hear the intro, I switch it off. I’ve never included “Shenandoah” in my choral repertoire. I know other conductors work it up to performance standard, or present versions in festivals to be examined or adjudicated. But “Shenandoah” isn’t for me.

Once, in a moment of strength, I bought fifteen copies online with the intention of teaching the piece to my senior choir. But there were so many versions it was confusing. I liked James Erb’s arrangement for eight-part chorus, but didn’t have enough quality voices in my choir to do it justice. I thought I’d rearrange the piece and divide my choir into three sections: soprano, soprano, alto. But the music I bought sits in my vocal music filing cabinet between, “Save the Last Dance for Me”, arranged by Mark Brymer, and a Spanish piece—“Si Tu Suenas”—written by Jim Papoulis, arranged by Francisco Nunez. When I have to listen to “Shenandoah”, its haunted tones open my eyes wide like the mouth of a river filled with water, and teeming with life.

I’ve even read articles about the Shenandoah Valley in the *National Geographic*. My students love the stories that are hidden inside music scores. Words and notes beyond the text. It helps them to imagine the words and breathe the music. I’m free to rearrange “Shenandoah’s” score, but not its history. I’m fascinated by the Shenandoah River, Fort River, Harper’s Ferry, John Brown and the Shenandoah Campaigns. Minke and I saw *Gone with the Wind* sitting in deck chairs at the cinema gardens. I fell instantly in love with Rhett Butler. Since then, I’ve relied on books and documentaries as I’ve never been to America. I conjure the Shenandoah River from the words I’ve
read, creating images in my mind. Shenandoah’s a Cheyenne word translated into English, “Daughter of the Stars”.

Stars shine bright in Park, bright stars rolled on a scroll in a southern sky.

The “Shenandoah” on the radio has made me nervous. The humming and singing spooks a childhood memory of sitting at a desk in a freezing cold room, with rain hitting and spitting at the windows. At the time I had a virus, a nasty cough and a shadow on my lung. It was pneumonia, brought on, mum said, by Minke’s sister Heidi’s death, from bone cancer. The disease started in Heidi’s hip, and she limped, but no one took any notice. Growing pains, her dad had said. On my return to school, Minke was still absent so I was forced to sit alone. While I was away, the class learned to sing “Shenandoah” and the words disturbed me: *I love your daughter. I love the place across the water ... I’ll leave you never. ‘Til the day I die, I’ll love you ever.* The new recording on the radio disturbs me but it is a release. It’s like hearing words sung in another language as I eye away the years. As I listen to the singing, lying on my bed back in Park, I hear harmonic voices, and imagine the past differently.

The next morning, later than usual, I walk down Lichfield Street. The sun is high in the sky and naked at noon. No shadows sweep the footpath. I listen to the hooting and trills of birds hidden by leaves, before noticing a taxi parked on the verge outside a double-storied weatherboard home. As I draw level, the iron gate at the side of the tradesman’s house opens, and there you are. Your long hair is dyed blonde and you
cross my path in silence. Without a sound, you open the taxi door and slip into the back seat. You speak to the driver, and shut me out of your conversation.
—When you fall off your perch, people will say you had a big life.

—Well that’s not going to happen.

—What’s not?

—You know what you said.

—You’ve had a big life, dad.

—Why do you talk like this?

—Like what?

—Every time you come to my house, you give me a verbal walloping.

Fred has the stare-you-down glare that I’ve inherited; the stare that waits for a reaction.

—You want a cuppa.

—That’s what I’ve been waiting for, wails Fred. His voice is like a ventriloquist’s, a different sound for each dummy.

I walk across the room and put the kettle on. While the kettle boils I fiddle in the kitchen, checking through the washing up for a couple of clean cups. A quick glance for faded lipstick on the rim, or tea stains in the bottom, determines a mug’s fate. I take the plastic milk bottle with the green top from the fridge. He uses milk from this bottle for his cup of tea, and milk from the blue-lidded bottle for his porridge.

—Remember when we sold milk at the deli in glass bottles?
—Yeah, I sigh. I run my hand up and down one side of the plastic milk bottle, and continue to reminisce. I love glass, seems healthier. Plastic’s not as cool on your fingers. I never buy milk in cartons. I think cardboard affects the taste.

—What can you do about it?

—Nothing.

—Don’t buy it. Just get on and make the tea. Life’s good, scoffs Fred, before adding, I heard an amazing story.

—What? I ask lackadaisically, never fazed by dad’s revelations.

—Narcissus and Echo!

—Narcissus and Echo, I repeat in a voice tinged with disbelief. I wonder what new information dad can add to this ancient tale.

—Lettie, what would you know about Narcissus?

—He loved himself.

—And what happens to him, Fred asks, pushing me into the discussion.

—In his erotic ecstasy, he fell into a pool and drowned, I sigh.

—What about Echo?

—She fell in love with Narcissus, lost her voice and became invisible.

—How’d you know that?

—You told me.

—Don’t be ridiculous, Lettie. I’d never heard that story until a bloke I haven’t seen for at least five years dropped in like a memory. Dropped in for a cup and chat. He was going on about myths. He said that everything’s a myth these days, nothing’s true and you just had to have a good argument. You can re-write history; it’s all cock n’ bull, said Fred.
He’s agitated now, so I spin him a story of my own making.

—Remember a few years after we moved out of Mena into the bush property on Gentle Road, I was twelve years old and you called me over to the old tuart tree in the front garden, near the old water tank that was converted into a swimming pool later. The tuart had an ancient scar where bark had been removed. The scar made the tree look as if it had an apron around its belly; its base was circled with flowering jonquils and daffodils. You said you had a surprise to show me. Set amongst the thick-scented bulbs in the garden was a tiny, white flower. You pointed to it, and asked me if I knew its name. I said it was a baby daffodil. No, you said: it’s Narcissus. You went on and on about Narcissus. About Narcissus as a teenager, and how he had boys and girls swooning all over him. Narcissus, you said, had become proud, vain and heartless. And when he knelt by the pool to slake his thirst, he saw a beautiful image, and unwittingly fell in love—with himself. Narcissus lay next to the pool like a lazy sod, reaching into the water to grab his lover, only to see the image vanish in a ripple. Grief-stricken and paralysed, he soon faded away to nothing, and a tiny white flower sprang up in his place. You asked me to repeat the flower’s name. But I wouldn’t. So you cut the flower from its stem, and pressed it into my face. The flower’s perfume made me feel delirious. That night, I dreamt I was a white flower repeating: Narcissus, Narcissus, Narcissus. Each repetition sounded softer and softer and softer then, without warning, I vanished through the apron carving and into the tree.

—You’re being smart.

—No, I’m not! I start to giggle and I can’t stop. I laugh the nervous kind of laugh that interrupts a serious moment. Dad’s angry, and can’t lift a smile.
—You’re bloody stupid, Fred said, and turns his face away. He stares out through the sliding glass doors separating the dining room from his small backyard where he grows vegetables.

I could ask dad about his garden, about the swedes, turnips and parsnips he’s growing for the first time. But I don’t. On an earlier occasion, dad reported to me that he’d heard it was hard to grow swedes, turnips and parsnips. Undeterred, he’d planted a couple of punnets of each. We’ll have to wait and see what happens in the Spring, he said. I’m growing them for the first time and sowing carrots from a strip of paper.

—A marvellous invention. I saw the carrot strips on *Gardening in Australia*.

—I hate swedes, turnips and parsnips, I’d said.

—Why do you hate everything I like, he’d said.

—I don’t, I just hate eating root vegetables.

—Swedes and turnips aren’t roots.

—I know, with them it’s the taste. They’re too strong.

—Throw them into soups and stews, they’re really good for you. Then, in a baby-like voice, he had asked me if I needed any spinach?

—No, no, no.

—It’s a great source of iron, he’d said, reverting to his know-all tone.

—I agree, but not today, I’d said, thinking over my plans for dinner.

—When then? he’d barked. The spinach’s taking over my garden and needs to be eaten.

—I can see that, but I’ll cut it fresh when I want it, adding with jovial seriousness: eating too much spinach is poisonous, you’d better be careful.
Now I wonder if Denise is right. She diagnosed dad’s condition on her last visit to Perth. His heart’s enlarged, he’s bad circulation and there’s not enough oxygen getting to his brain. He has ischemic heart disease, and I think he’s dying, Denise said. We should start saying our goodbyes.

—Denise, I’d said, dad always recovers from his heart attacks. I’m not saying goodbye. Besides, he’d laugh and wonder where I was going.

While Fred drinks his tea in silence, I retrieve my mobile phone from my bag, and start texting Denise. She practises in Sydney, where she lives with her family.

Lettie: cn u bleve dads nevr hrd of narcissus

Denise: Who?

Lettie: narcissus

Denise: Y r u talkin 2 dad bout N?

Lettie: e rekns es nevr hrd th story

Denise: E’s 4gotn.

Lettie: no memry

Denise: No reflxn.

Lettie: memry or reflxn

Denise: No love.

Lettie: no mirror.

I laugh, as I send the last text message. The sound returns Fred’s thoughts to the present.

—Why are you playing with your mobile phone? Put it away.
In the same breath, he puts his cup of tea down on the table, flashes his hands about like he is conducting, and then pushes a scrap of paper across the table in my direction.

—It’s a recent article I’ve cut out of *The West*. For your information.
—What’s so important? I ask. I suspect another Mena-bashing media story. Yes. It is.


—Stop ranting Lettie and read the piece. Remember the judge?
—Listen carefully Lettie. See if you can follow a simple story.

When he thinks you can’t understand what he’s trying to say, Fred has a habit of accentuating his words, like he is reciting poetry.

—Lawson was the Supreme court judge who made the government pay me more for my Gentle Road property. He’s the one who read the government report, and said that the valuers had got their sums wrong. One hundred and sixty three thousand dollars wrong. The government undervalued my land, Lettie. Took me ten years to get a result, because the government wouldn’t settle on a decent price. Justice Lawson was the judge, and now, the paper says, he’s retiring. It’s uncanny!

—Did you read the line that said Justice Lawson worked for the oil refinery as a petrochemical engineer, and that he lived in Mena?
—I don’t care, what he did or where he lived. The result was all good.
His story had worn him out.

—There’s more, I say. The paper says that, at first, Lawson thought Mena was a city in the Middle East. He thought he was being transferred from England to some exotic place near the Holy city! When he arrived in Mena, there was nothing holy and nothing to do. Little wonder, he resigned and went straight back to England to study law. He returned as a lawyer years later, but lived and worked in Perth.

Four years after Fred and Mary had opened their deli, the bottom had fallen out of the economy and Mena was bankrupt. Fred took over the lease of the fruit and vegetable shop, and wanted to lease another shop, open a drapery business.

—No, said Mary, I don’t think that’s a good idea.

—Why not? Fred asked.

—‘Cos we’re just breaking even.

But the drapery shop opened. Denise and I loved dressing the mannequins, then Fred pushed for a fourth shop.

—It was the government’s fault, Fred says. They formed Mena out of dust. Who would help her? Men under thirty couldn’t get a job. Residents left. Vacant houses dotted the streets. Deserted wives, fatherless kids, war widows, senior citizens poured into the vacant houses like refugees in detention. There was no work. Kids roamed, crime rose, the British managers and construction workers disappeared like flies in winter.
—Purpose-built towns, built around a shopping hub and industry, fail historically, I tell him. They sprawl out, and before long, no one knows anyone.

—Better to have houses rented than vacant, same with shops.

—Vandals.

—The government made Mena into a toxic womb, but I don’t dwell on the past.

—You stayed there too long.

—What are you talking about, Lettie? Fred says, starting up like a cough. The days in Mena were brilliant. Your mother loved the shops, loved the work, and helping the foreigners. So did you, so did Denise, helping yourselves to the lollies.

Fred talks on, picking up speed. It was a new world for us, a Dvorak symphony. Meeting foreigners, new innovations, world-wide media attention at first. The city dwellers couldn’t get enough of Mena. Every Sunday they’d motor down the old coast road in their Holdens, Austins, Vauxhalls, to prop up a bar, and down frothy heads. You couldn’t get a drink in Perth on a Sunday.

—Lettie, Mena’s canteen on Sundays was like a Mecca mosque on a Friday. Fred laughs at his own joke.

As Fred continues his speech slows giving me a sense of music. My latest purchase for the music room is a software program: Apple QuickTime. My instrumental ensemble students use the program to learn a new piece. The music slowing to half speed repeats a music bar as often as they like, until they can play the music with fluency.
—Lettie. Lettie, Fred went on as slow as you like. I am telling you, I’m telling you I am not taking that talk from you. Your mother loved Mena. Your mother loved Mena, he repeats, before adding, and so did you. Go on with you, he said, drawing out the last word, giving it more time than necessary, before his voice returns to its usual tempo.

During the school holidays, you’d walk up and down the shopping strip with Art and Elselina Van Der haak’s younger daughter, Minke, and Tor Wallace, following the two of you like a displaced kid. You walked as if you owned the street. You and Minke dressed in your black stretch slacks, and white polo skivvies, like every other girl in town. You and Minke wouldn’t wear anything else. That’s the crazy part about fashion, said Fred. Everyone looks the same, everyone’s a sitting duck waiting in line to be fed propaganda. Down at Long Beach fair during the summer holidays, the pair of you looked like Siamese twins attached at the hip as you jumped up and down on the trampoline; the canned music playing in the background. Up and down, up and down like a pair of wild horses on a hazy day.

A summer fair, with a merry-go-round near the sea. From a distance the garden island with a lighthouse, but no one took any notice. Everyone was too busy sitting on rocks soaking up the sun.

—Poms love a holiday, says dad.

Rock pools were ignored by the contented crowd stretching their bodies like starched sheets, getting browner not whiter in the sun’s glare. At the far end of the wooden jetty, alongside the diving board, fishermen threw lines into the swollen sea hoping for
a bite—a catch. The Wallace brothers—except Tor, he spent his summer days collecting empty bottles and cashing them in for a handy deposit—jumped into the blue from the diving board one by one, soaking the fishermen. The boys in the water, duck dived and skylarked until:

—Shark! A fisherman shouted from the jetty.

The boys weren’t convinced but swam to shore as a dolphin surfaced and calmed the anxious bystanders. The sun was warm, a beautiful day.

—Look at the birdies, look at the birdies, dipping heads, dipping heads, cried Minke.

—Binoculars, said Art Van Der haak. Dolphins, looks like three. Yeah, three. A grey male, the biggest of the lot, he’s the boss.

—Show mama, cried Elselina.

—I can’t run, I’ve got a sore leg.

—It’s growing pains, Heidi.

—Lettie, before you left Mena, you’d find any excuse to get out, go somewhere else. You hated it. Why?

—No, I loved Mena, I still do.

I can picture Mena. The way her houses sat and met the sun every morning. Brick houses stare down hills, like snobs, while weatherboard and asbestos houses sat in hollows like boats moored in bays waiting for the tide to turn. I loved the way she shimmered and swung in a summer’s sea breeze, singing in the wind as magical sounds
escaped the bushland. I see Lillie-Minnie sitting proud under the tuart tree near the water tank, yarning until dusk.

—Lillie-Minnie, Fred always said to her, you’ll have to be gone with the sun. You can’t be sitting on my lawn all day and night, it’s not a reserve.

Wailing voices singing from the bush campfire, calling to the midnight dancers who turned into mopokes in the Dreamtime.

—*Mopoke, mopoke, mopoke.*

I still love the banksia trees that skirt the town and nibble her frayed edges, and the spectacle-shaped fresh water lakes linking ancient trade tracks to the Murray and Swan Rivers. Golfers swing, hit or miss on straight greens where frogs croaked into the night. No more minnows, no more tadpoles, no more turtles, the golf course has killed them all. No one heard Mena cry, but the poet, when a change of weather puffed a fine, white, mist-like drizzle over her for days at a time. It took the breath out of the town.

—It was government’s fault, said Fred. All that industry, then they brought people from the east and dumped them.

—Prime land for industry, I whisper.

—No government reversed the trend, Fred says.
Refinery chimneys stretch like matches ... minding space without a sun.

When Vera discovered I grew up in Mena, she couldn’t believe it. Such a surprise. Her parents were the children of children of children of dairy farming pioneers who arrived in the Long Beach district off the ship Calista in 1830.

—My parents, Vera said, were disenchanted by the unbearable summer heat, the wild pigs, the mosquitoes and flies.

Vera went on and on before repeating a Wagner-like legend she’d heard from her sister, Norma, about a ship named Pretty Maiden careening unmanned across the Sound during a violent storm. It broke its moorings on the back beach of the garden island, near Singing Rock.

Vera sang like an eerie wind blowing an old love story through eroded rock.

—The ghost-like ship washed up on East Long Beach—later renamed Pretty Maiden Bay—after the ship, Vera added.

Norma was in the second-grade class at East Long Beach Primary School, when one of the boys in her class told the teacher that he’d seen a ship on the beach as he was walking to school. The teacher didn’t believe him. Though Norma’s been dead for decades, Vera can recite her stories word for word.

—Don’t be funny! the teacher said.

—No truly, said the boy.
—Oh, go on!

—If you look down Office Road, you can see it!

—Well, we’ll go for our nature study walk down there.

—We explored the old ship from stern to bow on that first morning. After she had settled in her graveyard on the beach, we climbed down the gangways into the dark interior, tiny needles of sunlight shone through pin holes in the rusty deck.

Vera thought the story all the more remarkable when I told her that the *Pretty Maiden* wreck was my summer holiday playground. Minke, Tor and I, I told her, leaning against her front fence in Lichfield Street, were like old prospectors, prodding dark shapes with gidgees, until they moved. We looked for squid and crabs hiding under rocks, and between crevices of rusty iron and stone that smelt of salt and decay. But with the constant lapping of waves, the changing tide and wind, sea water on iron, the hulk rusted fast and soon the wreck was fenced off by the shipping authority. A sign hung on a metal wire fence warning pests that:

![Trespassers will be prosecuted sign](image)

No one took any notice. Every weekend, during the summer and on fine wintry days, crowds of sightseers came from the city, squeezed through the fence, and scrambled over the wreck in search of treasure. Eventually, the wreck was filled with limestone, forming the walk-over platform that is now the jetty.
—Listen, says Fred, tiring of the subject, and leaning across the table in my direction, Lawson’s right, there’s a town in Egypt named Mena.

—That’d be right, I said. A stuffed town filled with mummies.

There’s love and loss between dad and me. We laugh and share humour, but no grudges, and I’ve never been afraid of him. Never felt estranged from him, never had a need to write a letter to him. Never thought of Fred as a cold man. He’s hot-headed and provocative, but I’m not timid. I understand how he grabs hold of anything that might give him more time; talking about the past in the present is a way of thinking about the future.

—Mena was a makeshift tent town in Egypt, Fred goes on, built in the shadow of the pyramids for the allied forces before they fought the Turks during the great war. Fred sighs as he searches his memory for another episode he’d read in Gallipoli. He imagines his father scurrying off with his brother to enlist. Not Mary’s father, ‘cos, he was a pacifist.

—Mum wanted out, I said, interrupting dad’s war thoughts. She wanted out of Mena. It wasn’t just the vandalism and thieving but, after four years, her happiness had evaporated in the polluted air of the refinery.

—Mum wasn’t alone.

*In all directions, shafts of pain fan without a centre.*
—It’s not a myth, Lettie. If you stay too long in one place it becomes impossible to leave. When did your mother say that?

He pushes me, he knows I will answer.

—Years ago.

—Great start for migrants, though.

—Yeah but, just long enough to get out.

—Lettie, Fred says right out of the blue. Do you remember the old codger who lived down the road from the deli and saw ants?

—No, he must have come late.

—Everywhere he looked, there were ants! He’d come into the shop and point at the wall, the door, the floor, up on the ceiling. He went round and round the deli, like a spinning penny, shouting orders like a lieutenant to the battalion of ants he saw running along the fluorescent light fittings, electric cords, creeping out of power-points. He tracked invisible lines with his fingers across the steel-top counter and glass display cabinets. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. He was well-coordinated, his finger and head moved at the same time, but in opposite directions. Made me dizzy looking at him. Deli customers gave him a wide berth. One day, the police took him away.

—Lettie, Fred says, after one of our silences, the last time I was in the hospital after my aneurysm, I saw ants.

Fred loves participating in surveys and used to sign up for the studies that the hospital research teams promoted. In one survey the medical officers discovered that Fred had
a blister on his aorta. It wasn’t a problem yet, but they would watch and wait and repair the aneurysm when it was critical in size. Complicated by his coronary heart disease, Fred had a post-operative heart attack, and that was when Denise flew across from Sydney.

—Dad needs a defibrillator and a pacemaker, said Denise.

—Ants! Ants! Ants! I heard myself yelling, said Fred in a muted tone, stifling his amusement—I must have been delirious. It was—like an out-of-body experience. I was looking down on myself from the ceiling and murderous ants were running all over my bed, gnawing my skin to get at my bones. I was disappearing in front of my own eyes, like in a horror movie. Denise was there. She thought I’d lost my marbles. When I was more settled, I remembered the old boy from Mena, his noise, singing, shouting before he swung through the door into the deli.

—It’s the drugs, they make you manic. Like mum, before she died. Last thing she remembered before the morphine sent her off, was the Lockerbie disaster. She thought Denise and I were the Popular Front to free Palestine.

Dad put his head in his hands remembering that hot January.

I have a shadow on my lung, mum had said, breaking up the silence, as we travelled from the airport by car to their home.

—Pneumonia? I said, holding the youngest child close. When I had pneumonia, it started as a fever, then a cough, then it made me lethargic and breathless. I lay on the lazy boy at the back of the deli and slept for weeks. The sickness set in after Heidi’s death.
—Yes, I thought you’d end up with weak lungs, mum said.

In the sweltering days leading up to Mercy’s wedding, mum and I rested together on her queen-sized bed, but I couldn’t sleep. We were top and tail. Mum’s head rested on a mountain of pillows, my feet on the pillow where my head should be. Gathering years in a moment, I remembered walking with mum and Denise around the roads of Mena. I revisited the colourful houses hearing languages I didn’t understand, saw the white roads before they were painted black—a black-washing of ancient tracks. I saw burnt out trees. Memories of a hell, spoken in story, sung in songs, repeated and remixed. Stories written down, and read, read over. Just at that moment, my baby stirred and left my thoughts in mid-air. As mum slept, I rolled to one side, and unbuttoned my shirt. I scooped the stirring baby into my arms and watched his small mouth latch onto my nipple. Mum stirred. Just a feed and nappy change, I whispered.

Days later, the afternoon wedding brought sweet perfumes on a fresh sea breeze. Splayed colours widened on the ribbons, ties, and sashes of bridesmaids’ and flower girls’ dresses. Mercy looked frighteningly beautiful. Beautiful, because she was the image of her mother, and frightening because mum looked nothing like her old self. She was thin and gaunt and it was all chilling. Wedding guests asked, what’s wrong with Mary?

The next day, just after daybreak, Ada, Mary’s eldest sister, rang Fred.
—Take Mary to hospital.

Fred had turned a blind-eye to Mary’s illness as he walked down the aisle to give his youngest daughter to her groom. Had turned a quick step into a waltz at the reception while Mary sat still at the bridal table.

Ada and Thea, Mary’s sisters, soon arrived and took charge. Fred was nauseous and faint with shortness of breath as if the pressure of Mary’s shadow were on his own lung. Thea drove to the hospital, Ada holding Mary tight in her arms on the back seat. Fred sat in the front with Thea. Denise was on duty at the hospital, and met the car on arrival. She oversaw all the necessary arrangements for a hospital admission.

After talk of ants, the old codger, drugs and mum’s death, that evening I dreamt I was working in the deli. Dad had popped out the back of the shop for a smoke, but in next to no time, he was back with an unlit ciggie hanging from his bottom lip. He rummaged through some papers.

—What’re you looking for? I asked.

—A bank statement!

—Why?

—Your mother’s just told me she’s bought five second-hand cars, and she’s out the back standing next to one. It looks like she’s waiting for someone.

I hear mum’s voice clearly, for the first time in decades.

—Fred, she shouts, which was unlike mum, I’ve bought five second-hand cars. I know we’ve got no money, but it doesn’t matter. You always said, she reminded him, if money’s the only problem, forget the money.
Dad didn’t hear mum shouting. He found the statement he was looking for, and ran straight out of the back door to show her. As the back door snapped open and shut, I saw mum huffing and puffing as she pushed a car. She looked younger than when I last saw her in the hospital. Her hair was jet-black, trimmed and set. One by one, mum pushed all the cars from the back car park to the front of the deli. Lined them up in single file. By then, dad had disappeared from my dream.

I wake early, and as I’m walking down Lichfield Street with The West once more, I notice a crow flapping about with a white moth in its beak. The moth batters her wings up and down, but is going nowhere. There’s no time for the insect to empty her womb of eggs before she dies. Then for no apparent reason, the crow opens its beak, and the moth flies—barely flies off—in lop-sided circles. (It tries to regain its balance and remain airborne). It is surreal and fascinating to watch as I stand motionless with the paper under my arm, observing the drama staged between two white gum trees.

Without warning, the crow swoops again, and snaps up the moth in mid-air. Bewildered, the moth beats what is left of its wings. This time, when the crow opens its beak a second time, the moth spirals to the ground. Strange behaviour for a bird. I imagined the crow should’ve eaten the moth in a peck, but it flies off and leaves the moth for a colony of ants to work over.

All dad’s ant talk makes me think of army ants in South America. I’ve read about them: they cooperate with each other and work in teams. One team fills potholes in the soil
with their bodies to make the journey smoother for the ants carrying prey. I wondered what game the crow was playing, savaging the moth before leaving it for dead. But my thoughts are interrupted. As I near dad’s house. I hear his phonetic, ornamented, stilted voice, the one he uses to speak to new Australians. At first, I think he has a visitor, but then realise he’s alone, and on the phone.

—Monica Heinrich. Fred Miles. I am ringing up to see how you getting on.

—Remember the early days in Mena, you’d come into the delicatessen and ask for two milik?
—No.
—You used to say, two milik.
—Yeah.
—Milik.

On the word milik, Fred looks up and sees me at the door. He smirks.
—You meant milk.
—Milk.

I glare at him.
—You eighty-six? Fred continues.
—Wow!
—Two years older than me.
—You can’t walk.
—You living with your daughter.
—Marvellous.

Fred grins at me. The flywire door is snibbed shut; I am locked out.
—Did you know Jean and Tam Wallace’s son.
—You knew.
—Very suddenly.
—Dropped dead eating breakfast with his new wife.
—Number three.
—Yeah.
—They were eight.
—Wives?
—Oh—children.
—DAD, I said, sounding a warning.

Fred ignores me and continues naming the Wallace children without drawing breath.
—Yeah.
—Minke, Lettie, Tor, Fred laughs.
—Always together.
—Three Muskets.
—Ha. Fred laughs again.
—Musketeers. I mean musketeers.
—Dad, Monica won’t remember, she’s old, I said, straining my words through the flywire.
—You got good memory, Monica.
—Yeah.

Fred chuckles.
—Cameron.
—The pop-star.
—You knew.
— You going to funeral?
— You not too good.

I stare the glare at dad, waiting for a response.
— Yeah.
— Lettie’s here.
— Speak soon.
— Yeah.
— Come visit.
— No.
— Not today.
— Another day.
— Got to go.

Before dad puts the receiver down, I explode.
— Why do you always bring the milik up when you speak with Mrs Heinrich?
— I think it’s funny, Fred laughs, the memory’s funny.
— It’s not.
— Well, Lettie, it was funny at the time, but you wouldn’t understand. There were so many Euros in Mena, and all their words sounded like they came from their chest, nothing from their heads. Poor Monica Heinrich’s still battling to make sense of a sentence. Elselina, Minke’s mum, had such a long neck, that all her words jumbled in her throat. It sent Elselina insane. Insane. As Fred repeats the word, he rolls his eyes.
— It was the effect of Heidi’s death on Elselina, I remind him. The same effect Denise’s accident had on mum.
All Denise had wanted for her fifth birthday was a sky-blue, nylon fairy dress embossed with jewels. She saw it at first light hanging from the doorhandle of her bedroom door. The curtains filtered just enough light from the winter’s day for her to imagine that the birthday fairy had delivered it, direct to her.

She celebrated her party that day with a crowd of neighbourhood children, many of whom could not speak fluent English but who knew how to laugh, scream and play games. Hide and seek in the bush across the road. Chasing and fleeing through the house. Screaming down the back stairs. Musical chairs. Pin the tail on the donkey and, finally, dancing around the kitchen table eating baby frankfurts, party pies, sweets and cakes, before the birthday cake was carried in on a special tray. Five wax candles flared on top of the lavish cake and everyone sang: Happy birthday, dear Denise.

Denise sipped a gigantic breath of air, and was unconsciously mimicked by all the children around the table looking at her. She blew out the five candles in one go. Then the cake was cut, and passed to everyone. Bottles of soft drink were grabbed and gulped down thirsty throats.

In the soft shadows of early evening the asbestos walls of the little pink house soon ceased to vibrate to the laughter and footsteps of children. The party guests left, food scraps were bundled together and order was restored to chairs and tables. Then word was brought. Fred’s ear had caught the whisper. His mother Anna had died. Instead of going home, as planned, Alice, Mary’s mum, must stay for a few days, to care for Denise and me.
On the morning of Anna’s funeral, as Mary was about to leave, she noticed Denise’s fairy dress hanging on the door. She thought about putting it away but decided not to worry. The dress was special and Denise knew she was not allowed to wear it for dress-ups.

We sat with Alice that morning scrunched together at the kitchen table. Lettie held Alice’s hand and asked Alice if her mother had read the Red Shoes story to her when she was a little girl. Of course she had, and Alice still remembered. Denise said she could not believe that an old woman would chop off a girl’s legs, just for dancing. —Pah, she blew the word out of her lips like spitting grape seeds, imitating Alice’s expression when Alice did not believe what she was being told.

The red shoes were soon dancing across Lettie’s mind and soon she was lost in the story. The red shoes made the girl go to the left when she should have gone to the right. They danced the girl all over town and out of town. The old lady had given the girl the shoes because she felt sorry for her, sorry because the girl did not have any shoes to wear to her mother’s funeral. She made them out of strips of red material. She was kind to the girl and when the girl put the red shoes on and followed her mother’s coffin she could not think of anything except her shoes. So the old woman chopped off the girl’s legs. Just as Alice was putting an end to Lettie’s frenetic telling of the story, Maurice, Mary’s brother, arrived.

While Alice and Maurice were in the kitchen talking, Denise and Lettie played dress-ups in the lounge room. Alice could hear them laughing and talking. She knew they loved this game and played it uninterrupted for hours.
Today, because it was Anna’s funeral, Denise said she would wear her fairy dress. She knew she was not allowed because it was new and very thin, and made from nylon and netting, but it was not like any other dress in her wardrobe.

Denise played the girl, and Lettie the boy. Denise dressed herself then helped Lettie into a pair of shorts, a shirt, and an Annie Oakley waistcoat. A fairy wand was in Denise’s hand; Lettie wore a Davy Crockett hat with a fake squirrel tail hanging off the back. They played a new game that Denise had made up.

Alice did not hear the girls go onto the front verge to play in Maurice’s car. Lettie’s head was filled with Denise’s imaginative game and she followed every command. They discovered the matches under the dashboard, with a packet of Capstan Red cigarettes. Their mother did not allow smoking so they left the cigarettes. Instead, Denise took two matches and gave one to Lettie. They pretended to smoke.

Both girls were delighted to see the red end, all painted up for the fire. With her wand in one hand and the match and the box in the other, Denise told Lettie to get out of the car and open the side door. Hold it wide open for the fairy queen, she added with pomp, in the same tone her mother used when she read the girls stories of fairy queens and maids. After Denise stepped down from the car she waved Lettie to hold her train and carry it around the yard, like a shadow.

—Ohhh, Lettie cried, quickly tiring of traipsing after Denise. She felt like the poor little match girl who had only one pair of slippers which were too big for her because they’d been her mother’s.
—Lettie, you’re so thoughtful, Denise beamed at her. They sat down on the grass verge playing and talking. Denise told Lettie that when she visited Grandma Anna’s house in Park, the garden was full of rose bushes. Lettie only remembered Anna as a sick lady who sat in a chair all the time. When the sun caught the lady in her chair it cast a long shadow on the wall that scared her. They both knew Alice loved flowers. Violets were her favourite.

*With stars in their eyes and the smell of wild violets,*

Denise lit a match and imagined herself sitting in front of a big stove with a blazing fire. Then she threw the match into the air and it landed on the grass to be extinguished by Lettie’s quick boot.

*With stars in their eyes and the smell of wild violets,* Denise recited.

Denise lit another match and imagined she could see through a wall, see a table spread for a birthday party. Then she threw the match into the air and it landed on the grass again to be extinguished by Lettie’s quick boot.

*With stars in their eyes and the smell of wild roses,* Denise emphasized.

Denise lit another match, imagined a falling star and Anna dying, then threw the match into the air, where it tumbled over and over.
I am.

A leaf blowing in the wind, turning, turning around, rolling around, around in a circle, a circle turning a kaleidoscope of bright mirrored images.

Lettie looks through the tunnel of pictures sticky-taped to the inside of her brain, from upside down and right side up, but cannot see the man driving by, as he brakes, jumps out of his car, pulls the fairy dress, rips the dress off.

There was no ambulance in Mena so a blue Vauxhall drove erratically along the old coast road, past the refinery, the BHP iron works, ammunition huts left over from the war, past Robb’s Jetty, where offal was washed into the sea. Past the cattle and sheep pens, past the sheep skin and cattle hides drying sheds. The Newmarket Hotel. By the time the car arrived at the port hospital Lettie could no longer hear Denise’s long moans. Lettie had been left behind in the care of a neighbour. Left with Monica Heinrich short and stout, a tea pot pouring her warmth and flavour into their cupped life. Monica Heinrich pulled Lettie onto her breast, and cried, mein Gott, mein Gott.

When Fred and Mary arrived home from Anna’s funeral, they found Mena’s chemist sitting on the top step of their home.

—Don’t go into the hospital until the doctor calls you.

After thirty six hours the doctor called.
When Fred saw Denise, her face was bigger than a helium balloon. He gently held her hand, tight in his, and they floated along together without words. He did not let go in case she flew away, and out of sight.

Ten years after Denise’s accident, in the same month of winter when every day was cold and rain threatened—Heidi died. She was only sixteen. Everyone knew that she was dying, but there was nothing anyone could do. The disease had started in her left hip a couple of years earlier, but it was only noticed when she kept complaining, and limped for too long. It wasn’t normal. I didn’t go to Heidi’s funeral, but I heard about it in the deli, the following afternoon.

—Her dad, Art, picked up handfuls of dirt and went berserk, said Evelyn. That was after Father Mack had ended the Mass of Holy Innocence, and began singing a benediction in Latin.

Jean Wallace begged to differ. Another customer stood listening, with her teeth protruding over her bottom lip, her hands on her cheek. Her head pivoted from face to face as each voice took her attention.

—It was after the sprinkling of holy water and incensing of the ground before the coffin was lowered into the hole, Jean explained, an ungodly site for Catholics. That set Art off.

—Nein, said Monica Heinrich, contradicting Jean in faltering English. Das smoke, she said, dass burning of incense. Sign of hell triggered outburst of Art.
The listening customer leant forward, sucking her lips together and nodding in agreement.

—It happened when Father Mack had finished his singing and incensing and the coffin had been lowered into the ground and then Father suggested to Art that, he should be the first to throw a handful of sand on top of the coffin, said Mary. Art went crazy. Circling around Father, as if Father was the Pope, as if the Pope was the one who’d made bitter water sweet in the desert.

Art grabbed dirt from the mounds, flinging dirt into the air. He let the clumps go in handfuls, straight into the grey-winter sky. Clods of earth rained down on our heads, on everyone’s head. But this did not stop his frenzy. He saw no one. His sobbing, snorting, gruff, Dutch-guttural angry sounds gradually softened and faded into a bleak silence. Then his empty hands closed limply into weakened fists, which fell onto his thighs. Elselina stood motionless without expression, holding Minke’s hand.

—It’s not our place to judge, said Jean.

—Here, Lettie, Fred says, how is this for a clear memory of our first nights in Mena?

Tam Wallace was on his way home from drinking at the canteen, he stopped in the lane, running between our house and the Van Der haaks’ singing “Loch Lomond” like a bird without wings. It was alluring. The full moonlight was shining on Tam’s face, his voice sounded eerie and he looked like a ghost. As he sang through the song, you could hear the high and low roads, pitched in the melody lines. You could imagine what he had left behind in Scotland to come to Mena. His voice still plays like a recording in my mind.
—That first night was historic! Fred says. Everyone in the street, including Monica and Heinz, Art and Elselina, who’d been sitting on their front verandahs staring at the full moon, heard the singing and came out of their colourful, box-like houses to hear Tam. His singing was infectious and while you were sleeping, we sang and danced in a ring in a bush clearing at the end of the lane. We danced all night, until dawn eclipsed our circle.

—On other nights, Tam spoilt by grog, confident and spiteful, would prop himself up in the middle of our parties, and quote his hero, Rabbie Burns. Rabbie, he called him. “A Man’s a Man for A’ That”, he would start, and on he would go spruiking: I dought na speak—yet was na fley’d—My heart played duntie, duntie, O. It was embarrassing. Jean interrupted Tam’s recitations at the optimum moment. She circled like an eagle, waiting to steal him away home. With a speaking voice as quiet as a whisper, Tam would shock you with his suggestive rhymes and crude songs, especially when he was loaded with booze. He could throw up a storm. Tam was a Bankie. He said that Bankies never lose their identity, and hate being confused with weegies, Glaswegians. Weegies, call everybody wee man, and their children, Wayne. Most Scots, Tam sprayed in my face one day, keep their dialect and politics, tunes and histories, and especially the ones from the lowlands, and in particular those from Clydebank.

—I remember mum saying she thought the Scots spoke too fast; she said their words sounded like they were reeling and she’d have to get them to slow down their talk to repeat their grocery orders. It was the rhythm in their words and talk, their poetry and songs, the dancing and flinging, their band with pipes, the drumming and the chant.
—It was the annual Burns’ nights that kept the Scots tight in Mena, said Fred. But Mary and I, Elselina and Art, Monica and Heinz, were always invited to parties at the Wallace’s. I remember a hot summer’s night 25th January, laughed Fred, chatting to Art and Heinz sitting out the back in the Wallace’s yard near the clothes line. We were getting eaten alive. But the Scots in their tartans and whiskey drinking felt nothing.

—Tam recited Burns’ bawdy rhymes to the men, as their women danced a fling to a lone piper. Mary, Elselina and Monica nibbled on neeps and tatties and oatcakes with cheese, when Jean Wallace came jigging over to Mary to the tune of the “Dashing White Sergeant”.

—She grabbed Mary’s hands, pulled her up off her chair and onto her feet. Jean sang a line from the tune: If I had a beau for a soldier who’d go, Do you think I’d say no? No, no, not I and danced Mary fair down the middle of two lines, as the women clapped on either side. Jean cast her off, to meet Mary again at the bottom of the lines. Mary was hysterical. I’ve never seen your mother laugh so hard in her life.

—It was shock, and she looked awkward dancing with women and not knowing the reel. The night ended with everyone standing in a circle, with arms crossed to shake hands, and sing “Auld Lang Syne”. Mary stood between Elselina and Fred.

At home after the party, Fred sat in the lounge with a cold beer listening to Kitty Kallen’s sultry voice singing, “Little Things Mean A Lot” waiting for Mary to come out of
the shower. The words reminded Fred of the small-framed elderly Scottish woman.

Jean’s mum was on a month’s holiday to Mena from Mull.

The little old woman wore a scarf on her head, and had a face as thin as a hen. She sat in a wicker chair with a vanity purse in her lap. No one took any notice of her the whole night. Fred had watched as, with spindle-like fingers, the old woman applied blue eye shadow to her lids before removing her scarf and a plastic comb that had been keeping her hair in place. She held a small mirror in her left hand as she worked her right hand over the back of her hair gathering loose silver threads and pulling them together as a tail, before putting the mirror in her lap. Using both hands she rolled her tail-like hair round on top of her head. With a large clip, the old woman pinned the top knot in place.

Without noticing Fred, she continued to make her face by opening a compact and dabbing powder on her cheeks and chin with her fingers, before using her pocket hanky to spread the powder more evenly over her face. She returned the compact to her purse, took a stick of lipstick out, and made a plum coloured bow of her lips. Replacing the lipstick she ferreted around in her purse then discovered the mirror in her lap. She held the mirror high to inspect her work. Fred saw a look of delight sweep across the old woman’s face. She returned the mirror to her vanity purse, pulled the zip tight and looked up, and as she did, she caught Fred’s eyes in hers. She smiled, and blew him a kiss. Fred had witnessed the transformation of a haggard, sleepy crone into a beautiful woman.
—Poor devil! What’s in haggis, Lettie?

—Power! What’s in your phone call?

—See if Monica is going to Cameron Wallace’s funeral.

—Dad, Mrs Heinrich wouldn’t be going to Cameron’s funeral; she’s old and can’t walk.

—Well, I’m going.

—There’ll be no one you know from Mena. Everyone’s dead, or vanished, except Monica, and you’re old and can’t walk.

—Lettie, that’s not the point.

—Look at the willie-wagtail, I said, as it appeared out of the blue and onto the green of Fred’s lawn.

Fred glanced up.

—That’s my wagtail.

We looked at each other then, and laughed. It was spontaneous, and warmed the cool air which had descended into our talk.

—He lives here; he lives with me, and keeps me company, said Fred.

—I’ve a wagtail too, but it’s not mine. She just visits, and spends a lot of time flipping and flitting in my rose garden. Look at his white eyebrows. Perhaps this one’s from my garden, and followed me down to your place.

—It’s possible, but not probable. They’re territorial, said Fred.
—Some mornings, in that split second when I wake during the night, I hear the wagtail’s song. She sings to me.
—What’s she sing?
—You’re a miracle! You’re a miracle! You’re a miracle!
—You’re making that up, smirks Fred.
—I’m not! You can sing any words you want to a melody.

We move out of the house, and into the garden: talking and walking in sunshine, without noticing the sun.

—Listen, the wagtail’s singing, I said.
—What’s he singing?
—Fred get on with it! Fred get on with it! Fred get on with it!
—Fred laughs, then asks, get on with what?
—That’s the mystery, I mouth to him, as I open the side gate of his house, and begin my walk home.

Fred potters about in his garden for the rest of the day, jiggling his hands in the dirt, touching the parsnips and carrots like a blind man, feeling for size, but thinking of shape. Just as the sun sets behind his fence, he wonders whether he should pull a couple of carrots and throw them into the stew he had boiling on the hot plate. Funny, he thought, when living in Mena he could never have imagined in his wildest dreams spending his twilight years in Park. He had grown up in Park, all his boyhood. When war broke out, he joined the navy, following his older brother out to sea. When peace
was declared, and he was de-mobbed, he flew straight home to Park, like a hornet. All Fred wanted to do after the war was get married. He stayed on in Park for a few years after he and Mary married, and Denise and I were born there. The maternity hospital’s now a block of flats. As he pulled carrots from the soil, he thought of what his father said before Fred went to war: if you ever get money for land, buy more land. It was Lettie who’d planted the seed in his mind to buy in Park after the money for the Mena property came through, from the government.

One Good Friday, I invited Fred to Park, to look at recently cleared land at the end of Cavendish Way. You could build your dream home, I said to Fred—down the street from me—and avoid the nursing home. It made sense to Fred, but you would wonder at my motive. We were always arguing; we were so similar. Fred thought me a bird at heart—a mother bird—not dove-like, no cooing, or inappropriate nest building like the Mena days. No, I was more like a nutcracker, or a sugar plum fairy, waltzing around the streets and babbling like a Russian ballet score. The street was my stage, where I planted seed-like thoughts and ideas in my neighbours’ minds.

Fred stood up, and noticed a crow sitting on top of the street light. A street post that all but butted onto his garage.

—What are you going to sing to me? You black pariah, old man of the air. As Fred’s words hit air, the crow began to squawk—Life! Life! Life!

—Get on with it, Fred said, swinging the freshly-plucked carrot by its green head as if it were a bell. Then he went inside and closed the door on another day.
IV

On Saturday nights, restaurants in Park are abuzz and diners queue in the street for seats at tables. *Spices of India* is a flush of bright orange and yellow décor suggesting scents of cinnamon, ginger, cumin, fenugreek, cloves, fennel, and curry leaf. The Boulevard rises to the aroma of spices circling unseen. A pot belly of delightful cuisine; a potent mix of taste and music. The aromas fill Rafiq’s senses like a night of love.

When Rafiq saw the girl with the long neck like a swan working on the street, he gazed on her. He thought, just a squinny. He looks; a quick glimpse. A second gaze is prohibited. He is bound by his law to look down. But looking at her, up and down and up and down he avoids eye contact. Rafiq is cautious but fascinated. He maps the girl like a river, her mountain-like bosom, wending and coursing with the flow of her body. His thoughts rush, but, without warning, the treacherous Beas River of his childhood bubbles into his mind. Boys who fell into the rough waters of the Beas never made it back to the bank.

Sometime later, walking Park on an unseasonal hot August night, Rafiq caught a whiff of climbing jasmine. The night was dark with a new moon. The girl came out of the darkness and said:

—Are you looking for a lady tonight? Her voice was like a sticky date, and he wanted to hear more. But he resisted.

—No, he said, and waved his right hand about as if battering a moth away from the light.
Rafiq walks The Boulevard during the early evening, a custom he adopted over the years, and more regularly after his wife left. Walking in the evenings reminds Rafiq of his childhood in Gurdaspur before it was divided in two. His mother, his brothers and his sisters, he once explained to me, had walked the colourful crowded streets during the early evenings of summer.

—Our eyes filled with colour, noses scented and mouths slimy like puppy waiting to be fed. Ha, Rafiq laughed. All my childhood, is colourful, noisy, hot nights, and without a warning, Rafiq throws his arms into the air—ha!

Night after night Rafiq brushes the girl off like lint on his jacket. She walker-stalks him, not knowing he hasn’t any money. In the beginning, when she started work, the girl was out of her depth, tottering about in high heels and cocktail dresses. She creates arguments as she crowds in on the other girls’ territories. The girls have turned The Boulevard into a car park. They’re like parking meters and Park’s shopkeepers and residents are fed up. A community newspaper article highlights the problem:

*Shopkeepers complain to Park council that sex is going on behind walls, and in shop doorways.* One businessman wrote a letter: *I surprised one sex worker and her drug addict customer shooting up in the shadow of a charity clothing bin.* All the sex talk and smell of sex awaken a dormant lust in Rafiq. He walks the street like a dog, a male dog in the presence of a teaser bitch on heat. He scents every lamp post like a shadow.

On that hot night, rain poured down like a cloud burst. The girl looked at Rafiq.

—Hurry, she said, and stretched out her hand.
Rafiq held it tight, held her tight. Years ago, he’d worked in the sales department of a tyre manufacturing business, but he was let go. Set up by his workmates for theft, and sacked by his boss. He was like a picket without a fence, and became long-term unemployed. Shame at being fired for theft and the betrayal by his colleagues led to a health crisis. His wife left and took their two young children back to the Punjab. Rafiq didn’t have the energy to fight, and resigned himself to living in a bed-sit in a men’s boarding house. He asks me sometimes for work in my garden. Asks me if I will ask Paul for a job. Tall, dark, and handsome, Rafiq’s aging.

Following his loss of job, wife and family, I happened on Rafiq collecting leaves from trees and stopped to talk. He was controlling his thirst with fresh leaves. It didn’t make any difference. Rafiq urinated often, he said, he felt lethargic and was always hungry. When I saw him some time later, I mentioned the link between diabetes, unquenchable thirst and black skin and sent him scurrying to a doctor for a referral to a specialist.

As the rain pelted down, Rafiq had no choice but to follow the girl with the neck like a swan to her room. He didn’t know her name, but her perfume spread its fragrance across a room more delightful than he had imagined. He had neglected his own. I have no place, he thought. The girl showered, as Rafiq took off his wet clothes and hung them out to dry. Naked, he covered himself with a throw rug, and lay on the matted floor. Rafiq was faint for food and soon fell asleep. Showered and dressed, the girl didn’t have the heart to wake her guest. Rafiq stirred but didn’t wake, so she went back out to the street. As Rafiq slept he imagined he was resting by the shore of an
ancient sea. He saw a strange sight. A gown of glistening white feathers lay in the sand and fluttered in the sea breeze. Picking up the gown, he noticed swan wings in the place of shoulders. As he held the garment to his chest, a naked young woman materialised before him. She was crying, crying for him to give her back her robe. Rafiq was loathe to give back what he had found.

As dawn rose, Rafiq woke to find the girl naked by his side, asleep on the floor. He thinks he’s in paradise. He wonders what her other men are like? How they act and perform? He imagines them dancing around her. He thinks how beautiful her hair, lips, mouth, breasts. Aroused, his left hand sweeps up and over, up and over, up and over and around her fully formed breasts. A nipple ring has enlarged the girl’s right nipple, and his slight rubbing and slipping rouses her. Rafiq lowers his left hand. He hums until his hand reaches the button of her sex. He imagines the young woman of his dream, dressed in her glistening white feathery robe coming for him, dancing in loops and singing sensuous songs with a sultry voice.

At Fred’s house while he reads the paper, I notice a tiny piece of sun, a pinprick of shine stuck on his kitchen wall. The white light has entered the room through a slightly opened, wood-slat blind. When I place my right index finger over the speck, my nail becomes a sun. I keep my finger in this position for a minute, gazing at the light eclipsing the crescent moon of my nail and remember a story seldom told.
Alice, mum’s mum, first arrived in Mena at the beginning of winter. June is a beautiful time of the year when seasons are on the cusp, and the wind is unpredictable. Mum was six months pregnant with her third child, my brother Philip, and would soon be facing Anna’s death and Denise’s terrible accident. She was relieved to see Alice who was easy-going but blunt. Alice loved the shop, and went straight to work with mum and Evelyn preparing the mix for cakes and pastries. Later in the day, her first day, Alice baked a batch of scones in our wood-fired oven. While the scones were in the oven, Alice sat at the kitchen table chatting with Denise and me, when suddenly, I noticed that Alice was missing the middle finger on her left hand.

—Where’s your finger? I cried.

Alice, as usual, was sharp.

—I had it chopped off!

I gasped, but soon became fascinated with the way the other fingers all pointed to the place where the missing finger should have been. Alice’s finger stuck in my mind, and I wouldn’t let it go.

—Did it hurt when it was chopped off? I asked. More than anything, I wanted to know how it was cut off?

—When your mother was a little girl, Alice said, I went into Pasquale Caruso’s butcher shop to buy lamb chops for your grandad’s dinner. I put my left hand on top of the counter, just letting it have a rest, like your heads are resting on your hands with your elbows on the table. I was Pasquale’s first customer that day. He was very excited to see me and sang.

—Hellooo Alici-a, I’m-a in-a lov-a with-a you-ooo.
Alice imitated Pasquale’s rich, colourful baritone voice for she loved the opera and ballet.

Denise and I giggled. Alice explained that Italians sing when they talk and their songs are filled with love.

—Why did the butcher call you Alicia, when your real name is Alice. I asked.

—Pasquale is an Italian, Alice explained, he was born in another country. Italians love to put an ‘a’ or an ‘o’ at the end of words. Your name is Letizia although everyone calls you Lettie. You have an Italian name, but you were born in Park, Australia. Pasquale was born in Rome, Italy, but he says Roma, Italia. Reverting to her English accent, Alice continued—I was born in London, England, and I am an English princess, Princess Alice. At the mention of her name, Alice got up from the table, turned a full circle on a square in the middle of the kitchen’s linoleum floor, lifted the corners of her apron and curtsied in our direction. Denise and I looked on with wide eyes and bright smiles. Alice used the opportunity to lift the scones from the oven, slide them off the cooking tray and onto a clean tea towel. She tossed a few on the bench to cool and wrapped the rest to keep warm, before returning to the kitchen table.

—Sooo, Pasquale said a to-a me-a: Alici-a, get-a your-a hand-a off-a my-a count-a or-a I-a cut-a off-a your-a fing-a. Pasquale was in a happy mood. He took his butcher’s knife out of its cover and pretended he was getting ready to cut off my finger. I was not scared, and I did not flinch a muscle. He was playing. I was playing. We were just acting. It was an accident.

I looked at Denise and imagined the percussive sounds of a butcher waving a knife and chasing Alice around his shop to get her. Pasquale was an old witch chasing the young soldier for the tinder box before the soldier turned and cut off her head.
Alice moved away from the table toward the bench. She opened the cutlery drawer, removed two knives and imitated sharpening one against the other, then she put both knives down, and picked up a scone. One at a time, she broke open three with her fingers, then picked up a knife and spread the scones with butter and strawberry jam. Delivered—presto—on a china plate for Denise and me to enjoy an impromptu tea party.

Denise (looking and smiling at me) started singing:

—Twinkle, twinkle little finger

How I wonder where you tinker

Up above the world you fly

Like a tea-tray in the sky

Twinkle, twinkle ...

I soon forgot about Alice’s finger and thought Denise so clever, even cleverer than Alice in Wonderland. We could both improvise on a story or song as easily as lift a finger. When Fred opened the door, Alice, Denise and I were squashed at one end of the kitchen table eating scones.

—No room! No room! We cried with surprise at seeing our father.

—There’s plenty of room for me, said Fred, and sat down at the other end.

—Fred, please have a scone and a cup of tea, Alice said, most eloquently.
When I glanced back at the wall, there was another sun spot. Another scrap of shine had slipped into the room, while my back was turned. As I listen to Fred’s digital radio, I compare the two spots. The second sun speck had positioned itself on the wall, directly below the first spot. What about that, I thought, two flecks of sunlight sitting so close together in the kitchen on a very ordinary day. I put my right hand near the wall, and watch the two suns sitting in my palm. As I rotate my hand, the suns play over the stretch lines of my palm. The miniature cosmos set my thoughts in motion.

During a kerbside chat on Lichfield Street, Rafiq had said all your good deeds are written and recorded in a book. On Judgement Day, this book is put in your right hand. All your bad deeds are in another book in your left hand.

—That’s a load of bunkum, says Fred, when I tell him. Putting the good in your right hand is just symbolic. Some nong nongs believe black is white.

—That’s not hard, I said, remembering my recent sighting of white birds flying and turning as one in light mist and sunlight. Early one morning, after a south-west holiday, Paul and I were returning to Park by car, and just south of White Lake off the old coast road near Mena, I saw a flock of seagulls, turning and gliding, floating and soaring through irrigation mist at the market gardens. Why would gulls fly kilometres from the ocean? I wondered. But as we drew level with the flock, I was shocked to discover they were black ducks. I couldn’t get over it—white light lies, I’d decided.

—On the contrary, Lettie, watery mist refracts white light, you can see any colour of the rainbow, except black, Fred says in a self-satisfied voice, then goes on, have you forgotten I’m a mollydooker. What about all the other cackhanders? Is everything they
do bad? No, no, no I’m not having that rubbish. I don’t know this bloke Lettie, but he’s filling your head with nonsense. It’s involuntary, nothing to do with practice. I spent years conducting the Mena Male choir and the brass ensemble. I used both hands to conduct, but my left hand was stronger and held the beat. My right hand expressed the harmonic dynamics of the piece.

My hand circles through another rotation and I remember Rafiq going on about you with the long neck.

—Beautiful face, he said, and he couldn’t help notice recent piercings in eyebrow, nostril, ear, and above the lip like beauty spot—ha, Rafiq laughed.

I haven’t seen hide nor blonde hair of you since you slid into the back of a Black Swan taxi and closed the door on your conversation with the taxi driver.

—A red, red, red rose, yes, but more beautiful, Rafiq said. We went on to discuss health and infections with piercings.

Once, during one of Denise’s ongoing plastic surgeries following the accident, Denise asked the surgeon to pierce her ears. She twirled her sleepers until the piercings became infected. Red streaks and painful lumps around the piercings oozed pus and the lymph glands on either side of her neck were swollen. When she took her earrings out, the holes closed over.

—Women in India, women in India, Rafiq said, for five hundred years, have nose pierced and ear pierced. Women’s and girls’ ear and nose rings in ear and nose, always joined by gold chain, and all piercings on left side, not right. Left side female
reproduction organs—ha, Rafiq laughed, piercing on left side make childbirth easier and reduce period pain. Understand?

—No, Rafiq, I told him. I’ve a right and left ovary. That’s a ridiculous theory, and sounds superstitious. There’s no practical medical data to support such claims. It sounds like a myth.

—You have no ring in ear or stud in nostril.

—I don’t want any body piercings, or a tattoo for that matter, I said. I’ve never read or heard a philosophical argument for left-sided piercings contributing to pain-reduced childbirth or period, I told him.

Your desires are nothing like mine, I thought, meditating on piercings and tattoos, and the friendship chains and bracelets I’d worn as a teenager as I tilt the two suns sitting in my right palm on their axis. Looking at the sun spots rising high in my palm, I think of music and her sub-cultures. I tell my students music can’t be taken away from you, it’s in your head and heart. You don’t need to follow one style. Jazz is good, trad or free, R and B, classical, rock and pop and country blues.

Hovering now, I trace the sun rays from Fred’s kitchen wall across the lounge room to the wood slat blind and pull the cord tight with my left hand to extinguish the shafts of light. I’m darkening the room, blocking out the heat, and saving power. Newspaper headlines are screaming energy restraint and ongoing water restrictions.

My movement confuses Fred. He’s been engrossed with Tchaikovsky’s ballet music on the heels of the news. As Fred catches a glimpse of my choreographic-like manoeuvres in his peripheral vision, it distracted him, and he wonders what I am doing. With my
right arm stretched out like a neck, my two fingers looking like a beak. It seems, he thought, I was dancing like a swan-maiden and he smiled in amusement.

—What are you doing?

—Closing the blind!

—Odette, I thought you were Odette.

—Who?

—Swan Lake. Tchaikovsky, you know, you’re the music teacher!

—I was closing the blind.

—What for?

—Keep the heat out.

—I have the air conditioner on.

—I know, but I’m worried about global warming.

—I don’t believe in that warming rubbish, Lettie. How cold was it in Britain, last Christmas? How much rain have we had this year? The scientists say it’s never going to rain again—doomsayers!

—The earth’s atmosphere and oceans are warming, I say, in response to his sarcasm.

—That’s what the politicians want you to believe, keeps everything else off the front page. Climate’s always changing.

—It’s the Greenhouse gases.

—It’s the sun.

—It’s humans.

—It’s the media.

—It’s global.
—Strong love, that’s what Mary and I had, Fred says. Your mother and I had strong love.

—She’s dead, I say, taken by surprise in the middle of our debate on global warming.

What’s your definition of strong love?

—S-t-r-o-n-g, Fred sounds out the letters, and stretches his neck, to make himself look taller in his chair. I love it, he continues, how no one knows what a word means. No one is prepared to have a go these days and get something wrong, admit they’re wrong.

—When I was at school, the schoolteacher marked your work right with a √, or wrong with a X. There was no pencil dot next to an incorrect sum, or squiggly line under a word to make you think again.

—Lettie, Fred says, changing the subject, that bloke who dropped in for a cuppa the other day, going on about myths and Narcissus, he was obsessed with the word Nike, wanted to know what the word meant. I told him it was a brand name, meant nothing, there’s no meaning in a product’s name. But my answer wasn’t good enough. No, no, no, he said it had something to do with the Greeks, and he kept peppering the word about the room, hitting it up like a tennis ball. Nike Nike Nike Nike@Nike, Nike Nike Nike Nike@Nike, Nike Nike. It was monotonous. He was singing a frog’s chorus, and cupping his hand over his left ear lobe, listening for the reverberation in his own voice. To put an end to his recitative, I said, in a voice as slow as you like, go and Google Nike on my computer.

And off he went into my study. When he re-appeared, he announced, it’s a Greek word. Nike is the Greek goddess for victory, and with that, he said he had to fly, he had an appointment and didn’t finish his cuppa. Later that day I received an email from
him. He’s a strange fellow, Lettie, very strange—says he’s going blind and calls me the elephant guru.

After a pause, Fred answered my question.

—Strong means powerful, not giving up, or giving in, keeping the pressure on. Then he arrived at the meat of his argument. I’m a wake up to you, Lettie. I know you’re trying to trick me. You’re trying to get me to apologise about something. Next minute, you’ll have me confessing to murdering your mother, and blaming me for Tor Wallace’s disappearance.

—I wouldn’t say that!

—Yes you would. I couldn’t do anything about your mother’s death. The events happened so fast. After a week of tests in the hospital, the doctors told Mary she had radical cancer. It had spread through her body, but with chemotherapy, she might have six months. Without the treatment, three. Her first treatment nearly killed her, and she decided one dose was enough.

The week after the diagnosis, grey-filtered light kept Mary’s room cool and the morphine helped ease her pain. Fred sat in a chair and read her confessional psalms. It was peace of mind and relief from suffering that Mary craved. After her pain was stabilised and she was more lucid, she asked to see her children. When I sat with her, she even became talkative.

—I love you, I said to her.
—Lettie, I haven’t heard those words for a long time.
—I’ve always loved you.

Mary smiled at the words she wanted to hear. She rested, then asked:
—Why did you scratch a love heart into the violin?
—I was seven.

She dozed for a few minutes, stirred, dozed, stirred and then said:
—It was evil.
—The love heart?
—Lockerbie.

The Lockerbie disaster was current news at the time of mum’s hospitalisation. Mum had vivid dreams, a side effect of the morphine that controlled her pain and shortness of breath. When I sat with her she slipped in and out of sleep, and once dreamed she was trapped on the ill-fated flight commandeered by terrorists. When Denise sat with her she imagined Denise was trying to kidnap and shoot her. Mum tried to escape from her hospital bed. But on the morning of the day mum died, there was some improvement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asked for a cup of tea and a milk arrowroot biscuit</td>
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<tr>
<td>told Fred to go home if he was coming back that night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maurice came to visit after years of estrangement</td>
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<tr>
<td>He wanted to come again but Mary said ring the hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary knew Ada and Thea had stayed all day at the hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She did not know her children had not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fred and I go into the garden and make a bed for late summer seedlings. Pink zinnias have flowered unawares all January, embroidering Fred’s driveway with a block of colour.

—Come here, Lettie, and let me show you something.

I follow Fred. He bends over a zinnia and removes its spent head, holding the head in his hands as if it is a new baby.

—I love zinnias, he says.

He removes each petal as if he is asking the flower if Mary loved him. Then he points to its tip:

—Here is the seed. Every petal is a seed, and every seed contains a colour. The colour of each plant is a mystery until it flowers.

—I didn’t know how I would go on living without your mum, says Fred, after a long silence. You don’t know what your mum and I had—the navy was the best place for Tor, he was in trouble with the law, he was up to no good and following petty criminals.

—Tor blamed his dad, Tam, I say.

—No, says Fred. Tam kept the Scots together. He had so much energy. Do you remember him standing in our lane in Mena, spruiking Burns?

—No. I was scared of him.

—He looked mad then, standing stock still without an audience, going on and on. Mary had thought the signs of insanity were there early.
While Fred spoke of Tam, I thought of Tor. Tall for his age, blonde, and tanned in summer, he had a flat black mole above his navel. Once we were swimming deep under the horse-like raft at Long Beach when he swam up close to pinch my tit. But I didn’t have boobs then. His sister, Alison, must’ve shown him what was what. For when we surfaced he whispered in a slow lyrical voice,

—Ah’ll lay ye odd o’a hundred to one, ye’ll no find a feller, who’s go’ an older sister, who’s no’ been intae ‘er—aye my my.

Tor loved Minke and me, at the same time. He could never choose between us. Two girls sharing one boy was not unusual in Mena. Mum said, in Mena brothers and sisters will marry each other one day, for they don’t know their fathers.

—It was the war, and having so many children, says Fred. In Scotland, the babies arrived as quick as rapid fire in a two room tenement, and all sleeping together on the floor. Sirens went off at 9pm. You don’t know what people do. Tam was working for John Brown and Company of Clydebank when the shipyard and the Singer Corporation were bombed over a weekend in May when the moon was beautiful, full and bright. The bombs came down in clusters of seven. Everyone donned Mickey Mouse masks. ORP Piorun, a Polish destroyer was in Clydebank’s dry dock at the time. The Piorun retaliated, but its anti-aircraft fire brought nothing down. Over a two-day blitz, four hundred and thirty-nine German bombers dropped over one thousand bombs on the town, five hundred and twenty-eight people died, over a thousand wounded, forty-eight thousand people homeless. You can’t begin to imagine the destruction Lettie, the incessant bombing.
Of twelve thousand homes, only seven houses were not affected, Lettie. The noise was deafening. Tam wanted to send Jean and the boys home to her mum in Tobermory, but Mull was a restricted area, and the Bay, a naval base. So they’d stayed put in Clydebank.

Exempt from enlisting in the armed force, Tam built ships, but the yard was vulnerable to attack. Jean was pregnant at the time of the blitz, Tam said, that’s how she survived the war, and kept her sanity. She had a baby each year from 1939 ‘til V-day, and on into the start of the Cold War. But wanting and having so many babies became a disease, even if they coloured the grey of war with new life, and celebrations. Jean worked like a rabbit in a warren. There was nothing her hands couldn’t do. She had hands for everything: cooking, sewing, painting, and talking. Her hands pointed here and there to get her way, her way with words. But it was the breast feeding that was the root of the rot in their marriage. Can you believe it? He was in competition for her tit and Jean never lost her milk. She fed all her babies, and became a wet nurse during the war. It was as if breast feeding was her career, and it went on for well over a decade. Tam complained but Jean gave him the cold shoulder. He never got over it and took to the bottle. Arriving in Mena, he was at the men’s club every night.

—On his way home he’d start up in the lane with Burns, Gie him strong drink ... Till he forgets his loves ... An’ minds his griefs no more.

—Lettie, I was sat on a bench in the Park arcade, the other day, when a pregnant woman walked by. She had a tight dress on, and it made her tummy stick out in front, I
could almost see the baby waving at me. It’s disgusting the way pregnant women dress these days, scoffed Fred.

—No hiding babies under duffel coats, I say, thinking of Minke. Duffle coats were once all the rage.

—No modesty. Pregnant women don’t dress like your mother did when she was pregnant. She wore big, blousy frocks, and very nice, too, he says, moving his hands, waving them out in front of his own body, to indicate the way the dress bloomed with Mary’s pregnancy.

—A tent, I say. Women wore tent dresses. Did nothing for women, or their shape.

—Pregnancy’s an intimacy.

—Who for? The father, I say, answering my own question.

Fred laughs.

During the heat of our talk, I noticed Rafiq stroll past Fred’s lounge room window, casually dressed in brown trousers, brown and cream striped jumper over a white open neck shirt. A natty dresser, everything is colour co-ordinated. He appears relaxed, and nonchalant. From my elevated position, I can see a bald spot developing on the top of his head. Rafiq doesn’t have a receding hairline, so he mightn’t realise.

Oblivious to Rafiq’s movements, Fred continues reminiscing:

—When we opened the drapery shop alongside the deli and the fruit and vegies, your mother and I sold dresses to pregnant women. I remember ordering maternity smocks and frocks from Goode Durrant and Murray. They had a fantastic set-up. You would place an order by phone, and when the order was ready, they would call the shop, and
I would drive the ute to Perth. Around the back of the warehouse was a turntable. I’d drive the ute onto the table and it turned the ute around. A storeman would stop the machine when the tray was level with the deck, so he could slide the stock straight onto the back of the ute, and off I’d go back to Mena. It was a brilliant invention.

Tam wasn’t jealous, Fred smirks. He was gentle, so gentle he couldn’t bear to think of his fluffy yellow ducklings out in the dark, nestling under their mother’s wings during the Mena winter. Each night, before the sun set, he’d bring the young ducklings inside. He kept them warm in the lounge room in a straw-lined cardboard box, and with the radiator on for extra heat, he’d pet them, like they were his babies, feeding them warm milk and whiskey through an eye-dropper. It wasn’t as if Tam was getting back at Jean, and Art was teaching the older boys guitar in the shed; they were on their way to fame.

—I remember Cameron coming up the lane singing “Gloria” at the top of his voice.
—I remember Cameron caught naked climbing the light pole outside the deli. The police wanted to lock him up. I said, let him go.

Tunes and dancing, recitations and grog kept Tam at work, but it was Jean who breathed for the family; she was like an iron-lung. Beautiful, tall and slender, curly blonde hair, and skin as smooth as silk. She danced like a mythical queen on the sandy, dance floor. You could see Tam was lost in her, in love with her. Away from the dancing, she was as remote as a crag, and just as lofty. Tam was tall for a Bankie, thin and plain-looking with a shock of straight, pepper-coloured hair. His hair would have
been as black as pitch before the war. When Jean started cleaning for the German scientist, it was the start of the end.

—Mum wondered what Jean saw in Tam, I say to Fred.
—It was his voice, says Fred. Jean was lured onto the rocks of a marriage by a myth-defying male siren, and then tied to a post by eight kids.

—Tor looked like his mum, I say. She was pretty, he was handsome. It was high school that changed him and, after the older boys were gone, he started smoking and drinking and being with Minke after dark. I could tell what he was thinking by the look in his eyes. He hung onto Alison after Jean left. I felt sorry for Alison. The sight of the German scientist and Jean driving around Mena in the scientist’s red Messerschmitt embarrassed Tor and Alison.

—Tam stopped work, and spent all day standing like a post on his front verandah, until he met Norma Locke, says Fred.

I think of Vera. Within a week of Vera knocking her nose on the window, Hats ’n Things changed its name to Mariner Blues, then, in next to no time, the shop closed. It’s still empty with a For Lease sign stuck in the window.

Now standing at Vera’s front gate, my eyes rove the hedgerows, before focusing on a yellow rose. I can see the rose’s petals are turning inside out to protect themselves from the heat. From a distance, I can’t decide who it is, could be Gold Bunny, Friesia,
Holtermann’s Gold, or Golden Celebration. It doesn’t matter, needs water. The flower’s petals have become twisted and spiked. Looks more like a cactus dahlia than a rose. But there’s no trace of Vera and, the curtains are drawn. Her house is shut up like a frigid womb. Maganzia will know.

I sigh as I make my way down Lichfield Street and see Rafiq walking along the footpath, heading in my direction. He sees me, but brushes his right hand in the air like he’s drawing a mirage with his fingers, a mime that says, it’s too hot to stop and talk. I flick both my hands up to answer his message. We communicate like the deaf.

The next thing I notice is Maganzia. Short but well proportioned, she’s dressed in a pink top, black skirt, and wearing flipper-like pink crocks on her feet. She’s steering the emptied recycling bin back into her carless garage, and out of her neighbours’ sight, to maintain an environmentally friendly front yard. She has grandchildren who visit, and a sticker with a heart on the side of her wheelie bin warning drivers, to beware of the children. I can see her hurrying the bin into place so she can synchronise a meeting with me. As I pass her front gate, I wave and she rushes over.

—How’re you getting on with your passport? I ask, forgetting about Vera. Maganzia’s leaving for Rome, the Wednesday of Holy Week, and says she’s having a devil of a time renewing her passport. Someone without a face, in an office, keeps spelling her name wrong, by typing an s for a z. It just won’t do. She will never make it through customs especially in Rome at that time of the year. I can see its frightening hell out of her.
—Not-a good. They’re-a basket. I rang-a the office-a and he-a say that he-a post it out-a to-a me on-a Friday. It will-a be in-a your letterbox on-a Monday he say. I wait-a at-a home all-a day yesterday. But-a no-a passport come. My son-in-a-law he-a say that the Chinese-a say basket when they-a mean-a bastard.

Just as Maganzia’s emotional outburst is pitching higher, a young Middle Eastern-looking man passes by and breaks into our conversation.

—You remember me? he says, directing his question to Maganzia.

—Yes. Maganzia waves her hands about, pointing to the houses on either side of her place.

—Yes, my friends, he says.

—I-a see you-a visit-a, Maganzia interrupts, cutting into his speech, without giving the young man time to name her neighbours.

—My car’s broken down, he indicates with his hand, pointing to a blue car parked in the neighbour’s driveway. I need help to get it started. I’m not sure whether it’s the car’s battery or it’s out of petrol.

—I’ll help, I said. Maganzia moves back toward her gate, away from the action.

The car bonnet’s up, and a charger’s already connected by jump leads to the battery. He needs someone to hold the rubber button down on the charger, while he turns the ignition key.

What if it’s not what it seems, I think, as he moves away and out of sight behind the bonnet. I could go up in a flash. But I’m not going to be intimidated by reigns of terror.

I press the button with the index finger of my right hand, and hear the engine roar in
my ears before the sound cuts out. The young man turns the engine over three more times; it roars on each occasion, then cuts out.

—It’s the petrol. Its run out of petrol, I call as he stands up. Maganzia’s disappeared inside her palatial home.

—Thanks, he says.

I watch as he takes a tin and funnel from his boot. He removes the petrol cap, and begins pouring petrol through the funnel, into his car’s petrol tank.

—Just enough fuel, he says, to get the car to a garage.

I hear Dave laugh as I pass his house.

—Hey Lettie, Dave calls, you nearly had your head blown off. I know him, he’s bad news.

I haven’t seen Dave for weeks. He’s doing a course in anger management.

At home, I turn my computer on and Google the word Mena in the search bar. I type, what does the name Mena mean? In a flash, multiple sites appear on the screen, but the first entry has confused Mena with the mathematical term, mean. I move the icon to the next site. I read the summary, then click. The hit identifies the gender of Mena as female. Its origin is Dutch, and the name means strong. This is amazing, considering Fred’s recent outburst about his strong love for mum.

I return to the original page, and surf the next site: Chacha Questions and Answers. I imagine a Latin flavour, perhaps dancing symbols flashing on and off on the screen, but I am overwhelmed by the sight of an enormous fat woman dressed in a bikini, shedding light on how she lost four pounds of ugly stomach fat, each week for a month.
by simply obeying one rule. One rule to a flat stomach: **OBEY**. I pass over the advertisement, and read another site inviting readers to *start your family tree today*:

**Q:** What does Mena mean?

**A:** Mena is a variant of the girl’s name Mina (German), and the meaning of Mena is: love.

I’m flabbergasted. By combining Dutch and German answers I’ve determined that Mena is female, and means **strong love**.

I email the links to Fred.

Hi dad--
check out the attached links--
you and mum had--
mena--
ha-ha--
lettie

Fred’ll be knocked out, and he’ll forward my email to all his contacts. That’s Fred’s style, nothing’s private. My inbox is flooded daily with forwarded mail from Fred. Internet technology and pharmaceutical tablets keep Fred alive.

His email response is immediate, but brief:

Dear Lettie

Truly amazing, eh!

Love

Dad
I’m worried about dad and the net. He wanders through websites. I warn him, do not sign up for anything, or use your credit card. But when he became computer-literate at eighty, he became obsessed with chat rooms. For a couple of years he emailed a forty-something-year-old woman in Arkansas. But he is more wary now.

—Depressed, the woman was depressed, said Fred.

When he read a crime stopper news report about one of his acquaintances being sentenced to a year’s jail for having child porn on his computer, dad was shocked. I’ve told dad, I don’t want to visit him in prison; hospital’s bad enough. He thinks I’m being funny, thinks I’m stopping him from having a life.

—How did that happen to your friend?

Fred is at a loss.

—Clicking on a site, I say, downloading material, and storing it in a file. There are plenty of old men in jail.
—Who’s old? Fred says, as he pushes a couple of pages from the obituary section of The West into my hands. Read the story on the French women. It’s very interesting. Read the whole article.

As I read, Fred watches my face; he’s eager for me to finish. I fold the pages, and place the paper back onto the table.
—What did you think of her?
—She had a pretty amazing life.
—Tell me one thing that you thought was amazing.
—A courageous friend saved her life. She stole the ticket with the woman’s number from the top of the line-up list to the gas chamber.
—Yeah, right off the SS officer’s desk, when he wasn’t looking. It was miraculous. What else, Lettie? I hope you read right through to the end.

The last sentences held the key to his driving force.

—When the woman turned one hundred years old in 2005, I say, repeating the article word for word, she felt as though she was only fifty, as if time had passed her by.
—Yes, says Fred, and that’s exactly how I feel. Yes, he repeats, emphasising the word, before slowly repeating—if time had passed her by—Lettie, I feel like that.
—Time hasn’t passed you by. You’ve had a big life. When you drop off your perch people will say, you had a big life.
—Why do you say that?
—What?
—Lettie, when I say to you, I feel like I’m forty when I’m eighty, it’s not so strange, because that’s how the woman in the paper felt when she was one hundred; she felt half her age.
—Bloody hell dad, I don’t care how old you feel, it all comes down to what you can do.
—I can do everything. I just need a little more time, says Fred.
—All you have to do is sit and breathe. It’s ongoing, day after day.
—If I had my time over again, I’d be a cellist, cries Fred.

—Why?

—It’s so versatile, rich and deep, mellow and soothing. Dvorak’s Cello Concerto in B minor Part 3 is so beautiful, it’s like a breath.

Fred is upping the ante.
Like birds in winter, Vera has disappeared and Maganzia is in Rome. Grown women, and both so different. Passing Dave’s house I hear a bird trill, and a roll of sound. I think of Fred and “Mockingbird Hill”. Tra-la-la-tweedle-dee-dee-dee I whistle to myself.

—Come here, Dave calls.
His truck is strapped with washing machines, there’s a side-of-the-road-junk pick-up.
—I see you’re back at work.
Dave has difficulty walking, his knee’s giving him trouble. He’s on anti-inflammatory medication and hates steroids. He is in the queue to see an orthopaedic surgeon about a knee replacement.
—Wanna hear a new riff?
—Not now.

Dave shows no emotion one way or the other, but his talk penetrates my day.
Homelessness has a young face but it’s not a new look; it’s just a couple of rent payments away. Dave’s anxious, depressed, and paranoid. He says government’s doing its best to kick him out. Rent hikes.

—My boy’s getting married.
—When?
—Saturday.
—How old is he?
—Nineteen.
Dave is generous with his sons—they’re older now and can make their own decisions—but they don’t allow him near their mother, he says. Domestic violence, the law, AVO. He spins his story. He wonders how his son’s wedding will go. Who he’ll be sitting next to at the reception.

Home again, and sitting in a chair on my front verandah, I see you coming along the footpath. You look strange, spaced out. You don’t see me, but slow to a stop at my letter box. Your hair’s still long but dyed back to black, you’re wearing a gorgeous, graceful, two-layered flouncy hem on the fur collar of a worsted wool coat, buttoned up but cut off at the knees. You stare at something in my garden. You stand stock still. It’s too early for the pruned roses to bloom, but bulbs, perennials and weeds spot colour. Without looking up, you walk into my garden and pull a red poppy out by its roots. You put the plant in your plastic carry bag, turn around and walk back along my garden path to the sidewalk. You don’t look around to see if anyone is watching. You turn to walk away, but notice another patch of poppies. You stop and stare but decide against another raid. You walk off in the direction of The Bent Spoon.

Nat nda dighy, dight dan nay, night and day, the winter night in Mena was thick black; there were no stars. Denise was in plaster from head to knee after her skin grafts. At the time there was no medically-registered plastic surgeon in the state. Port city hospital flew one in from Melbourne to set up his practice. Denise lay motionless on her hospital bed, looking like a mummy, and critically ill. She stared blindly at the colourful fish swimming in a glass box, especially fitted by electricians into the wall, to
soothe her pain. Over days a light appeared in her hospital room. Light and shadows on the wall, and in the wall; she wasn’t afraid. Weeks later there was more light. She saw a movement, a shimmering in the water. Bubbles, then fish. Colourful fish. Shiny silver and brilliant gold. Denise thought they were jewels she’d seen before, but she couldn’t remember. Beautiful star-like diamonds sparkling on light blue. The fish played in and out, over and under the bubbles. She remembered how she and Lettie had plunged in and out of the shallow waves at Pretty Maiden Bay. They’d chased the waves back to the sea, before running away as a new set washed the shore. Unable to move, or to squeal with delight, her big, brown eyes followed the fishes’ oscillations.

Without moving her head, and unbeknown to the medical staff, Denise began to study the fish. Why did they open their mouths? Did they know they could see through glass? How did fish swim? Eat? Breathe? Sleep? Talk? When they opened their mouths, she noticed, nothing came out. Occasionally, the fish didn’t move. Were they dead or sleeping? She decided they were sleeping. When visitors moved, the fish didn’t swim and hide in the white sand, or behind a rock plant. Maybe they were blind and deaf. She thought of them as her colourful angels. It was six months before she came home.

In those nights, I had the same dream, over and over. I dreamt that when I visited Denise in hospital with Fred I too was in bandages and looked like a mummy. This bedrock image filled my head for years. In the dream I imagined dead people bound and lying about on hospital beds. During those days I found it a comfort to sit silently in the deli shop window. The people walked by like colourful fish. They didn’t stop and
stare so I decided they were aliens. Once, Tor’s mum, Jean Wallace stood outside the window staring at the noticeboard on the shop front. She wanted a job.

That was when she took a job cleaning for a German bachelor, an industrial scientist at the local refinery. Why would Jean work for a German? Tam couldn’t believe it. Made him irritable. *I rue the day I sought her O, .. But he may say he’s bought her O.* The words took Tam’s breath. There was no more singing and whistling as he worked. Unbelievable, he hissed to himself. Who was this bloke? Where did his wife meet him? What care you? What care I? The questions skipped through Tam’s alcohol-potted mind like the improvised lyrics he’d sung when he’d reeled through a Scottish folk dance with his neighbours soon after he and Jean had settled in Mena:

*Now the singer's ready, let us all begin!*

*So step it out and step it in.*

*To the harmonic music, of the din.*

*We’ll dance the hours away.*

*Mary, Fred, Elselina and Art, hey.*

*Tam and Jean, Monica and Heinz,*

*Dance, Dance, Dance, Dance,*

*Dance away the hours together,*

*Dance till dawn be in the sky;*  

*What care you and what care I?*  

*Hearts a-beating, spirits high,*

*Dance, Dance, Dance, Dance.*
What care you? What care I? Tam’s questions went in and out of his mind, out and in, and over and over, casting off and beating away, like a dashing white sergeant dancing the Gay Gordons. Spontaneous improvisation going on in Tam’s head.

Jean had met the scientist through an advertisement pinned to the noticeboard inside the deli window. Right in the middle of the footpath, she’d stopped to read the community news. Sitting in the shop window Lettie had watched her read the notice. It was an ordinary piece, written by hand in blue ink, requesting a cleaner. Two hours, two mornings a week: Mondays and Fridays. Very good conditions. She didn’t know the author of the advertisement was German. So when she first broached the idea with Tam, she didn’t mention Germany.

—Monica and Heinz are German. Open and up-front German and that’s the difference, said Tam, rejecting Jean’s argument that the scientist was a displaced person from Bohemia. Monica was stranded in Berlin when the Red army came. People are suspicious of him. He lives with his elderly mother and keeps to himself, but I’ll leave the decision with you, Tam said.

Sometimes, the Mena chemist walked by the deli window, and tapped at the glass, level with Lettie’s mouth. Lettie pretended she was a lion and tried to eat his fingers. Whenever Lettie felt sick, she sat on the sugar bin at the back of the shop behind the counter. Winter and spring infused heavy rain with sweet scents. Summer sucked Mena dry. Seedpods exploded from trees, leaves turned their faces inside out, wooden-framed houses creaked with heat, and birds lost their song. Mary worried
about how Denise would manage in the sweltering heat, covered in bandages. On Denise’s first night home, Lettie donned a Red Indian head-dress and danced deliriously around Denise’s bed chanting:

*Nothing must change*

*everything’s the same.*

*Everything’s the same*

*nothing must change.*

*Nothing must change*

*everything’s the same ....*

The black shadows cast on the wall by the colourful feathers taunted their memories.
The scent of violets and roses permeated the air.

At the end of that summer, Denise started school. The surgeon had advised Fred that Denise attend *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, in preference to the state school which was overcrowded. He said to Fred, Denise will get extra attention from the nuns. It made sense to Fred, although the family were Protestant. Alice, Mary’s mother, bought Denise a brand new pair of Bata black leather ponytail school shoes on a day trip to Barney Silbert’s port city shoe store. Her new uniform—a navy blue-pleated skirt, white short-sleeved shirt, navy tie, and brown socks—were purchased out of a car boot, from a business registered as Family Traders.

Harry Russell, the family trader in question had moved to Mena from Greenbushes with his wife and six kids to work at the refinery, but the wages were so low he’d
needed extra. On Harry’s rostered days off from the refinery, he sold drapery door-to-door. Then the government stopped him and said he needed to have a shop front. A small shop face in the port city sufficed, and he continued his Mena rounds. Little by little his money grew, and before long he had enough cash to move out of Mena. He resigned from the refinery, and set up a drapery business in Long Beach. When Harry left, there was a gap in Mena retail. Without telling Mary until it was set in writing, Fred rented the vacant shop, next to the deli, to build a drapery emporium. He got it at reduced cost but it sent his businesses into receivership.

When Lettie started at the convent she jumped the front fence and ran off down the road without waiting for Denise, or saying goodbye to Mary and Fred. She wore her new Bata scout shoes with animal prints on their soles. According to Alice, Lettie had been sitting too long in the shop front window. School was just what she needed.

At school, Sister Amara, taught the alphabet by sounds. Lettie would close her eyes, listen to the recitation and picture their shapes. She’d trace each letter with an imaginary finger. Vowels did not come first because the letters were in strict order. Sister commenced with the perpetual articulation and correct pronunciation. Correct speech, Sister Amara believed, enabled children who could not speak fluent English to listen and feel the sounds on their tongues and lips.

Lettie touched her lips with her tongue, wetting them, before she whispered the letters to herself in a seductive, ritualistic chant: ā... ĕ... ĭ... ĭ... ... z... Ė... Ė... Ė... After
school Lettie would sit at the counter in the deli and read the Mena telephone book, sounding out letters into surnames, then drawing houses on a map of Mena.

One morning, the word amara was printed on the black board, and all the children were instructed to recognise the repeated letter in Sister’s name. Sister had written her name without a capital letter to avoid confusion. The three a’s were identified in a second. At this point, Sister taught the class something interesting. The three a’s she said, looked the same, had the same shape, but all sounded different. The first had a long sound, and was written as ā in the dictionary. The middle sound, had an ah sound, and the final had a short sound, written like ă in the dictionary. Then she sang:

*A sailor went to sea, sea, sea*

*To see what he could see, see, see*

Lettie thought it was hysterical. She closed her eyes and imagined Sister swimming in her black habit out to a raft in Pretty Maiden Bay; she looked like a jellyfish, or a black woman-of-war. Lettie prodded Sister away from the jetty with her gidgee.

On the way home from music lessons with Mother Cecilia, Heidi, Denise, Minke and Lettie cut a path through the bush. Although Heidi and Minke went to the state school, Fred had organised for them to study music at the convent with Denise and Lettie. Except Minke and Lettie, they were in different grades, but it didn’t matter with music. Music’s ageless. As they walked, they chanted the words of continents: Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia, Antarctica, America both North and South. In class, Mother had led them in clapping, counting and dancing the rhythms. As-ia, Af-ri-ca, clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, step-step, step-step-step. They swayed their bodies and sashayed through
the bush as if dancing a conga, listening to each accent. The first letter, like the first note in a bar of music, is accented, Mother had said, sing-clap-step a little louder. Asia, Af-ri-ca. Clap-clap, step-step. Lettie listened to Minke singing. Her voice soared above the trees and Lettie imagined God listening. Denise sang like a nightingale. Heidi had a monotone, but that improved later, with piano lessons. They looked for a long straight stick to use in their game they called, Countries. Not any old stick, but the longest and straightest they could find.

At the intersection of Pace Road and Mena Avenue, which was directly in front of the police station and adjacent to the deli they cleared a patch of ground. Heidi held the stick out so it touched the ground some distance from her feet and then she turned a circle. They all stood outside its circumference. Then each in turn, drew shapes of imagined countries in the circle. Any shape would do. Then they invented new languages for each country. They were explorers inventing their own world.

Over the weeks and months the languages became repetitive. The girls used similar words, mimicking and imitating each other’s sounds and phrases, especially when countries shared a border, even when the shape of the country changed. Like roosters at the break of day, they set each other off. At home, Denise and Lettie used each other’s translations for hello and goodbye, mama and papa. When Mary heard them, she would say, stop talking double Dutch. They would grin at each other, happy because they believed double Dutch was a language, spoken by people in foreign countries.
After lunch on Fridays, the school students—with Mother Cecilia, Sister Amara and the other nuns—attended a Mass with Father Mack. Denise and Lettie could not understand a word of Latin. They’d glance across at each other, and raise an eyebrow when they heard a familiar word, a word they knew as double Dutch.

When I teach I use Mother Cecilia’s music methods, and the game of Countries, to explain to students that music is a language. Everyone around the world can speak it, but in their own time and tongue. It doesn’t matter where you’re born, any country would do: Kiribati, Ireland, Comoros, Denmark, Moldova, Eritrea, Jamaica, Yemen, Nigeria, Brazil, Tajikistan, Australia. Sometimes, I greet them with nonsense words. I say: Babagoomor, which means good morning in Baba, my invented country. My students look at me and smile. They think I’m having fun. I’m not. I tell them I’m teaching an old language yet to be rediscovered. I lead them in a musical exercise to make my point.

I put on a popular instrumental CD, and coax them to move about the room to the beat or the rhythms in the music. In and out and around each other, around each other, in and out, without touching. I join in, it keeps me fit. When I press the pause key, the students freeze, then face the student closest to them. Out of the silence, one of them speaks nonsense words. By repeating the exercise over and over with different partners, their nonsense languages develop. Their animated tones sound high, low, fast, slow, soft or loud.
Sometimes I compose language rhythms with their names. I point to a student and say, what’s your name?
—Zev.
—Zev, say your name with a high soft voice.
—zev.
—Now, bass low and loud.
—ZEV.
—How many syllables?
—One.
—One clap. One step.
—What’s your name?
—Tiam.
—Ti-am.
—Clap-clap.
—Step-step.

We seldom sit down in music.

—What’s your name?
—Christopher.
—Clap-clap-clap.
—Step-step-step.
—What’s your name?
—Alexandra.


—Zev, Tiam, Christopher and Alexandra say your name in unison. Now one by one. Repeat. Soft or loud, high or low, fast or slow.

—Walk in a circle and repeat your name. Walk in a circle and repeat your name. Soft or loud, fast or slow, high or low. Now stop!

—One by one, two together, three then one.

The students are sound catchers.

In the Callam Music Auditorium at the university, Louise, one of my ex-students is giving a recital. I read the program notes and study the repertoire.

1. Aggression- John Serry arr. Louise Nylander
2. Rain Tree - Toru Takemitsu
3. Prism - Keiko Abe
4. Frenetic Fantasy Etude - Eugene Ughetti
5. Bem Vindo - Ney Rosauro
6. I Ching IV. Towards Completion: Fire Over Water - Per Nørgård

Crouching-tiger, hidden-dragon warrior, Louise is subtle in her manipulation of the instrumental sounds. While performing “Aggression”, in mid-flight from the gong to the smallest kettledrum, she presses the soft-headed mallets against her abdomen, twirling the sticks with her fingers into the American grip.
The Japanese Rain Tree has hundreds and thousands of finger-like leaves no bigger than finger tips that capture and store water during a storm. After a night of rain, the droplets drop-drop-drop one at a time. I drift away during Louise’s introductory talk to a magical tuart tree in an enchanted forest. The topmost branches are so lofty, they reach through the clouds and rustle at the feet of God.

Applause for three musicians draws me back to the auditorium. Two marimbas and a vibraphone all with tuned crotales, are positioned left, right and centre. Beginning in a strict rhythmic tempo of cross-rhythms the phrasing is clear and expressive. Louise plays the vibraphone with ten crotales, tiny cymbals above the bars of the vibraphones and marimbas in pentatonic scale arrangements. The tone colour is beautiful. Special lighting effects create moments of light and dark, building to an outrageous explosive passage. The lighting creates an illusion of movement, but nothing prepares me for the finale not even Mother Cecilia: “I Ching IV. Towards Completion: Fire Over Water”.

I had learned to play “Some Enchanted Evening” from *South Pacific* on the piano with Mother Celia, out of a book of duets.

— “Some Enchanted Evening” is dreamy, explained Mother, a beautiful, romantic piece from a war-time story. Playing and singing songs helps your aural to function, I still tell my students. The ability to sing in tune with the changing dynamics and key shifts is important. Songs create an intimacy with the composer but are unsuitable for my pianoforte exam, Mother had told me.
The Australian Music Examiners Board printed a booklet for piano teachers each year, recommending the most suitable works for the classical examinations. Mother chose my exam pieces. Her pencil markings on my music books have outlived her. They’re a record of her interpretations of the composers’ dynamics; how did she expect me to practise these pieces?

Glancing through my earliest books, I can see which pieces I played for each exam. In Canon OP. 14, No. 26, by Konrad Max Kunz, there’s a green star on the page just below the title, a gift from Mother. The piece is in E major and, to relieve the monotony of constant repetition in practice, Mother changed the rhythm, time and key. The beginning of anything is difficult, she said, but the piece does not leap further than a fifth, minimising every temptation to look away from the score to the keys. Every attention must be made to the production of the tone and tone connection, above all to the singing style.

—Touch is to the pianist what breathing is to the singer, Mother said, quoting Kunz.

In “A Little Tune & Polka” by Dmitry Kabalevsky there’s a silver star. In “Polka”, there’s a pencilled slur to highlight the difficult leap from E to A above middle C for the left hand. List B: “Minuet” by Johann Christoph Freidrich Bach has staccato notes, triplets and dotted quavers circled with pencil. A bit tricky for little fingers. List C: “March” from Kinderheft (Children’s Album) by Dmitry Shostakovich, is in common time and begins on an incomplete bar with an accented C played with both hands, an octave apart.
Whenever Mother introduced a new instrumental piece she asked many questions. What does the title mean? Is the piece in a major or minor key? At what speed does the composer expect the music to be played? How dynamic? Mother would play the piece and then expect her student to write a short story about the musical composition for homework. She was interested in how we interpreted the title. “Für Elise”, translated means “For Elise”. Mother thought this fascinating. She said, all students should have this knowledge in case the examiner asked a question on translation during the general knowledge section. Some students didn’t know the title was written in German, but Mother’s students do. She drilled them.

“Für Elise” is shrouded in mystery, it’s intriguing. Some say that Elise was Beethoven’s lover, while others imagine, it is just Beethoven’s careless handwriting, and the piece was, “For Therese”, his girlfriend. Mother thought this a hoot. Therese turned down Beethoven’s marriage proposal. Mother believed this was why the piece is so emotional, so dynamic.

I love the theory of music, but I never practised the piano, not like Denise. Denise was up at six every morning, running her scales up and down. Minke quit piano lessons straight after the exam. One year, I spent two months of Saturday mornings at the convent, playing scales and arpeggios, for telling lies. Mother was too busy to hear my scales, so she just asked if I was practising. I said, yes. Eight weeks out from my fourth-grade exam, out of the blue she said, play G# minor arpeggio over four octaves. I shimmered my hands all over the piano, but my lack of practice was obvious. My scale sounded like a new invention from hell.
Lying, stealing, graffiti and vandalism were rampant in Mena at this time, but when Fred saw the word SEX (through the windscreen of his ute) scrawled in thick black paint across the front wall of the shire council office, it startled him. Get out of town, he thought. About then the Ding Dong nightspot was a venue for dances and parties. It was where Fred played trumpet with the Harry Russell Big Band. Then it fell on hard times and the bank was advertising it for sale. Even though Fred did not have the money he bought it. Not having enough money never stopped Fred, but it worried Mary.

—Never let money stop you doing what you want, Fred philosophised to Mary, as he danced a quick step into a chitterbug.

The Ding Dong property was one mile west of Mena and spread over ten acres of land running around the bottom of Chalk Hill. Chalk Hill—green but white underneath—was a natural, geographical knoll overlooking spectacular wetlands. Gum, tuart, sheoak and banksia trees grew in the sandy soil seeded with wildflowers and orchids. Denise, Heidi, Minke and I would have competitions to see who could pick the largest bunch of spider orchids. Pressing the ones with red tongues between the pages of the thickest books we could find, and arranged the rest in vases as archaic-looking kookaburras sat on branches laughing and magpies chortling the last threads of day.

Fred and I talk of the Ding Dong garden. One afternoon, while we were reticulating the beds, he told me a story after I’d accidentally cross-threaded the piece of steel pipe he
wanted to connect. He stood up with the Stillson wrench in his hand and gave it a shake, then he told me he had been a biter when he was a kid.

— A biter?

— One day when I was a kid, the woman next door leaned over the side picket fence and said in a very loud voice—Fred, if you bite ’Gus again I’ll pull out all your teeth with my tongs. She held up the tongs and gave them a shake to frighten me off. I looked at Fred as he pretended to shake the wrench; I curled my top lip and Fred thought I looked just like a lion.

In the corner of the park, opposite Vera’s house is the community nursery where Vera and Maganzia rent allotments and garden together. At the gate a scarecrow stands guard unnoticed by crows, magpies and wattlebirds who nest in nearby trees. They fly above the rows but there’s nothing for them to eat. We are between seasons and nothing much is growing. An onion crop is coming to an end as broccoli heads develop and white butterflies circle. (They are also known as white moths because they’re not colourful) A woman bends to build a bed with compost. She sees me, wanders over and offers me a strawberry. It’s a little tart, not quite ready, she says. She has an English accent. Lived in Australia since she was fifteen. Married a Perth boy, but he was an Italian and had a different view of marriage. She’d tried to resettle in London around the millennium. It was exciting but with 9/11 she decided she wanted to return to her children, and the most isolated city in the world. I mention that my neighbour Maganzia is in Rome, and scared witless of flying.
—Maganzia, the woman says then laughs. She has an allotment alongside mine. Ha, she giggles, Maganzia specialises in broad beans. Her friend Vera’s here too, grows lettuce and tomatoes, very Australian.

—Broad beans, I laugh. I hate them. My dad loves them. Boils them up until they’re soft, then splashes them with butter and salt—yum, yum, he says, good in stews too. He grows broad beans on the east wall of his home. They’re difficult to manage as they grow so tall and need staking. Vera? I ask. I haven’t seen her for a bit.

—Vera’s lucky. She has a niece in Mount Barker, and another of the community gardeners has family in Albany. Over a garden bed, they’d planned a quick weekend trip south, just spontaneous. The gardener was dropping Vera off in Mount Barker on the Saturday and picking her up on the Sunday. On the morning of the Saturday departure, the gardener was to ring Vera at six in the morning to make sure she was up and about. When Vera answered the phone, her words were slurred.

—Stroke? I asked.

—Yes. Ambulance arrived in quick time. Vera was in the hospital within minutes. Minor, they said minor, recuperating in the Mercy hospital. Full recovery expected and due home any day.

—Maganzia too, I said, is coming home soon.

I notice a poppy plant in a bed of pansies and petunias. It stands tall and looks odd. I hear laughter and turn to see Rafiq walking by with you. I’m shocked. You are wearing a cute strapless dress with black and white floral print. It’s a cool day, too cool for your get-up. You skip ahead of Rafiq as if to keep warm. You look like a cabbage butterfly, but he acts like a male moth. He flutters, zigzags up, down, behind and in front of the
female, flying until she lands again. He catches her closed wings with his legs, spreads his wings and flies off with her dangling beneath him. Rafiq’s avoiding me. What a surprise.

One afternoon in Mena when I arrived home from school I found a note from Fred pinned to our front door.

BABY GIRL

WOOHOO

MUM HAD BABY DURING LUNCH BREAK.

ALICE IS ON HER WAY BY BUS

TO LOOK AFTER US

Alice was always at home waiting like an alarm clock to go off, by bus, train or ship, a suitcase in hand, to help her daughter. That evening we stood with Alice on the hospital’s wooden verandah, like chooks perched on a stoop, waiting to see my new sister. I caught a glimpse of the cot as I peered through the nursery window. Our baby had wrinkled skin which was peeling. She had thick, jet-black hair like mum. She looked like a monkey trapped in a crib-cage. She was different from the rest of us. We all had white hair, like dad. We looked like split peas from one pod. That’s why I never believed the schoolteacher when she said I looked like a monkey. I’d seen black gorillas, orange orang-utans and brown monkeys, but never a white one. Our baby gave me a start, and I wondered where she’d come from. I overheard dad tell Alice, as I was getting into the back of the ute, that mum had had a caesarean. I’d never heard of them.
At home, I forgot that our baby was a caesarean because dad asked Denise and me to imagine what our baby was going to be called.

—Guess the name of your baby sister, said Fred. Denise had no idea, but I quickly thought of girls’ names more popular than my own:


But dad said, no, to every one.

I used to wonder about my name, Letizia. I wondered where mum and dad had found it. In an ancient book of Italian stories, I said, to mum. She was put out by my dislike for my name. I went on and on about it until she’d enough. Mum said, there was a fashion model, very pretty and popular in the city, during the late forties and early fifties, called Letizia. She had never heard the name until then, and she liked it. She said, dad was very happy to go along with her decision. Letizia, dad said, was the mother of a little emperor, and his campaigns were fascinating, if miserable periods in world history.

When I told Denise about Napoleon’s mother, she said, Alice had told her a story, set around my first birthday. Alice said dad thought I was the same length as when I was born, I’d not grown. Worried, he took me to the children’s hospital for a check-up. The doctor on duty told Fred not to panic as one day I would grow into a lion. I’m not sure I
believed either story, but I stopped carrying on when I realised a few more Letizias walked around school.

When dad said the name of my sister, I nearly dropped dead. I was shocked and I raged against him. How could a baby live with the name Mercy.

—Mercy. Mercy, what kind of name is that for a baby girl, I argued.

Denise was a teenager, and loved the name.

—Mercy, Denise said, is a river in Liverpool, Lettie. There’s a new hit by Gerry and the Pacemakers, “Ferry Cross the Mersey”, and added, it made the top ten in Britain for the first time last week. What a coincidence that dad, who never listened to the radio, would choose a groovy name. Denise couldn’t get over it and improvised on the words, and borrowed the tune:

*Lettie cross with Mercy*  
*We don’t care what you might say*  
*‘Cause Mercy is just as worthy*  
*And is here to stay*  
*And is here to stay.*

Mercy, dad said to me, ignoring Denise’s singing, is an acronym. But the word made no sense. I knew she was a caesarean, but an acronym? I’d never heard of either word, and I cried all night.
I hadn’t known mum was pregnant, until she was sick every morning. Her sickness went on for months like Heidi’s, and I thought mum was dying. When I found out she was pregnant, I was embarrassed. After a bilious attack mum called me into her bedroom. She had a flannel on her forehead and said, I’m pregnant.

I was speechless. I thought mum and dad were too old for babies. They were nearly forty, I told Tor. He said, don’t worry, his mum was old when she had him, and nothing went wrong.

Mercy wasn’t the only baby born at Mena’s maternity hospital that year. There were plenty of young and old women in Mena having babies. It seemed like every woman was pushing a pram around town. And I knew why. Before Mercy was born, I overheard Jean Wallace going on about the pope. I was weighing sugar from the bin into small, brown paper bags when I heard her say that the pope’s contraceptive intervention was for keeping nations Catholic.

—No, mum said, it’s all about the government’s threat to close Mena’s maternity hospital, before adding, Fred thinks it’s The Beatles. They laughed.

I disagreed. I said I’d read a heading in *The West*: “Australians: Populate or Perish”.

There were many weddings in Mena. Minke and I would find out where and when the weddings were taking place and sit on the wall outside the church waiting for the bride to arrive. We thought the gowns looked beautiful, and we couldn’t wait to be brides ourselves. At Cameron Wallace’s wedding his bride arrived wearing a lemon-coloured
dress designed from a Vogue pattern. She was on the way, as they say. Monica had made the dress. Bought the pattern and the material from the drapery. It was a new style, a full skirt, figure skimming, not the empire line hourglass pattern, with its high bodice and angel sleeves.

—Sie haben zu haben, how you say, giggled Monica, as she covered her breast then her shoulders with her hands.

—Modest neckline and shoulders, said Mary, as Monica and Mary flicked through the fashion pattern books on the counter of the drapery store.

Cecilia was not Mother Cecilia’s real name. It was her confirmation name. Cecilia’s the patron saint of music who was given a crown of roses by an angel. On this basis Mother Cecilia was confirmed. Her mother told her a musical story that day. When Saint Cecilia was dying, she sang a song to God, she said. When I recounted the naming stories to Tor, he laughed.

—I don’t believe in that rubbish, said Tor.

I reacted against his reaction.

—It was Monica Heinrich who told me, I said. It was Monica heard me going on about Mercy’s name. She explained the acronym.

—Mercy, she said, stood for Mary Elizabeth Ruth Catherine Yasmine.

—Don’t take so many of das sings zu heart, Lettie, she said.

When a schoolgirl living in Berlin before the war, Monica, like Mother Cecilia, chose Cecilia as her confirmation name. Monica Ursula Cecilia Hahn, then changed her surname to Heinrich, when she married Heinz.
—I don’t understand any of it, whispered Tor but explained, Tor’s short for Torrance. It’s Scottish for crag, or God of Thunder. But I’m just Tor. I don’t even have a middle name.

As I head home from the community garden I’m surprised to see Vera sitting on her front verandah.

—Vera, how are you?

She waves me up.

—Lettie, her voice quivers and her hand trembles.

Seeing Vera vulnerable is unnerving. She looks like a bird conserving energy for the long trip north.

—I had a mini stroke. Oh Lettie. If I hadn’t planned the trip, I wouldn’t be here now. My friend rang at six as planned, just three rings. When I lifted the receiver, I spoke, but she couldn’t understand a word. She called the ambulance. The doctor said it was a TIA and to take an aspirin a day.

When Heidi died, I had had hallucinations. I can still remember my night fevers, when my bedclothes and pyjamas flew off leaving me naked. I chased my sheets up and down the passage, dancing and shouting out. My body was like an inferno. I was dripping with sweat and hollering.
—Mum, come and help me, I said. I can still feel myself jumping out of my body to bring a sheet down, wrestling and fighting, snatching and grabbing, but my struggle was in vain. It was an hallucination.

When I settled down, mum yanked my pyjamas up, and remade my bed. She pulled the top sheet up to my chin to reassure me that I was tucked in. It was nothing she couldn’t handle. Mum was like a shady tree on a hot day. But it was a lowdown time in Mena.

It was the month the pope condemned oral contraceptives and Keith Bennett had been abduced. Good things happened too. Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. Chuck Berry sang “No Particular Place To Go” and the “Little Old Lady from Pasadena” climbed high into the charts. The Beatles were in Australia sending Johnny O’Keefe’s record sales down, he said. Anti-Vietnam war marches swelled in number, and marchers sang: “Give Peace a Chance”, and “We Shall Overcome”.

Out in the bush, Lilli-Minnie and her family were camped near the water tank at the Ding Dong in an old car body attached to a canvas annex strung high by ropes to the boughs of a tuart tree. Fred didn’t mind but said the old car was an eye-sore.

—You need to get rid of them, said the health inspector.

—Get off my property, Fred told the inspector.

No government has housing for Aboriginal people. They’re on the bottom of the queue and monitored for hygiene, I read this in the answer to Fred’s letter to the housing authority. He believed everyone was created equal, he’d written. Besides writing letters, he was working overtime to avoid bankruptcy.
On my return to school after my bout of pneumonia (I’d switched from the convent to the state school to be with Minke and Tor), Minke was absent, and I had to sit alone. I listened to the spitting rain percuss the windows. Tor was sitting at the back of the room. I couldn’t believe it. While I was away, Miss Norma Locke, my teacher (and Vera’s sister, I’d discovered) changed our seating order. Tor was no longer sitting behind me. She must’ve thought it better to split Minke, Tor and me up. The three musketeers she called us. Habitual chatter-boxers. Once, while Minke and I were turning around to chat to Tor, he suddenly became very quiet. His eyes opened really wide, and he blushed. I wondered what was wrong, until I heard an almighty crack, like thunder. Miss Locke had almost smashed Minke’s and my desk in two with a piece of firewood. She’d lifted the wood from the wood box in the corner of the room, near the stainless steel, ice-cold wonder-heater. The damage to our desk was minimal—more noise than anything else—just a splintered indent in the wooden lid, but my writing book had an indelible column. Even now, I can feel the fear that collected in my body during her attack. It could still make me groan.

Heading back up the street, I see you slumped on a bus seat outside the 24-hour diner. You look stoned, slipping forward on the bench while fumbling in your bag. Two buses arrive and depart. No one gets off or on.

—Do you need a bus? I ask you.
—Yes, you said.
—Two buses have just pulled in and out.
— I need to catch a bus on the other side of the street.

— You wouldn’t get across the road. What have you been doing today?

— Shopping.

— Shopping? I repeat in disbelief.

— I had an epileptic fit in a shop.

— Fit?

— Yes.

— You need to go to the medical centre.

— No.

— Yes. It’s right here, twenty metres down.

— I’ve been there.

— What did they do?

— Gave me medication.

— You need to go back to them.

— No.

— You can’t catch a bus. You know where you live?

— Of course. You slurred.

A woman appears on the scene to catch a bus. She raises her eyebrows at us.

I see an empty taxi in the zone outside the diner.

— Keep an eye on her. I tell the woman.

The driver is in the diner ordering a falafel. He says he’ll take her in ten. I pay him.
Health, poetry, social studies, and music were all important to Miss Locke. Because of her I can recite “She Walks in Beauty”, “Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day”, and “Clancy of the Overflow”, without falter. During music with Miss Locke, we learned to sing “Shenandoah”. Miss Locke hummed the Introduction, ignoring us while arranging the music in her head. She added value by lengthening and sustaining the notes. I can still see Miss Locke’s head swaying with the melody. She looked like Vera, though not as fine-featured. Both moved soundlessly, like spiders. One of Miss Locke’s eye’s closed when she hummed. She was like an artist gaining perspective while balancing the mood of the song with pitch, toned by loss. You could see in her fingers and hear in her voice the touch and sound of something missing when she sang these lines:

*Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you*

*Hurrah, you rolling river.*

*Oh, Shenandoah, I’ll not deceive you,*

*We’re bound way ’cross the wide Missouri.*

Her soprano voice was beautiful. The words still disturb me. “Shenandoah” spirits me away to when Heidi died. She was taken to the chest hospital for relief but hated it so much she tried to jump out of the window. It was the drugs. After Heidi’s funeral, Elselina stopped talking. She had nothing more to say. Art poured himself into the band, travelling and playing in the major cities of Australia, and suffering bouts of alcoholism and drug addiction.

—Nothing stays the same, says Fred.
Tam, Heinz and Fred, often held conversations over a few beers at the back of the deli.

—My childrens, said Heinz, come home from der school cryin, an tellin me das got zo friend. I sinkin of puttin em wit zer nuns. Zay say Lettie, Minke and Tor hide from dem.

At zer recess und lunchtime, boys in zer school, run round callin out dass zay touch zer gas bombs. My childrens is zer gas bombs! Can you believe das? Childrens run up an touch dem, an dann shout: germs! Zer contaminatin students ave zu tag someone else, zu get rid of zer gas bombs’ germ; it’s zer game! More worse, some schoolgils call my son Franz, Frankenstein!

—After the German scientist, slurrd Tam.

—Nein, explained Heinz, zer monster!

—He didn’t have a mother, said Fred.

—Yes he did, Dr Frankenstein lived for a while in the Scottish fair city of Perth, reeled Tam. He was trying to keep his promise to the monster and create the perfect woman in Scotland. A-ha, laughed Tam. Straight after his laugh, Tam disappeared into the drapery shop storeroom, and returned shortly with a naked mannequin. He sat the model on his knee. Here she is, said Tam, without a navel and not a mark on her body.

Fred and Heinz sat dead silent looking at Tam with the naked woman on his lap.

Tam whispered into the mannequin’s left ear—*Let loove sparkle in her e’e; Let her loe nae man but me*. Ignoring the mannequin, Tam said—I’ve noticed that the froth on a pint of Swan lager disappears quicker than the creamy head of a Guinness. Why’s that Heinz?
—Zer gas in zer bubbles, zer hand pouring zer pint, or zer material sand used in zer manufacture of zer glass, but I don’t know, just guessin. I’m not zer German scientist, just zer pipe fitter, laughed Heinz.

Without another word, the men’s conversation was interrupted by a familiar knocking sound. Fred took a deep drag on his cigarette, then placed it in an ash tray before he went around to the front of the deli to investigate. A late evening customer.
—The doors shut, I’m working out the back, yelled Fred.

He yelled to get his message through the glass pane.

—Late night shoppers, muttered Fred, hard to get rid of them. They see a light on and they keep knocking hoping that you will open the door. If you open for one, you open for the town. Customers sit at home all night in front of the box, then realise, just as they’re about to get into bed, they have no milk for breakfast.

It’s the day before my wedding anniversary. I turn on my computer to check my emails. There’s one from Jacquie Lawson. A greeting card from Fred. I click it open.

Dear Lettie and Paul
Fred Miles has sent you a Jacquie Lawson electronic greeting. Click on the link below to open.
http://www.jacquielawson.com
With best wishes from us all
Dad is romantic. He remembers dates: births, weddings, and deaths. He is melancholic, so anniversaries add colour to his days. A white lily appears on the blue screen with a note: *click on lily to begin*. Simultaneously, I see a heart and hear our wedding march, “The Grand March of Aida”, by Giuseppe Verdi. As the triumphant trumpet voluntary sounds, white lilies, honey suckle, blue lechanaultia and yellow pom-pom daisies form a wreath around a heart. Inside the heart there’s a message from Fred, wishing us the best on the big one. I forward the email to Paul who is still up north. In little time, there’s an email from him with the subject: Fishing trip wives welcome.

Hey Darls  
The boys at the mine site are organising a fishing trip to Stewart Island in the far south off the south island of New Zealand. It’s a five star experience according to the brochure. Thought it would be a great way to spend our anniversary. Check the photos, and let me know what you think.  
Love  
Paul

There’s seven photographs attached to the email. The first slide is a fishing launch on its side with surging waves submerging the deck. More slides of the same launch flick by in various stages of rolling, sliding, pitching against the tide before the launch disappears into a wall of water. The last photograph bears a single beacon flare.

dear paul--  
hilarious--i’m thinking i’d like to do europe--  
there’s a music conference in belgium--  
i’ve long-service leave--  
need to use it--  
what do you think--  
love  
lettie
Paul’s response is instant.

Hey Lettie,

How many fairy tales really end?

Paul
Credits


On pages 18 and 19 the lines quoted are from My Life of Song, by Gladys Moncrieff.

The lyric quoted on page 35 is from “Music in a Changing World”, by William Arms Fisher.

Line quoted on page 39 is from “Letter to His Father”, by Franz Kafka.

The excerpt on page 49 is influenced by Gallipoli: Untold Stories from War Correspondent Charles Bean and Front-Line Anzacs: A 90th Anniversary Tribute, by Jonathan King and Michael Bowers.

Line quoted on page 74 is from Dreamtime, by Theresa Walley.

On pages 75 and 78 the quotes are from the poem “Beyond Kwinana”, by Toby Davidson.

The excerpt on page 76 is from Kwinana: Third Time Lucky, by Laurie Russell.
The line quoted on page 93 is from “A Fragment”, by Robert Burns.

On page 117 the line quoted is from “Scotch Drink”, by Robert Burns.

The lyric quoted on page 130 is from “My Love She’s but a Lassie Yet”, by Robert Burns.

Excerpt on page 130 influenced by the lyrics of the folk dance, “The Dashing White Sergeant” (1826).

Lyric on page 155 is from “Jockey Fou and Jenny Fain”, by Robert Burns.

Full details are given in the References.
Synopsis of *Impromptu I—X*

*Impromptu I—X* harmonises on two story lines. One line unfolds in the present, the other unravels the past. In the present, Lettie lives in Park, a fictitious, inner city suburb of Perth, Western Australia. Lettie, a schoolteacher, arrives home after a busy day teaching music and is startled by the sight of a young street walker starting up her business. She bears a striking resemblance to Lettie’s childhood friend, Minke Van Der haak. The past story, set in the 1950s and 1960s, as Lettie, Minke and their friend, Tor spend their childhoods in Mena. Mena is unique to Western Australia, a purpose-built industrial town planned by the state government and BP Oil. Four families, the Australian Miles’s, the Dutch Van Der haak’s, the Scottish Wallace’s and the German Heinrich’s live on the boundary of Mena and bushland. Each family is musical. At night they meet in the bush clearing to sing and dance. It is this thread that holds them together despite their different language backgrounds.

Within four years of the agreement between the State Government and BP Oil, Mena is bust. To stem the haemorrhage of residents fleeing the town, the Government re-settles needy families, war widows and senior citizens into Mena’s housing estate but develops a reputation for crime. Fred and Mary Miles’s (Lettie’s parents) delicatessen goes into receivership, but it survives. The Wallace and Van Der haak families implode. Fred sees an opportunity to buy a nightclub, a mile out of Mena. The nightclub is close to an Indigenous camp, and the State’s efforts to reclaim the Indigenous land, where Fred’s property is located becomes a battleground.

In the present, Fred is widowed, elderly, and lives down the road from Lettie. Each morning Lettie buys the newspaper and collects Fred’s mail for him. The people she
meets takes the mundanity out of this chore. Dave, on a disability pension, lives in the corner house opposite Maganzia’s Italian villa. Maganzia is a devout Catholic, suspicious of everyone and, like her friend Vera, has been widowed for years. Vera, who has lived in Park all of her life, spins yarn to all passers-by. When Maganzia returns to Rome for a holiday, Vera vanishes into thin air. A chance meeting between Lettie and a community gardener resolves Vera’s disappearance. Rafiq, a more recent Indian migrant to Park, talks politics with Lettie. He is also fascinated by the young prostitute. (Part V of Impromptu I—X ends as Lettie considers an overseas trip.)

Lettie goes to present a paper at a music conference in Europe. An unexpected performance of Don Giovanni in Amsterdam draws Lettie back to memories of Minke. On her return home, Fred is so excited to see her that he accidentally trips. He is hospitalised, but before he is discharged he has a heart attack and dies. Lettie is overwhelmed. Unable to focus on her teaching, she decides to resign. One day, the young prostitute returns to the lane. She and Lettie talk of roses, names, places and singing. The girl’s father is a singer in an alternative rock band and she imagines singing is in her blood. She likes opera and jazz music. When Lettie checks the annual city festival program, she is astonished to read the Dutch opera company is performing Don Giovanni. Lettie buys six tickets and imagines the special night she and her neighbours will share at the opera.
Dissertation

Music matters in fiction: Creative and critical reflections
Introduction

By the 1960s, eighty percent of Australian schools offered the ABC’s weekly children’s singing programme as the music curriculum in schools.\(^1\) For half an hour, one morning a week, a class monitor would flick a switch on the wall and the speaker above the blackboard would come to life with piano music and song. While the teacher sat at the back of the room, marking spelling, dictation and maths papers, the students sat and listened, sang or spoke in response to the prompts of the voice from the speaker.

Apart from these weekly music lessons, I was one of the few students in my school who learned piano privately, not because we had a lot of money, but because my father, coming from a musical family, decided that, before they reached the age of seven, each of his five children would learn to play the piano and study the theory of music. There were no private music teachers in the newly established industrial town in which I lived, so I attended piano lessons before and after school at the convent. My classical piano education began with easy pieces but I was quickly swept into the Australian Music Examination Board exams. Preparing for a theory or pianoforte exam was like playing a competitive individual sport and involved daily practice for the final that was scheduled for later in the year. Each Wednesday after school I would attend theory lessons with all the other music students in a room at the convent. On two other days, a morning before school and an afternoon, I would attend individual lessons. Mother Patricia would choose the piano pieces she thought I would enjoy and we would begin to discover the techniques and dynamics of each piece. Beginning with the right hand, progressing to the left hand, before two hands played together took

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\(^1\) ABC radio music programmes for schools, such as, “Let’s Hear the Music”, were fundamental to Australian state education.
weeks of practice as did memorising and transposing songs from one key to another.

Over the years, I developed an appreciation for the enormity of my father’s generosity and imagination, and the world of global music the nuns had opened up for me.

In my fictional work, *Impromptu I*—X and in this dissertation, I investigate the relationship between music and literature, and the role of music in narrative fiction. I ask, how can reading a work from the perspective of music enhance our understanding and interpretation of a text? These are the questions around which my thesis is organised. Within this paradigm, my thesis concerns how novelists Toni Morrison, David Mitchell and Tim Winton draw on music as practice, discourse, and form in their respective narratives: *Beloved* (1987), *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and *Dirt Music* (2001). In spite of critical attention each of these novels has received, they have seldom been discussed with regard to the power of music, and its explicit and implicit techniques and effects—such as form and genre, voice and expression, thematic progression, tonality and pitch, rhythm and repetition.

In order to explore the questions motivating this dissertation, I provide below a brief overview of the historical relationship between music and literature, and the evolutionary domains of music and literature in the Western tradition that have given rise to the rich, symbiotic relationship they share. In my analysis, I have drawn on Eric Prieto’s interpretations of the historical explanations of music and literature, and his translations of Rousseau’s and Mallarme’s theoretical writings from French to English. Prieto suggests an interdisciplinary project would be incomplete without an understanding of the historical relationship between music and literature (2002a, xi-xii).

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2 In non-Western oral cultures and Western cultures with strong oral traditions, music and literature, the practical arts are considered united in word, dance, visual arts, and performance (Prieto 2002a, 1).
Music and literature

In Western culture, we can trace the historical relationship between the domains of music and literature from Homer (c900-800BC). Homeric epics performed as song or chant, through rhythm, rhyme and repetition of collective memories and cultural myths, stand as oral recordings of an ancient poetic communication between music, language and performance. But music understood as a metaphor could not have become available to literature if this connection between music and words established in song had not begun to disintegrate in fourth-century Athens with the advent of writing (Prieto 2002a, 1-2). From this time, music and literature emerged as more specialised arts, independent of each other. Literature became a written practice and began to lose its (oral) voice while instrumental music without semantic clues became a non-representational art work until the medieval period.3

Early Church music of the medieval period (500AD-1400AD), included sacred texts set to a melody and sung by a soloist or unison choir without accompaniment, whilst music theory was not limited to sounds and included Pythagoras’s mathematical ratios (Ulrich and Pisk 1963, 16, 26, 28-9; Prieto 2002a, 4).4 Following the development of a single melodic monophonic style (700-800 AD), where new material is inserted within the song (plainchant), the rise of polyphony between 900-1200 AD, as we know from music history, incorporated additional vocal lines above or below the single melody (Ulrich and Pisk 1963, 56). The polyphonic lines sung as counterpoint (part-singing), where voices and instruments are harmonically interconnected, yet independent in

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3 It was not until the ninth century that mnemonic devices written as “‘Catalonian’ neumes” were used in Gregorian chant as melodic contours (Mundó 2007, 15).
4 Besides sacred music in the medieval era, there was a variety of folk ballads performed by minstrels (Kamien 2002, 71-2).
rhythm and melodic scope, caused confusion in the listeners and the number of vocal lines were gradually reduced and replaced by musical instruments.\(^5\)

During the Renaissance (1450-1600), Aristotle’s *Poetics*, from c335BC, were rediscovered, and initiated a discussion about it amongst Italian literary critics (Javitch 1999, 54). Whilst the *Poetics* concerns tragedy, Aristotle makes it explicit that “as a painting imitates objects and narrative imitates action, music involves the imitation of ‘character, emotion and action’” (Aristotle in Prieto 2002a, 4). With Aristotle’s poetics thus in vogue, the Italian composers, led by Monteverdi (1607), were seeking a return to the monadic vocal style of composition (as a reaction to polyphony), where a song is characterised by recitative, forging a new link between “music, poetry and drama” (Prieto 2002a, 4).\(^6\)

This monadic idea of music and writing, precipitated the birth of opera. In the operas of the Baroque era, music had a special relationship with word, as Monteverdi (1607) announces: “let the word be the master not the servant of the music” and reiterated in recent times by musician and conductor William Christie: “Great music, grows out of language” (Christie in Jampol 2010, 45). Simultaneously, the *Pléiade* poets in France, including Pierre de Ronsard (1565) and Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1573), were reforging the connections between literature and music along classical lines, where lyrical language and music were fused in rhythm to form “linear melodic music” (Thomas 2006, 21).\(^7\) While Ronsard insisted on the importance of having some of his poems set to music (Prieto 2002a, 7), de Baïf attempted to re-create the classical Greek *mousiké* of sung verse composed and performed by poets (Thomas 2006, 20-1).

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\(^5\) Church authorities were concerned about polyphony as they thought sacred texts were being overpowered by multi-part and “decadent music” (Benson 2006, 86).

\(^6\) Recitative is a song that adopts the rhythms of ordinary speech.

\(^7\) The French *Pléiade* poets imitated the Greek and Roman poetic styles of the original Alexandrian Greek poets (285-46 BC), a group of seven, and named after the Pléiade star cluster [www.pleiade.org/pleiades_04.html](http://www.pleiade.org/pleiades_04.html).
During the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, music and literature were considered “intimately related” (Thomas 2006, 16). This idea gave rise to what John Neubauer (1988) calls the “verbal paradigm” which was considered by music theorists, such as Spanish Jesuit and musicologist Antonio Eximeno (1796), as the predominant treatise on music of the eighteenth century (Thomas 2006, 16). However, since the late eighteenth century, Western classical music has been and is still considered by some musicologists as “autonomous”: bereft of meaning and theorised according to its internal mathematical patterns and form (Thomas 2006, 6; Cook and Everist 2001, v-xii; McClary 1987, 14; 2000, 2). Yet, this notion of music is at odds with what Eximeno had intimated a century earlier. Music, he suggests, is not connected to language through “musical mathematics”; rather a “verbal paradigm integrate[s] music into the network of meanings, into the signifying practices that make up culture” (Eximeno in Thomas 2006, 16). Such a concept initiates the potential of a musical language and a means to communicate ideas and emotions giving music a distinct “role in culture” (Thomas 2006, 17).

Thus, the relationship between music and literature continued to occupy literary critics and philosophers, including the philosopher/composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who located the “origin of language in song” (Prieto 2002a, 5). The key to Rousseau’s artistic theory is the term “musical expression” in which expression is implied as imitative (Rousseau translated by Prieto 2002a, 5). His theory was the precursor to the Romantic era of the nineteenth century when composers, such as Franz Liszt (1848-58) and Richard Strauss (1886-1915) looked to literature for music models, such as the tone poem, and writers, such as James Joyce (1922) and Virginia

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8 This understanding of cultural practice introduced music to the plausibility of a semiotics (Thomas 2006, 16). Julia Kristeva (1989) and Emile Benveniste (1974) consider music as a code in their respective theories of semiotics.
Woolf looked to music to inform their writing of literature (Luening 1980, 192-4, 197-8; Prieto 2002a, 5).\(^9\) Over the centuries, opera maintained the strongest link between music and literature. With its increasing popularity in early nineteenth-century society and culture, opera necessitated a specialist approach to its spectacular extravaganzas: composers wrote the music, librettists arranged the lyrics, while choreographers, stage and costume designers were integrated where and when necessary (Prieto 2002a, 6). Such specialisation spurred the composer and reformer Richard Wagner (1849) into a counter-activity. Reverting to earlier practices, he sought to model his operatic spectacles on the Greek *mousiké* by reuniting the features of poetry, music, drama and dance in “love for one another; when at last each art can only love itself when mirrored in the others; when at last they cease to be disavowed arts,—then will they all have power to create the perfect artwork” (Wagner 1895/1993, 155). Unlike his musical predecessors, novelist and essayist George Eliot suggests that Wagner’s operatic theory insisted that poetry, music and drama be given equal attention and without frivolous music lines to highlight a voice but “‘must be content with the degree of prominence which falls to them in strict consonance with true dramatic development and [format]’” (Eliot in da Sousa Correa 2003, 49).\(^10\) In *Der Ring des Nibelungen/“The Ring of the Nieblungs”* (1854-1874), Wagner extended soliloquy and repartee with true dramatic development, replacing “conventional arias” and limiting the choral section (Ulrich and Pisk 1963, 535).\(^11\)

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\(^9\) In relation to “Sirens”, Joyce said, “I wrote this chapter with the technical resources of music” (Luening 1980, 185). Woolf’s short story, “A Simple Melody” (1925), epitomises her acute interest in music.

\(^10\) Eliot wrote one of the first treatise on Wagner’s music in English, “Liszt, Wagner and Weimar” (1855), in which she describes his art as an “organic evolutionary development” (da Sousa Correa 2003, 11).

\(^11\) Friedrich Nietzsche (1956) was influenced by Schopenhauer’s writings and was initially captivated by Wagner’s music, as featured in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). However, in his later essay “Nietzsche
To achieve continuity and coherence in his new artworks Wagner incorporated two principal features: the leitmotif, or musical patterns which attached a theme or emotion to an individual, such as interwoven musical memories repeated with difference at each successive entrance, and operatic form (Mahaffey 2013, 38). It is not surprising therefore, that mid-to late-nineteenth-century French poets Charles Baudelaire (1845) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1876) focussed on Wagner’s idea of musical design and the “totalizing vision that characterized Wagner’s theory of the ‘art work of the future’” (Prieto 2002a, 7). Wagner’s use of the leitmotif, as a short, fragmented and repetitive phrase, was heard by French novelist Édouard Dujardin (1888) as:

the life of the soul expressed through the incessant eruption of musical motifs … one after the other, undefined and in succession, the ‘states’ of thought, feelings and impressions brought into existence … no longer in logical order (Dujardin in Mahaffey 2013, 38).

Another influential nineteenth-century turn on music and literature arose with the Symbolist poets. In particular, Mallarmé’s innovations in language and writing have been critical to contemporary interdisciplinary studies of music and literature. Mallarmé was dedicated to language, and he resented the widely held value afforded “absolute music” (Smyth 2008, 34). Unlike the sixteenth-century French poet, Ronsard, Mallarmé did not seek a reconnection with the Greek classical idea of music and literature, and argued that the inherent link between music and literature had little to do with the Greek concept of oral performance but was constituted by the embodied “metaphorical voice that Mallarmé calls ‘l’idée’” (Prieto 2002a, 7-8). “The Idea” referred to how music became more available as a metaphor that incorporated

Contra Wagner” (1888-9) and The Case of Wagner (1888), he argues that Wagner’s music is inspired by theatrical gestures and posturing.
thought—not as voice or performance, tone or rhythm—but as a “semantic autonomy”, that is, without reducing thought to the “denotation of words” (Prieto 2002a, 8-10).

This characterisation of Symbolist thought deeply motivated Dujardin, who was already captivated by Wagner’s music. Dujardin’s novel, Les Lauriers Sont Coupés (1888), is widely credited as the first interior-monologue novel (Mahaffey 2013, 39). This writing style which depicts a character’s thoughts as overheard in the mind profoundly influenced modernist novelists writing narratives on memory or characters’ inner lives, for example, Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time (1913-27), James Joyce’s Ulysses (1922) and Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway (1925).

In the contemporary period, music has been integrated into fiction in numerous ways (Smyth 2008, 1). In this thesis, I argue that the three novels I have analysed by Morrison, Mitchell and Winton, all novels influenced by the postmodern era, signify music as expressive political power and symbolic meaning, form and style, practice and technique. Thus reading representations of music in fiction, “becomes part of an empowered interdisciplinary practice” (Benson 2006, 4). As straightforward as this seems, this idea was not entertained in literary criticism until the last two decades of the twentieth century, when a shift in the meaning of musicology, as the study of predominantly Western classical music, shifted from a focus on the internal relationships and patterns of music to one of the historical and cultural perspectives. I begin the next section with a brief overview of musicology and literary criticism and the theorists who have influenced my analysis of the three works of fiction.
Musicology and literary criticism

In its present form, musicology is the study of music that essentially investigates Western art (classical) music embedded in both “the modern university and the high culture of a great civilization” (Kramer 2011, 278). Benjamin Breuer (2011) explains that modern musicology was pioneered in Western culture during the late nineteenth century by Guido Adler (1885) as a “codified”, “scientific method”, and that it became a scholarly concern between 1860s and the First World War (Breuer 2011, iv). The shift in musicology during the 1980s resulted in musicology becoming more attentive to literary theory and resulted in a rupture between systemic (scientific) musicologists, such as David Huron (1999), Henkjan Honing (2011), V. Kofu Agawu (1991), and cultural musicologists, such as Lawrence Kramer (1990), Rose Rosengard Subotnik (1991), and Susan McClary (1991), who saw the need to study music in its socio-political, historical and cultural contexts. Theorists such as Kramer and McClary challenge the view of classical music as expressive and divinely inspired, and “independent of language”, wordless about the evolution of society and culture (2011, 280; 1991, ix-xi). “Music”, Stephen Benson writes, “needed to be put back into the world in which it is made, performed, received and evaluated” (2006, 3).

The transition towards a focus on art’s cultural embeddedness in musicology had already been achieved in literary criticism. But like musicology, traditional literary criticism of the nineteenth-century concerned the rise of the “aesthetic experience”,

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12 Since the ancient Greeks, Western music theory has wavered between the sciences and mathematics and the arts (McClary 1985, 150).
13 Scientific musicology is primarily empirical and data-oriented and involves the study of “acoustics, physiology, neuroscience”, for example, whereas humanities systemic musicology (cultural musicology) includes “philosophical aesthetics, theoretical sociology, semiotics, hermeneutics, cultural and gender studies” (Parn cott 2007, 1).
14 Over the last twenty years the shift is no longer controversial but it is still significant (Kramer 2011, 20). Kramer, McClary (1991), Subotnik (1991), Richard Leppert (1987), and others, opened the field of musicology to new interpretations that analyse its communal and affective qualities (Thomas 2006, 3).
the “symbol” and the view of literature as an object of study (Eagleton 1983, 21). The separation of literature from ordinary social life supported the view of art as an “end in itself”. With the decline in religion in the late nineteenth-century, English literary criticism and aesthetic theory emerged as an attempt to alleviate the loss of “affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together” (Eagleton 1983, 23-24).

**Key theorists**

Prieto suggests that when novelists turn to music they “tend to see in it a source of models for re-thinking the plot-based forms that have traditionally governed the novel” (2002a, 59). He explains that music understood as a metaphor in the novel can inform the psychological (interior monologue) through “cultural conventions (anthropology), of semiosis (structuralist linguistics), of the unconscious (psychoanalysis), of ideology and entrenched power structures” (2002a, 61). Prieto’s musico-literary analysis is influenced by Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art: An Approach To A Theory of Symbols* (1976) which argues that “the disclosure of certain special features of the functioning symbols ... takes effect only through application of a general symbol” (Goodman 1976, 169). Prieto, therefore, does not focus on “direct comparisons between musical and literary works” (2002a, xi); rather, he looks for general conventions shared by both literature and music categorised by Goodman as “denotation”, “exemplification”, and “expression” (2002a, xi). In similar terms, I have analysed my three novels according to the formal analogies between narrative text and music and explicit references to music in the text.
Fueling my thesis including its creative and theoretical discourse is Kramer’s suggestion that the interpretations of music and language are open to all “resources of knowledge” where “signs are indispensable but ... not determinative” (2011, 21). “Musical meaning”, according to Kramer, is neither inherent in the object of interpretation nor constructed as the meaning “encoded in the object” but in determining “their relationship” (2011, 21). Therefore, reading music in the novel can depend on prior knowledge of both music and language practices and this knowledge can demonstrate a change of social and cultural contexts in the novel.

McClary, focuses on the socio-political context of music, including feminism, gender and sexuality, in contemporary popular and classical music (1991, xi). She argues that music styles are indicative of changes in social values and are fundamentally “a human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct” (1987, 15). McClary is influenced by Theodore Adorno’s and Jacques Attali’s insights that reject the history of music “as a flat, autonomous chronological record” and that “understanding musical culture of the past [is] a way of grasping social practices of the present and future” (1985, 153).15 I am influenced by McClary’s approach to analysis, and pay attention to the reciprocal and interactive impact of music in society and culture. Such articulations, are influenced by the historical transformation of sound and digital technology that have eliminated the “purely musical” concept of music as meaningless and detached from life and culture (Kramer 2011, 20; Thomas 2006, 12-13). This reorientation, which embeds music in cultural practice, emotive experiences and sensory expression applies to all kinds of music, both classical and popular,

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15 Prieto suggests that McClary, on occasions, submits her music analysis to popular culture’s fashionable issues (2002a, 280).
Western and non-Western. Hence, I follow Benson’s example of a close reading of the verbal (metaphorical) music in the novel.

Benson however, limits his analysis to classical and romantic music in literary texts, whereas cultural historian Gerry Smyth’s investigation includes various music styles and literary genres, as does the work in this thesis. Benson makes no apology for his method of analysing music in literature that features a particular classical musicological element, such as, “performance”, “form”, or “voice”. (2006, 7). Smyth’s approach to analysis (2008, 7-8) takes up Benson’s close reading of music references in fiction, but includes both popular and classical music genres. Smyth’s method, which has been useful to this dissertation is supported by the work of literary theorist Frédérique Arroyas (2000), who explains that when music is perceived to be present in the novel or is recognised as an influence on the author, the reader may engage in a musical literary analysis, relying on acts of comparison and affinity, using elements from the domains of both language and music (2000, 84-5).

I aim to utilise an array of interpretative strategies; knowledge of musical theory, close reading, and, after Kramer, the “cued and uncued” references to music in “a full, open engagement with music as lived experience, experience rendered vivid and vivified by a host of overlapping cultural associations” (2003, 134).

Music in practice and the selection of texts

In the chapters that follow, I offer ways of reading music in three works of contemporary fiction. In Chapter One, Morrison’s critically acclaimed fifth novel, *Beloved* (1987) takes the form of a slave narrative set in Cincinnati in 1873. I read *Beloved* in terms of its techno-auditory aspects, interpreting the novel as a
contemporary remix of the African-American woman Margaret Garner’s nineteenth-century slave experience. I draw on the concept and practice of remix to understand Morrison’s engagement with Garner’s story, and to locate it within the culture and history of black experience and music. In developing my argument, I show how the novel tells the usually unspoken thoughts of slaves, omitted in the original slave narratives. I argue that these stories are heard, recorded and replayed in ways that are similar to those practised in contemporary popular audio culture, which is attentive to sound, listening and sound recording, playback and transmission. In particular, I argue that the mix of dialogues, interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness writing enables the narrator to perform like a DJ, in sampling, manipulating, looping and reconfiguring the apparently seamless flow of memories that transform the lives of the characters, and render the reader a witness to the emergent stories. To my knowledge, no other critic has offered this kind of reading of Beloved.

Cloud Atlas (2004) comprises six separate novellas and each is written in a different genre: journal, letters, crime novel, unpublished manuscript, interview transcript and oral reminiscence, and each is of approximately equal length. Situated in different historical periods and geographical contexts, the novellas are subtle yet complex hybrid texts. The overlapping stories cover the period from the nineteenth century in the Pacific Rim to the twenty-fourth century in a post-cataclysmic Hawaiian-like dystopia. In this respect Cloud Atlas’s formal structure resembles a Western art music sextet, structured like a music scale with each note-like novella setting up its own harmonic history. In Chapter Two I show how music informs its first novella, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. Music is a supplement to the narrative of Adam Ewing, its protagonist, and it works as a means of signifying and underscoring the radically
different relations of power, which variously trouble him on his travels. Following Kramer’s reflections on musical narratology, I aim to demonstrate how the novella draws attention to musical sounds, form and practice in representing the stories of oppressed and marginalised groups. In my analysis I refer to Western art music, non-Western music and musical experiences to explore the role of music in relation to different social, cultural and geographical contexts. The chapter demonstrates that Mitchell’s comprehensive understanding of Western art music’s syntax and language, his knowledge of music and literature and their developing histories enable him to compose an exquisite and original literary music novel that draws attention to social injustice and greed inherent in humanity. Besides Smyth’s brief analysis of music form in Cloud Atlas (2008, 54-8), no other musico-literary analysis of the novel exists at the time of writing this thesis.16

In the first book-length critical study of Winton’s oeuvre, Salhia Ben-Messahel acknowledges that Dirt Music’s story “arises from the music of the land and is a symphony on the theme of Western Australia” (2006, 12), but Ben-Messahel provides little discussion of the role of music in the text.17 I take up Ben-Messahel’s challenge in Chapter Three which is organised around the musical form of the sonata. Winton’s novel, Dirt Music (2001) draws on country blues to depict a critical period in the socio-political and cultural life of Australia during the 1990s. I read Dirt Music’s narrative through the sonata form, showing how this form interacts with the novel’s thematic content. My analysis examines how sonata form ruptures the linear progression of Dirt Music, and motivates the reader to make connections between, and create meaning in

16 In addition to my own research, Sarah Dillon, lecturer at The University of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland, and the editor of the first collection of critical essays on David Mitchell’s oeuvre (2011), wrote an email dated 6th June, 2012, saying that she did not know of anyone working on music in the novel, Cloud Atlas.
17 In Tim Winton: Critical Essays (2014), edited by McCredden and O’Reilly and published by UWAP, the usual themes of love, death, water and landscapes are present, but the theme of music is absent.
relation to, fragmented sections of the narrative. The sonata form is a three-part (ternary) thematic plan that refers to the structure of the exposition, its development and recapitulation with a two part (binary) harmonic outline. Using music to lure, communicate, love and heal tensions in Australia’s past, the words in the title *Dirt Music*, come to comment on the underlying structure of the novel and the cultural work it performs.

In my conclusion, I discuss how a musico-literary approach to reading/writing music in literary fiction might be particularly valuable in the contemporary context as we live in an overwhelmingly visual culture. I suggest that sharpening our auditory senses, can help us to be more attentive to the power and significance of human expression and experience. In the novel, music in all its forms, can encourage the reader to listen, understand and respond imaginatively to problems of communication in the contemporary world.
Chapter One

Beloved: A Sound Remix

Introduction

Toni Morrison’s critically acclaimed fifth novel Beloved (1987) takes the form of a slave narrative set in Cincinnati in 1873.¹ Morrison’s inventive reimagining of slave experience is important in terms of addressing how African-American histories have been subverted, dislocated, silenced and forgotten by predominantly white political and cultural narrations (Stepto 1991, 6-11).² In this chapter, I read Beloved in terms of its techno-auditory relationships, interpreting the novel as a contemporary remix of the African-American Margaret Garner’s nineteenth-century experience as a slave. The fugitive slave mother Garner came to fame in 1856 when her escape from her slave master in Kentucky was thwarted in Cincinnati, Ohio, and during national discussions on fugitive slave cases. Rather than return to slavery Garner murdered her infant daughter and attempted to kill her other three children and herself (Reinhardt 2010, ix).³ It is relevant to my analysis that Morrison wrote Beloved during the mid-1980s, just as hip hop culture was changing the face of American popular music and influencing youth culture. This period has been described as one of the most innovative in terms of sound and rhythm technologies (Weheliye 2005, 2-4). Before writing Beloved, Morrison said, in an interview with Kay Bonetti:

¹ Future references to Beloved are from the 1997 Vintage edition and will be cited parenthetically.
² Stepto identifies three modes of slave narratives: eclectic, integrated and generic (autobiography) or authenticating (novel or historiography) with each having differing literary features (1991, 5-6).
³ Morrison first accessed Garner’s story when she was editing The Black Book (1974), for Random House. Morrison’s sole source was a nineteenth century journal article citing the “important things” but she neither actively researched Garner’s story, nor is Beloved a fictionalised account of Garner’s story. Rather, Morrison used her imagination to convert her one source into an innovative novel (Reinhardt 2010, x; Weisenburger 1998, 10).
I wanted ... the books to have an effortless and an artlessness, and a non-
book quality, so that they would have a sound ... And the closest I came, I
think, to finding it was in some books written by Africans, novels that were
loose ... the kind that people could call unstructured because they were
circular, and because they sounded like somebody was telling you a story.
Yet you knew it was nothing simple, as simple as that — it was intricate ... I
wanted the sound to be something I felt was spoken and more oral and
less printed (Bonetti in Hall 1994, 89).

I draw on the concept and practice of remix to understand Morrison’s engagement
with Garner’s story, and to locate it within the culture and history of black experience
and music. It is not my intention to universalise black experience but to show and
suggest how the novel remixes and samples Garner’s slave experience. In developing
my argument, I draw attention to pertinent differences between African, African-
American and European music cultures (broadly conceived) to show how remix does
not privilege a specific music culture but crosses cultures and musical styles.4 I argue
that Beloved’s stories are heard, recorded and re-played in ways that are similar to
those practised in popular audio culture, that is, the stories are attentive to sound,
listening, “and the creative possibilities of sound recording, playback and transmission”
(Cox and Warner 2009, xiii).5 In particular, I argue that the mix of dialogues, interior
monologues and stream-of-consciousness writing in the novel enables the narrator to
perform like a DJ, in sampling, manipulating, looping and reconfiguring the flow of
memories that transform the lives of the slave characters, and render the reader an
earwitness to these emergent stories. In doing so I have drawn on the work of critics
such as Paul D. Miller, an academic, literary crit
ic, novelist and hip hop musician, who

4 The original slave narrative, Stepto argues, attempts to “authenticate the former slave’s account”, and
is heard as a dialogue of various texts and voices that include white-authored texts by abolitionists (so it
becomes an eclectic narrative). A significant issue is white America’s acceptance of the slave’s literacy
and the endorsement of abolitionists typically occurs in an introduction or preface to the slave narrative
which effectively silences the slave’s voice (1991, 8-9).
5 Audio culture includes all archival sources and is attentive to sound, including the art of listening (Cox
and Warner 2009, xiii).
is more widely known by his stage name, DJ Spooky: The Subliminal Kid. Miller identifies stream of consciousness writing in literature as the methodology used to assemble a mix where differences in time, place and culture are collapsed to create a recombinant text. In this writing, a narrator selects and guides the flow of information in a text and is, therefore, comparative to a DJ who mixes and remixes information from music samples as a protector of black aural tradition (Miller 2009, 351). To my knowledge, no critics have offered this kind of aural reading of *Beloved*.6

In *Beloved*, the pre-existing historical archive of the slaves’ fractured and marginalised narratives re-emerge as a positive power through the imagined memories that are re-presented and relocated in the novel’s social and cultural contexts. Morrison said that her aim in *Beloved* was to transform her characters from “the historical into the personal … from the page into the imagination” (Andrews and McKay 1999, 11). Related to this re-presentation, and a significant feature of the novel, is that the language of the novel is perpetually interrupted. Thereby, sentences are often disjointed as the sampled information is re-played then improvised by the narrator. Improvisation is recognised as an important feature of African and African-American music cultures and its core criteria and codes are said to be similar to speech acts that rely on pre-existing material (Small 1998, 27). Through improvisation, the narrator provides the reader with a new sense of history based on the “rememories” (36) of the thoughts and feelings omitted in the original slave narratives.

“Rememories” is a term Morrison uses in *Beloved* for a memory of a place, or an institution-like slavery, a memory which exists even if the place or institution seems to be forgotten, or is destroyed (36). In this sense, *Beloved* parallels the original African-

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6 Weheliye (2005) also offers new insights and modes in understanding sonic Afro-Modernity from a techno-auditory position.
American slave narratives, but addresses their implicit and unsayable trauma, through both poetics and, I argue, music.

Confirming the important relationship of music to her writing, in an interview with literary critic and author Nellie Y. McKay, Morrison confirms that her writing style was “not like James Joyce ... not like Thomas Hardy ... not like Faulkner ... [but] like something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music” (Morrison in McKay 1994, 152; italics in original). Morrison says of the importance of re-interpreting the past: “I know I can’t change the future but I can change the past. It is the past not the future, which is infinite. Our past was appropriated. I am one of the people who has to reappropriate it” (Morrison in Taylor-Guthrie 1994, xiii-xiv).

*Beloved* is a complex novel that addresses the terrible practice of slavery through the depiction of individual and marginalised characters who vocalise their experience of historic events so that they may reshape their world. Such events include the Middle Passage, which refers to the Atlantic slave trade to the New World and The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which decreed the fate of slaves recaptured in free states in the USA.

That Morrison’s writerly use of innovative blues modes and jazz techniques draws attention to socio-political and historical issues has been well-documented (Eckstein 2006, 271-283; Rice 2000, 153-180; Reed 2007, 55-71; Kitts 2006, 495-523; Fallon 2006, 524-541; Kodat 2008, 159-171; Rodrigues 1991, 733-54; and Morgan 2008).

Clearly, *Beloved* cuts across a range of eclectic music genres as the novel references spiritual, blues, jazz, operatic, classical and ballad samples (a fragment of information, a sound, or rhythm selected for the remix). Morrison herself argues that this is most

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7 Cary Nelson makes the point that literary history recovery is not an “innocent process”, as cultural and psychological episodes must be revised and rewritten (Stepto 1991, x).
appropriate as “Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into ... music” (Morrison in Cox and Warner 2009, 351). Unlike Morrison’s novel Jazz (1992), the role of music in Beloved has seldom been discussed, in spite of the novel having attracted prolific scholarly attention.\(^8\)

Literary theorist Alexander Weheliye suggests that while contemporary criticism of major black writers, such as Morrison, discusses blues music and the oral tradition, it tends to be limited in scope and neglects sound technology as a new contribution to the field (2005, 6). The importance of sound technology in reading Beloved, I argue, lies in what Miller refers to as sound technologies’ tendency to fragmentation: “Each and every source sample is fragmented and bereft of prior meaning—kind of like a future without a past. The samples are given meaning only when re-presented in the assemblage of the mix” (2009, 349-50). Miller’s description fits Beloved, where each memory leads to another memory, creating a deep sense of continuity in the slaves’ voices as each sound loop is altered, remixed and represented.

In her essay “Memory, Creation and Writing” (1984), Morrison explains that her intent in writing is not to make the reader comfortable but uneasy, compelling the reader to actively respond to the text as if there were an illiterate or pre-reader: “on creating this discomfort and unease in order to insist that the reader rely on another body of knowledge”(Morrison 1984, 387). Beloved’s narrator, like a DJ, is not merely an artist but a dispenser of material from various “temporal, spatial and cultural locations” (Miller 2009, 348). Audio culture, therefore, offers the possibility of a new reading of Beloved, drawing on the slave experience as a mix where the creator and remixer (author and narrator) are linked together by a variety of historical, cultural and

\(^8\) Eckstein (2006), identifies music references as substantive in Beloved and expresses his surprise at the lack of critical engagement with its musical scope.
sound materials creating a flawless web that “mirrors the modern macrocosm of cyberspace where different voices and visions constantly collide and cross fertilize one another. The linkage between memory, time, and place, are all externalized and made accessible to the listener from the viewpoint of the DJ who makes the mix” (Miller 2009, 351). Thus, the mix that informs Beloved can be said to transform its original source and rewrite its own history.

Retelling slave narratives: the story of Margaret Garner

It is on the historical record that in late January 1856, the Ohio River froze, and encouraged by the unusual weather conditions, groups of slaves in neighbouring parts of Kentucky hatched a plan to escape across the river from Covington, Kentucky to Cincinnati, Ohio, a free state. Margaret Garner and her husband Robert, their four children, along with Robert’s parents, Simon and Mary, stole two horses and a sleigh from their slave master. They then crossed the frozen river on foot. In Ohio, the slaves separated into smaller groups to avoid the suspicion of local residents.

Eventually, the Garners reached a safe house run by a free slave named Kite, a relative of Margaret Garner’s who had been bought out of slavery by his father. On the outskirts of Cincinnati, the house was on the river road, near Mill Creek Bridge. Later that day, Kite sought advice from Levi Coffin, a well-known Underground Railroad worker, to help arrange the Garners’ escape route north.

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9 I have used a number of written representations to access Margaret Garner’s story including Bassett (1856) in Reinhardt 2010, May (1856) in Andrews and McKay (1999), Reinhardt (2010) and Weisenburger (1998). Reinhardt draws on commentary for his book from New York, Cincinnati and Kentucky newspapers, speeches, interviews and sermons of the time.

10 Some critics name Margaret Garner’s husband Simon Jr., while other commentators call him Robert. I name him Robert following Reinhardt and Weisenburger (Reinhardt 2010, 9; Weisenburger 1998, 34-5).

11 I use capital letters for Underground Railroad following the example of Beloved. The Underground Railroad was an organisation where fugitive slaves were helped by “conductors” who led them on a path
Meanwhile, in Kentucky, the slaves’ escape had not gone unnoticed, and by the time Kite returned to his house, it was surrounded by the Garners’ slave master, a US deputy Marshall, an Ohio sheriff and posse. A large, silent crowd of onlookers gathered outside the house as the fugitive slaves barricaded themselves inside, armed with a firearm and batons (May 1856/1999, 26). The sheriff’s men stormed the house, but the ensuing fight was short-lived. Once inside, the officers discovered an infant girl, the Garner’s daughter, bleeding to death. Her throat had been slit and she was bleeding profusely (May 1856/1999, 26; Reinhardt 2010, 5). Screams from another room diverted the officers’ attention away from the Garners’ child, to an adjoining room where they found a pregnant Margaret Garner standing over her two young boys and a baby girl, brandishing a bloodied knife. The boys had been cut across the head and the baby had a large lump on her forehead, but was not seriously wounded. Garner vowed to the authorities that she would kill all four children and herself rather than endure a life of slavery (Reinhardt 2010, 5; Bassett 1856/2010, 215).

Under heavy guard, the runaway slaves were imprisoned in a Cincinnati jail while a US marshal and county sheriff argued over who had official authority over them. Historians are divided as to whether the local community supported the slaves (May 1856/1999, 26). The case was extensively reported in Cincinnati newspapers (May 1856/1999, 26-33; Reinhardt 2010, 177-209), which described Robert, the husband as

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12 Simon, Mary and Robert were the property of Mr James Marshall and Margaret was owned by John P. Gaines. Archibald K. Gaines, returning to Kentucky from Arkansas, bought Margaret and her four children from his oldest brother, John. Marshall and Gaines owned plantations in close proximity to each other (Reinhardt 2010, 10-11).

13 Reinhardt and Weisenburger confirm that at the time of Garner’s escape and trial, she was pregnant with her fifth child (Reinhardt 2010, 11, 14, 289 n. 22; Weisenburger 1998, 126).

14 May suggests that the local community made “no active desire to effect a rescue” (1856/1999, 26). Reinhardt indicates that there was support for the slaves from an intimidating multiracial group (2010, 6-7).
pleasant-looking and reliable, and Garner as intelligent and articulate (May 1856/1999, 26, 28). At this time, however, debate was raging over the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), which stipulated that it was a crime to assist runaway slaves, and that slaves, re-captured in free states, must be returned to their slave masters.¹⁵

At the heart of the Garner case rested an interpretation of slaves as either legal “property”, or “persons”. The Fugitive Slave Law excluded slaves from speaking for themselves as they “could only be known through their slave masters”, thus denying the slaves the right of testifying to their own advantage (Miller 1996, 256). As Franny Nudelman (1992) indicates, a fugitive slave could, however, approach a journalist or white abolitionist lawyer. Garner’s case became a focus for the notable anti-slavery lawyer, John Jolliffe, to argue that the Fugitive Slave Law was unconstitutional. This was part of an attempt to have Garner charged with murder implying recognition by society. It was through the media, therefore, rather than through the legal process, that a slave had the freedom to “speak the unspeakable” (Nudelman 1992, 947).

Abolitionist, orator, and proto-feminist Lucy Stone described Garner in the newspapers at this time as a “quintessential American hero”, likening her to the Americans who died at the hands of the British during the War of Independence (Rushdy 1999, 43). Another contemporary commentator, Rev. P.C. Bassett, after visiting Garner in prison, reported that she was not mad, but cool-headed, and very intelligent. He confirmed that she had decided to kill her children to protect them from slavery (Plasa 1998, 40; Reinhardt 2010, 215).

The court hearing found that Mary Garner, Garner’s mother-in-law—herself a mother of eight—did not assist Garner, but neither condemned nor approved her

¹⁵ Under a federal warrant issued by the authority of a US Marshall the Garner’s were taken into custody at the request of Margaret Garner’s slave owner, Archibald Gaines (May 1856/1999, 25; Reinhardt 2010, 23-8).
actions (Reinhardt 2010, 8, 216). The men, Robert and Simon, however, were charged with being accessories to the murder and found guilty. Both men declared to the jury that they would rather hang than return to slavery. As the Fugitive Slave Law stated that slaves were the property of their slave masters, they were returned to them.

The Garners’ case inspired furious debate and became the longest fugitive slave trial in American history. Although the Fugitive Slave Law denied runaway slaves the right to testify at their trials, Commissioner Pendery permitted Margaret Garner to tell of her excursions from Kentucky to the free state of Ohio, some years earlier, in the company of her slave master and his family (Reinhardt 2010, 64). Garner’s testimony was transcribed verbatim by a journalist from the Cincinnati Daily Gazette (1856) and, according to Mark Reinhardt, this is the only record of Garner’s “unmediated” words (2010, 100). Excursions into free states, like Ohio, were significant as they provided slaves with exemption from the Fugitive Slave Law and led to immediate emancipation. The Garners’ lawyers argued that this was sufficient evidence to liberate the Garners and their children. However, the Fugitive Slave Law was found to take precedence as Margaret Garner did not refuse to return to Kentucky with her slave master’s family after the earlier excursion. On this basis, the court found she had voluntarily waived her right to freedom.

After the convoluted court case, Garner and her husband Robert returned to their slave masters. There is some conjecture regarding their fate, but it remains uncertain (Rushdy 1999, 44; Reinhardt 2010, 142). Garner’s slave experience was often revisited

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16 Bassett (1856/2010) records that Mary Garner shared the same cell with Margaret. His records show that Mary spent twenty years as a professor of religion, and he speaks with passion of her hope that death will liberate her from slavery (Reinhardt 2010, 12-3).
17 For a comprehensive reading of Garner’s case and the fugitive slave law, see Weisenburger (1998) and Reinhardt (2010).
in the ensuing years, including in 1857, when her story inspired many others including the ex-slave, activist and writer, Frederick Douglass’s speech on “philosophy of reform” which stated that the “progress for human liberty shows that all concessions yet made ... have been born of earnest struggle” (Douglass in Reinhardt 2010, 225-7).18

Ultimately, however, Garner’s story was all but forgotten, until Beloved was published.19 Morrison has stated that her reason for replaying this slave narrative in Beloved was to address black readers who had “repressed, forgotten or ignored slave narratives, and not as an act to convince a white audience of the slave’s humanity” (Plasa 1998, 56).20

The story of Beloved

The subjects of Beloved are the historical characters of the Garner family represented as Sethe (Margaret) and Halle Suggs (Robert); Denver and Beloved as Margaret Garner’s daughters, and Baby Suggs characterised as Garner’s mother-in-law, Mary. In Beloved, Halle is not able to escape Kentucky with Sethe, and is presumed dead.

Morrison invents a representative for Halle as the slave Paul D Garner (referencing Margaret’s surname), who becomes Sethe’s lover. Morrison’s reimagining of Garners’ slave experience can be understood as a remix, in which the historical story is sampled and reconfigured. Circular in its logic, remix reinvents actual events rather than

18 Garner was well known in her lifetime, her story was repeated by nineteenth century poets, cartoonists, journalists. In 1868, a New York banker commissioned Thomas Satterwhite Noble to paint a portrait of Margaret Garner (Reinhardt 2010: 261-62). Douglass who attempted to escape slavery in 1835, taught himself to read and write, and wrote an autobiographical account of his ordeal, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1845/1991); he is one of the founding African-American literary figure (Stepto 1991, ix, 16-26).

19 Morrison’s text revitalised interest in Garner’s story and spawned numerous academic commentaries. Yanuck, J (1953) is said to be the most adept source on Garner before Beloved’s publication. (Davis 1981, 21; 29; 205; Gilroy 1993, 63–71; Middleton 1987, 20–32; Wolff 1991, 417–440). See Reinhardt (2010) and Weisenburger (1998) for thorough references of the case post-Beloved.

20 A decade after the publication of Beloved, Toni Morrison remixed the text of Beloved in the libretto of Margaret Garner, an opera, which premiered at the Michigan Opera Theatre May 7, 2005.
negates them, these include: life on the plantation; a plan of escape; the Underground Railroad; the attempt to re-capture the fugitive slave mother and her children by the slave owner, a sheriff and posse; the baby’s murder; the effect of Fugitive Slave Law; the trial and newspaper reports; the slave mother’s personality; accounts of abolitionists’ protests and the reported behaviour of the local African-American community living in the town of Cincinnati. In addition, powerful scenarios introduce new material, such as, the haunting of 124, the house of refuge, by the murdered baby girl’s ghost, and an account of the Middle Passage.\(^{21}\)

_Beloved_ is set in Cincinnati in 1873, seven years after the Civil War. The novel is divided into three sections, and begins abruptly, in _medias res_, usurping the traditional slave narrative form.\(^{22}\) According to literary theorist Carl Plasa, the conventional role of slave narratives, involved the slave testifying of their experience to persuade white people of their humanity: “This is my historical life—my singular, special example that is personal, but that also represent the race” and, “I write this text to persuade other people—you, the reader, who is probably not black—that we are human beings worthy of God’s grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery” (1998, 44).\(^{23}\) In _Beloved_, starting the narrative in _medias res_ allows the DJ-like narrator to destabilise the conventional historical account by sampling events from the past to bring about an alternative outcome for the novel’s characters. I argue that this approach is consistent with audio culture where samples are meaningful only when re-presented in a new

\(^{21}\) Barbara Christian argues in her essay “Fixing Methodologies: _Beloved_” (1993), that few critics have discussed what she terms, “the ‘unspeakable event’: the Middle Passage” and she suggests Morrison uniquely accomplished this in _Beloved_. Prior to the publication of _Beloved_ there was scant information on the Middle Passage (Christian 1993, 6; 1999, 204).

\(^{22}\) Morrison is committed to beginning her novels in _medias res_ and explains that the technique in _Beloved_ is “excessively demanding” as “the reader is snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense” (Morrison 2000, 265).

mix, allowing time, place and memory to eclipse the original version’s elements (Miller 2009, 351-2).

In the novel, white abolitionists and “The Colored Ladies of Delaware” (183) are successful in keeping Sethe from hanging, after she murdered her baby. At the opening of the novel, it is 1873 and Sethe now lives with a surviving daughter, Denver (now a young woman of eighteen) at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati. Sethe’s two sons, haunted by their mother’s murderous act and the presence of the spiteful unnamed baby ghost at the house, ran away as soon as each boy turned thirteen. This was just before Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law, died. Baby Suggs—an unschooled preacher, had been bought out of slavery by Halle, her son. She lived at 124 until her death in 1864, the year before the end of the Civil War. Every Saturday afternoon in the Clearing, “a wide-open place cut deep in the woods” (87), Baby Suggs had conducted church services for the marginalised black community of Cincinnati through the spoken word of love and dance. After the murder of her granddaughter, by Sethe, Baby Suggs retired to her bed and died of a broken heart, “her great big old heart began to collapse” (89).

Paul D Garner, who had been Sethe’s fellow slave at Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation, twenty years before, arrives unexpectedly at 124, after escaping from a chain gang. He is looking forward to finding work and to a reunion with Baby Suggs. The novel then cross-fades to tell the earlier story of the slaves on the Sweet Home


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24 The house of refuge 124 is written in numerals in the way plantations were named (Morrison 2000, 265).
25 Baby Suggs had been living in 124 for eight years before Sethe’s arrival. Baby Suggs’s son, Halle, arranged her freedom and her whereabouts in Cincinnati was common knowledge amongst the slaves (Morrison 1997, 146, 177).
plantation owned by Mr Garner, a kindly slave owner and his wife Lillian. When Mr Garner dies in dubious circumstances, Lillian employs a relative of her husband as Sweet Home administrator, a man named Schoolteacher. Schoolteacher is influenced by Darwinism, and he is cruel. The plantation becomes a site of trauma for the slaves, who soon planned their escape (197). The escapees included Sethe, Halle, Paul D, Paul A, and Sixo. The half-brothers Paul A, Paul D and Paul F (Paul F was sold to another plantation owner by Mrs Garner soon after Garner died to keep the plantation financially viable) are all called by their middle name, suggesting the slaves’ lack of individuality for their owners. Later when Sethe escapes, she has no idea of what happened to the other slaves. Paul A and Halle (we hear later in a dialogue between Sethe and Paul D) were caught and hung, and Sixo was incinerated (197-8). Paul D, was sold to another slave master, where he suffered humiliating imprisonment and torture. His memories, represented as unspeakable thoughts are sung in Beloved; he says to Sethe: “Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul” (71).

On his arrival at 124, Paul D has no idea that Baby Suggs is dead, or whether Sethe’s escape was successful. He is also unaware of the murder and Sethe’s short imprisonment. Sethe informs him that Baby Suggs is dead, that her boys have run away, that the infant girl did not survive, that her pregnancy was successful and Denver is now a grown woman, and 124 is haunted by a baby ghost. When Paul D becomes Sethe’s lover, she invites him to stay at 124 for as long as he wants. But tensions rise between Paul D and Denver after Paul D exorcises the baby ghost from the house, only to have it return in the guise of a homeless young woman, who calls herself Beloved, the name Sethe had inscribed on the baby’s gravestone.

26 A cross fade is similar to a flashback as an audio editing device that makes a smooth transition between two different entities by foregrounding or backgrounding sounds, for example, the past and the present.
Paul D has seen numerous homeless women and children wandering the back streets, both pre-and post-Civil War. He does not notice Beloved’s devotion to Sethe and cannot understand why Beloved is forcing him out of the house. Paul D leaves 124 after an altercation with Sethe. At this juncture, Beloved gains control of the household and begins to psychologically torment Sethe and Denver, who come to believe that Beloved is the murdered baby. Both women become subordinate to Beloved’s wiles, until Denver recognises the danger of holding onto the past, and she takes action and restores order.

The samples of memories repeated in the characters’ dialogues and in their interior monologues create loops where the previously interior thoughts of the original story are still recognisable. For example, when Denver prepared to tell her birth story to Beloved:

She swallowed twice to prepare for the telling, to construct out of the strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved ... Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it (76-8).

These loops generate personal narratives of the same events, such as Denver’s birth and the baby’s murder. The loops show how memories are shared, recorded, manipulated and transmitted by the narrator to talk over the original source. In the following sections I discuss remix technology, before comparing and contrasting relevant and crucial differences between African, African-American and European music cultures. I then show these influences in Beloved through an analysis of the novel’s use of remix.
Reading *Beloved* as remix technology

In remix culture everything old is made new again as sound loops are cut from sound archives using digital software. Both sampling and remix originate with the art form of US black radio identities of the 1940s and 1950s, who preceded the 1960s technical innovations of Jamaican sound system culture (Weheliye 2005, 87; Rose 1994, 34-41).

In the early 1970s, a number of Jamaican DJs, in particular, DJ Kool Herc, acknowledged as the originator of hip hop, arrived in America and influenced the early development of New York DJ’s hip hop culture (Weheliye 2005, 87-92; Hebdige 1987, 137). Tricia Rose explains that many contemporary African-American musicians were initially trained to fix and service new digital technologies, and these newly acquired practical skills eventually informed the creation of innovative black music genres (1994, 63). The relationship between new technology and musical innovation is a long one. The phonograph (invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison) which revolutionised sound manipulation enabled sound artists and technicians to split sound from its origins and reproduce new spatial and temporal sonic landscapes (Weheliye 2005, 7). A proliferation of inventive sound technologies followed and, in the twentieth century, this generated a variety of music styles, including ambient, electronic rock and industrial metal. Audio technologies, such as phonographs, radios, tape recorders, CDs, the Internet, iTunes, iPods, MP3 players, Napster and iPhones have provided a range of composers, musicians, artists and writers with opportunities to sample, record, cut and paste, remix, mash and hack material (using popular terminology). Such manipulated, re-configured and endlessly remixed sound “breaks free of the old associations” to create new contexts, ideas and stories (Miller 2004, 25).
I use Miller’s theories of “rhythm science” and remix to demonstrate that the memory of an event in *Beloved* is represented as being like an infectious virus. Each character’s memories are sampled, edited, distorted, remixed, and replayed in other characters’ sound loops by the narrator who, like a DJ, processes and dispenses the sound material to foreground individual vocals that form links between memory, time and place (Miller 2004, 25; 2009, 351). In this creative process, the historic information in a character’s monologue pops up as a sound interface in other characters’ dialogues and monologues. For example, sound information sampled from a dialogue between the character Paul D and Stamp Paid (*Beloved’s* Underground Railroad man) pops up later in a dialogue between Stamp Paid and Ella, his Underground Railroad co-worker.  

Paul D had said to Stamp:

That ain’t her mouth … I don’t know, man. Don’t look like it to me. I know Sethe’s mouth and this ain’t it” (154).

Paul D does not believe what he sees—that is, he distrusts the visual—but he believes what he hears when Stamp reads the article to him as the reader discovers through Stamp’s dialogue with Ella:

I told him about—I showed him the newspaper, about the—what Sethe did. Read it to him. He left that very day” (187).

Loops in remix reconfigure the sounds in numerous ways, as Miller explains:

“There’s always more than one map to the territory” (2004, 9). In the above excerpt the reader is not hearing an exact repetition of the information sampled from the first dialogue in the second, but its transformation includes new material. The narrator files, samples, edits, loops, and reconfigures Garner’s historical information in the

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27 Henceforth Stamp Paid’s name is abbreviated to Stamp in keeping with the novel.
28 Repetition in cultural forms tends to represent its transformation (Snead 1981, 146-7).
remix, and it is in this context, Walter J. Ong suggests, that the originality of the new narrative is embedded (1982, 35-6).

As a derivative art, remix selects tracks from an original story or song, to cut and mix. Sampling voices and appropriate sounds from a variety of sources allows the author or composer to decide what to include and highlight in the remixed version. An example of the narrator’s selection of material in Beloved is the sampling and continual remixing of the indecipherable noise heard by Stamp (in Chapter nineteen).

A conflagration of hasty voices—loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. The speech wasn’t nonsensical … But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn’t describe or cipher it to save his life. All he could make out was the word mine (172; italics in original).

The confused sounds of the “hasty voices” in the above excerpt anticipate the most poetic chapters (twenty to twenty-three, of the twenty-eight chapters). In these the DJ-like narrator selects, splices, and foregrounds the hasty voices as three individual voices heard by the reader as monologues. Sethe’s is re-presented in (Chapter twenty), Denver’s (Chapter twenty-one), and Beloved’s (Chapter twenty-two). A sample of each monologue from each chapter is given below, and in each, it is possible to hear the sound references, overlaps (underlined) and the disconjunctures:

[Sethe] Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She came back to me of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing. I didn’t have to explain to her before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. Paul D ran her off so she had no choice but to come back to me in the flesh … Some other way, he said. There must have been some other way. Let Schoolteacher haul us away … My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma’am is. They stopped me from getting us there, but they didn’t stop you from getting here … She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine (200-4).

[Denver] Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother’s milk. The first thing I heard after not hearing anything was the
sound of crawling up the stairs. She was my secret company until Paul D came. He threw her out ... I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I’m scared of her because of it ... She cut my head off every night ... Beloved. She’s mine (205-9).

[Beloved] I [a]m Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from the leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way ... how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place I stop ... the man on my face is dead ... his face is not mine ... the iron circle is around my neck ... I come out of the blue after the bottoms of my feet swim away from me I come up I need to find a place to be the air is heavy I am not dead I am not there is a house ... she is smiling at me ... now we can join a hot thing (210-13).

In the above excerpts, the words sound confused even irrational, as the narrator blurs Garner’s original story with Sethe’s narrative. Sethe’s and Denver’s interior monologues are punctuated, but the ghost Beloved’s monologue is free from grammatical formality, adopting a topographic space that is otherworldly. This other world suggests African culture where the dead and the unborn are linked to the present by living individuals who connect past and future to both the physical and supernatural realms (Mbiti in Small 1998). In these terms, Sethe and Denver are characters related to the ghost Beloved, the historical Garner, and her murdered baby girl.

Remix is continuous, and through the cut and mix of the individual monologues in Chapters twenty to twenty-two, the voices of Sethe, Denver and Beloved are reconfigured in Chapter twenty-three. (See below.) The disjointed, ruptured poetic blocks of sound heard in Chapter twenty-three come to represent the text’s underlying and recycled traumas. Beloved represents opposition to the long-standing omission of the original slave experience from the narrative of American history (Travis 1994, 186).

In traditional African culture, humans become mature in society, and their model for society is family. Small explains that because humans are not “confined to the living, therefore, love and generosity are due no less to the dead, who in turn watch over the living community” (Small 1998, 20).
Thus, the remix traces motherhood and the Middle Passage simultaneously and articulates the previously unspoken trauma that reveals deeper motifs. “[Sethe] was about to smile at me when the men without skin [white men] came and took us up into the sunlight with the dead and shoved them into the sea” (216). Such shattered responses engendered by the repetitive and multivocal sounds of the women’s dialogues and monologues challenge the reader as noise, spliced to create the solo parts, is transformed and finally transmitted as a coherent and powerful narrative.

The three female voices in Chapter twenty-three might be recognised by the reader as informed by African-American music, beginning with a solo rant by Beloved:

I [a]m Beloved and she is mine. Sethe is the one that picked the flowers, yellow flowers in the place before the crouching. Took them away from their green leaves. They are on the quilt now where we sleep ... Sethe went into the sea. She went there. They did not push her. She went there. She was getting ready to smile at me and when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face or hers ... Now I have found her in this house. She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. She is mine.

. . . (214).

Unlike her monologue in Chapter twenty-two, Beloved’s rant is now semi-punctuated, with the conclusion of her song informed by an exaggerated ellipsis on a new line, positioned just below the final full stop, as demonstrated in the above quote. The ellipsis is a written example of a hip hop break in a song that can be traced to the music of Africa as I will later go on to discuss. In Beloved, the ellipsis, or break, momentarily suspends the writing before picking up words in a blues song built on a dialogue between Sethe and Beloved. The dialogue suggests the musical form of call and response. Call and response singing tends to be heard by the listener as dramatic expressions of emotion. Call and response techniques alternate under strict rhythmic
rules, and are shaped by the social occasion. The improvised singing might go on for hours picking up on preceding lyrics (Small 1998, 27).

Tell me the truth. Didn’t you come from the other side?
Yes. I was on the other side.
You came back because of me?
Yes.
You rememory me?
Yes. I remember you.
You never forgot me?
Your face is mine.
Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.
Where are the men without skin?
Out there. Way off.
Can they get in here? (215).

The duet continues until another break ruptures and suspends the writing. The break is represented in the text, not by an ellipsis, but as an extended visual space representing as an acoustic pause, or silence. Following the topographical silence and on a new line, Denver’s voice cuts in on Sethe, with a call to Beloved.

We played by the creek.
I was in the water.
In the quiet time we played.
The clouds were noisy and in the way.
When I needed you, you came to be with me.
I needed her face to smile.
[...]
Don’t love her too much.
I am loving her too much (216; ellipsis in italics not in original).

Following this call and response, recorded by the sisters, Sethe joins her daughters in a haunting choral piece, which samples the pre-existing material heard above but is written without full stops indicating an interactive, improvised free-flowing mix, that suggests the oneness of the group, joined as they are in persecution and experience.

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine

I have your milk
I have your smile
I will take care of you

I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine (216-7; ellipsis in italics not in original).³⁰

The stream-of-consciousness style of writing is a literary equivalent to a music remix (Miller 2009, 354). A mix in music either develops a life of its own, or is fractured, and left to circle around the beat as the changing “same”, as in the words “you” and “mine” repeated in the excerpt above.

What is immediately striking in Morrison’s use of remix as a narrative strategy is the emotive language, missing in the original nineteenth-century slave narratives. Moreover, when the narrator adds a break, or interrupts the slaves’ and marginalised characters’ songs, dances and iterative narratives of historical events, it is an opportunity for the author to insert new material into the text. In Beloved, the new material includes references to Dred Scott (173), the Settlement Fee (249), the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio (183), the baby’s funeral (183) and all these extend the original story, creating a reflexive remix that transforms and challenges this source material. In this sense, of the three basic types of remix, (extended, selective, and reflexive) reflexive is the most appropriate type for Beloved as it allegorises and

³⁰ “You are mine” is repeated so often throughout the novel it seems to suggest “your story is my story” which is Morrison’s desire for her black readers.
extends the art of sampling by adding or deleting material, and although the original tracks are recognisable the remixed version “challenges the original” and “claims autonomy” (Navas 2010, 159).

In music, improvements in audio skills such as “beat mixing” and “beat juggling” on two turntables allows DJs to seamlessly manipulate and merge different records, spawning a culture of remixed sounds and new compositions. With such advanced sound innovations, DJs disrupt the seamless flow of techno disco sounds in order to stress the rhythmic elements of older records known as (“the breakbeat”). As well, the technique of scratching is used, where the breakbeat of an older melody is substituted or dubbed by a different rhythmic solo (Weheliye 2005, 87). In general, when creating a breakbeat, DJs isolate and lengthen sampled material to form the base of a new track. When “scratching”, they move a vinyl record back and forth on one of two turntables assisted by a cross fader, to manipulate sounds and match the rhythm of the record playing on the other turntable.

The breakbeat and scratching strategies of remix can be applied at a macro level in Beloved, where the older melody of Margaret Garner’s story is substituted by the new rhythmic solo of Sethe’s narrative. In addition, the breakbeat can be heard in reverse at a microcosmic level. For example, in the text below, the narrative is temporarily suspended in a small scene where an old memory of the plantation comes rolling out in all of its beauty, dubbed in Sethe’s memory as:

the plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping at the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes in shameless beauty … remembering the soughing trees rather than the boys hanging (6).
In the above excerpt, the sound of water produces an acoustic space as the narrator erases the emotional trauma Sethe experienced at the Sweet Home plantation. The traumatic visual space—“the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path”—triggers a memory that is then refitted, recycled and reshaped by the narrator as Sethe remembers the beautiful sycamore trees of the plantation as well as the old memory associated with the boys hanging from boughs of trees (6).³¹

Bringing visual and acoustic elements into the discussion draws attention to the senses. Philosopher Marshall McLuhan, is interested in the way “our senses shape ... and are shaped by their environment” (Cox and Warner, 2009, 67). In the electronic milieu of today, remix does not take place in a cultural or political void; it crosses cultures and music styles. Rose (1994), in her revision of rap music, acknowledges that Western, mainly European, classical music “continues to serve as the primary intellectual ... reference for ‘real’ musical complexity and composition.” She suggests a comparative study of African, African-derived and European musical cultures “is of the utmost importance if we are to make sense of rap’s music and the responses to it” (1994, 65). And whilst McClary claims that the predominant music in the twentieth-century flows from the blues, other musicologists mourn the passing of a “main stream” arguing instead for “stylistic pluralism” (2000,32). For these reasons, I offer a brief, but necessary overview of African, African-American and European music cultures that are innovatively remixed in Beloved.

³¹ McLuhan contrasts “visual space” and “acoustic space” as different modes of engaging with the world (2009, 68).
African, African-American and European music cultures and Beloved

It would take volumes to fully explore the diversity of African, African-American and European music cultures, and their historical contexts, including the rupture to West African society by the slave trade; the Renaissance’s impact on European philosophy and the arts following the Middle Ages; and the interaction between African and European music cultures in America following migration during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For the purpose of this discussion, I confine myself broadly to African, European and African-American music-making cultures in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Musicologist Christopher Small argues that “temporal, physical and social continuity” tends to inform all aspects of African life including economics, politics, religion, and the arts, especially music and dance, which often evolve as “a single unity” within the community (Small 1998, 20-2). African music, rich in percussive, dissonant sounds, can include purring, thumps, and whistles, mimic any of “nature, animals, spirits and speech” (Maultsby 2000, 162). Manipulating the mouth, tongue, cheeks, or percussing the chest with both hands can create noisy sounds arranged in order and tempo to form musical compositions shaped by the event and, sometimes, abandoned just as quickly as they are adopted (Small 1998, 26-7).

Many African musicians, therefore, do not focus on music and dance as such but on the social gathering which reinforces the importance of human life and the religious framework which shapes it (Small 1998, 25). Historian P. Sterling Stuckey explains that for Africans in nineteenth-century American slave culture, “dance was primarily devotional, like a prayer … The whole body moving to complex rhythms … often linked

to the continuing cycle of life, to the divine (1988, 25). Such concepts inform *Beloved’s* weekly church service conducted by Baby Suggs, as the sounds of laughing, dancing, crying, and loving their own flesh are heard as “groundlife shuddered ... for the living and the dead” (87-8).

By contrast, European culture generally separates the arts from religion and politics (Small 1998, 20). Typically, Western classical music does not emerge from social occasion but draws on melodic progression and mathematical principles in an isolated compositional practice (score) and performance-oriented music. On this basis many Europeans did not acknowledge music that “did not conform to their rules and scales” (Epstein and Sands 2006, 36).

Western classical music tends to be goal-oriented and characterised by melody and harmonic resolution as it strives for consistency “of pitch, of time, of timbre and of vibrato” (Borneman in McClary 2000, 35).

African and African-American music has long been acknowledged for its emphasis and organisation on “repetitive words and rhythms” heard in the “slave songs, blues, spirituals and jazz” (Snead 1981, 150). Dynamic rhythm informs the lyrics of work songs sung by Paul D. For example,

*Little rice, little bean,*
*No meat in between.*
*Hard work ain’t easy,*
*Dry bread ain’t greasy* (40; italics in original).

Rhythmic complexity and repetition are to African and African-American music as harmony is to Western classical music. Of significance, what is referred to as African-American music, originated in America, and has been influenced by the exposure to Western music traditions, in nineteenth-century American society, including folk
songs, ballads, dances and marches (McClary 2000, 37). However, it is recognised that a collective core memory of African sounds was maintained by the slaves, which informs African-American music with a wide range of notes that may sound out-of-tune to Europeans. Such distorted, vibrato-like sounds, imitate African music tradition where the pitch is skewed as the note is approached from above or below, the timbre is percussive while the musical idea is prompted rather than fixed (Borneman in McClary 2000, 35). In the excerpt below, such an example of indeterminate pitch and percussive sound is suggested in Beloved’s voice:

“What might your name be?” asked Paul D.
“Beloved,” she said, and her voice was so low and rough each one looked at the other two. They heard the voice first—later the name (52). After four weeks they still had not got used to the gravelly voice and the song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay (60).

European music by comparison, tends to seek resolution in tonal harmony, albeit in the anticipation of a final harmonic chord or perfect cadence. But the organisation of sounds and rhythms, as well as the spontaneous outbursts of energy in African and African-American music defies closure. African and African-American music breaks (“the cut”) melodic and rhythmic threads by repeating pre-existing material, but never repeating the same music twice. Such cuts tend to interrupt the flow of music and skip back to earlier phrases in the music or song, offering the musician and the listener, a new beginning by introducing a different pattern of timbre or pitch. (Snead 1981, 151). Repetition, James Snead explains, is necessary in African and African-American musical forms as it organises the possibility of the characteristic improvisation and call-and-response aspects that develop over a common beat, shaped by the “black church”, “black folklore”, “poetry” and “song” (1981, 151).

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33 In The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Don Randel defines a cadence as “a melodic or harmonic configuration [of notes] that creates a sense of resolution (finality)” (1999, 105).
I draw on the role of repetition in remix to understand Morrison’s engagement with Garner’s story, and to locate it within the culture and history of black slave experience. In order for remix culture to develop the dynamics of repetition and representation, something must pre-exist: the original story or song. To be clear, then, European, African and African-American cultures differ in their interpretation of repetition. The activity of repetition in black music culture, according to Snead means “the things circulates ... in an equilibrium. In European culture, repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow, but accumulation and growth” (1981, 149). This means that in black culture “the thing ... is there for you to pick it up when you come back to get it ... it continually ‘cuts’” (Snead 1981, 150). In European tradition, as in Western classical music’s melodic and harmonic progression there is always progress and an aim toward resolution. Generally, African and African-American music is cyclical but not without melodic sound, and the phrases tend to be short, repetitive and repeated with slight variation (Small 1998, 113). For example, in Beloved, there is often a deliberate play on words.

You came back because of me?
Yes.
You rememory me?
Yes. I remember you.
You never forget me?
Your face is mine.
[...]
You are my face; I am you.
Why did you leave me who am you?
I will never leave you again
Don’t ever leave me again
You will never leave me again
[...]
I loved you
You hurt me
[...]
You came back to me
You left me
I waited for you
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine (215-7; ellipsis in italics not in original).

In the above sample, the verbal flow and layering demonstrate how the repetition, in this African-American song gradually ignores punctuation rules while amplifying the emotional content to inform the reader of the inherent ruptures faced by slave mothers and their families during slavery. Snead argues that “repetition is an important and telling element in culture, a means by which a sense of continuity, security and identification are maintained” (1981, 147). Thus, African-American music practice (blues in the above quote) is infused by the African tradition where a ritual, dance or song is cut to confront “undesired or unpleasant facts or conditions” (Snead 1981, 150).

When African and African-American music traditions were drawn into a relationship with European music traditions with the advent of slavery, different tonal harmonies and chord progressions filtered into African-American music styles, not in an adoption of harmonic progression, as such, but in the invention, for example, of the blues note and jazz scales that defy closure (Maultsby 2000, 157; McClary 2000, 32-3). At the same time, African and African-American improvisatory music traditions began to challenge European notions of “structure, form, communication and expression” (Lewis 2009, 273).³⁴

³⁴ Not all nineteenth-century classical composers followed European classical conventions. Arthur Schoenberg rebelled against European music traditions (McClary 1985, 153). Schoenberg railed against repetition in theme and variation suggesting it was a repressive ideology, and Igor Stravinsky, for different reasons, raged against the Romantic period’s notion of selfhood and individuality. He developed repetitive ostinato in his works as an example of “primitive” freedom heard in African and African-American music, with and pitted against European music. Claude Debussy followed Stravinsky’s compositional flair by including techniques from Asia (Kamien 2002, 285-7).
One of the emphases of African-American music discussed above is improvisation as a strategy of response and continuity, shaped by the occasion in live performance. An African-American musician might design a course of action during a performance, but will not be committed to a “technical blueprint [score] regardless of its effect on the listener” (Small 1998, 45-6). This strategy is evident in the description of the church service in Beloved, which always began in a certain way, but then is described as having got “mixed up”. After positioning herself on a:

huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently … Then she shouted, ‘Let the children come!’ and they ran from the trees toward her. ‘Let your mothers hear you laugh,’ … ‘Let the grown men come,’ … ‘Let your wives and children see you dance,’ … It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up (87-8).

Beloved’s use of Baby Suggs’s “call” is informed by both African and European traditions. In African cultures the call is a democratic mode of organisation in public rituals including religious gatherings, and was brought to the New World by the slaves (Epstein and Sands 2006, 34-5). Similarly, in the first century of European Christian tradition the call announced antiphony, a call and response style of liturgical singing, which has survived in musical notation in the Roman Catholic Church to the present (Thibodeau 2006, 244). However, when the Africans arrived in America they had to adjust to various new sounds, dances and surroundings, and European traditions. Through scrutinizing the differences they learned to fuse the new music with their African culture (Epstein and Sands 2014, 40-1).

“Let the children come” in the above quote, is an example of what Weheliye terms the “cultural language” of improvisation that cannot be captured by the

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35 Ronald Radano, in analysing the spirituals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discusses white fascination with the spirituals and the difficulties of white musicians in notating the songs on manuscript paper to be played or sung by whites (Radano in Weheliye 2005, 94-5).
extended musical notation of European music that is written down, filed as a score and later performed in the exact manner at a different time and place (2005, 94-5). In contrast, Snead suggests African and African-American music sets up suspense and interrupts it at “irregular intervals.” Moreover, the black church manifests repetitions at the crux of music and language (Snead 1981, 151). Thus, the rhetorical strategy, takes the form of anaphora in which the repetition comes at the beginning of the clause: (“Let the children come ... Let your mothers ... Let the grown men ... Let your wives and children”) (87-8). Here, according to Snead, the preacher cuts her own speaking by interrupting the flow of her rhythmical words; simultaneously, the listeners in reacting to the preacher’s calls at irregular intervals, produce a cut, a modest shift in the “texture of the performance” (1981, 151).

Another example of the improvisatory style of call-and-response is heard in the novel when a band of imprisoned and chained slaves compose a work song:

“Hiii!” It was the first sound, other than “Yes, sir” a blackman was allowed to speak each morning, and the lead chain gave it everything he had ... “Hiii!” at dawn and the “Hoooo!” when evening came ... They chain-danced over the fields, through the woods to a trail that ended in the astonishing beauty of feldspar ... They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings (108).

The above excerpt refers to its own internal fragmentation as “garbling”, “tricking” to produce different meanings. It is an example of how established African and African-American protocol and repertoires are shaped, re-shaped and reused in the everyday life of the novel’s slave characters to subvert, deconstruct and reconfigure the dominant culture’s semantic codes.

European and African music cultures have long influenced contemporary American music styles, such as folk, ballads, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, gospel,
rock and pop, country blues, funk, rapping, scratching and hip hop, formed out “of their particular historical conditions and experiences” (McClary 2000, 33). The importance of musical heritage to *Beloved* is ironically acknowledged when Amy Denver, the young white servant girl who helped Sethe (Sethe names her baby daughter after Amy) sings “Lady Button-Eyes” during Lu’s (aka Sethe’s) labour. In the emotional shift following the birth of Denver, and after a silence, Amy says to Sethe: “That’s my mama’s song. She taught me it” (81).36 “Lady Button Eyes” is a poem written by Eugene Field, a white American poet whose lawyer father represented the significant case of Dred Scott, the African-born slave who unsuccessfully sued his slave master for his freedom in 1857.37 This reference to Field’s song is an example of how a European-American song in an African-American literary text has been drawn on to inform both contexts. The insertion of the song “Lady Button Eyes” in *Beloved*’s music mix is both personal and impersonal. It draws European-Americans (Amy Denver and Field) and the African slave characters (Sethe and Dred Scott) into equal focus without diminishing either subject.

Much European music and literature in the twentieth century adapted repetition and cyclical insights not as a progression toward goal-oriented direction and tonal resolution but, as McClary suggests, “to observe how manipulated one is by musical patterns ... in other words ... to deconstruct—these rhetorical devices” (2000, 144). Similarly, Morrison’s rich cultural childhood and formal education in English and the classics fuels her novels in blending “rational and magical tonalities” to rediscover and reconstruct her African past (Ndongo 2007, 25).

36 From 1550-1850, British indentured servants brought to America a repertory of ballads and folk songs that survived through oral transmission. In stark contrast, Small explains, practically nothing remains of African songs (Small 1998, 17-46).

37 Scott was eventually manumitted (freed); the case is generally discussed as the lawsuit that started the Civil War (Public Broadcasting Service 1995-2014).
**Remixing Beloved**

Remix invokes an acoustic method of organising and recognising information and experience (Davis 2008, 54). Each interior monologue, dialogue and stream-of-consciousness writing in the text suggests a sound and aural origin, through the speech acts and thoughts of the slave characters. Those are then sampled and remixed in loops by the narrator to evoke memories that bring the past into the present as in the quote below. Acoustic sound anchors the meaning of images in sounds that in turn suggest non-linear and multi-sensory spaces. Like a sampling machine, the narrator dispenses any sound or experience, real or imaginative to do this work. For example, when Sethe is rubbing Denver’s hair with a towel the narrator creates an acoustic space through the dialogue between Sethe and Denver.

> “Maybe we should unbraid it?” asked Sethe.
> “Uh uh. Tomorrow.” Denver crouched forward at the thought of a fine-tooth comb pulling her hair.
> “It hurts,” Denver said (60).

In the excerpt above, the narrator creates a visual image organised along a linear, sequential, causal line. However, when Beloved asks Sethe a question the narrator opens an “acoustic space”, a space we hear rather than see:\(^{38}\):

> “Your woman she never fix up your hair?”
> “My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don’t remember. I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields ... She nursed me two or three weeks that’s the way the others did. Then she went back in the rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was ... So, to answer you, no” (60).

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\(^{38}\) McLuhan, while investigating electronic media and acoustic sensibilities in the ways we experience the world, defined acoustic space as the “‘mind’s ear’ or acoustic imagination that dominates the thinking of pre-literate and post-literate humans alike (2009, 71).
In this scene, Sethe’s action of combing Denver’s hair, creates a double movement in which the absence of Sethe’s mother and the presence of her daughters creates perpetual movement between objects of thought and representations, in which mixing the past with the present is extended through call and response: “What happened to her?” asked Beloved. “Hung” said Sethe (61). The word, “hung” produces a break in the conversation, as the narrator picks up Sethe’s erased memory to navigate her past in an interior monologue. Miller suggests that interior thoughts can be changed in the “real” world (2008, 10). This concept is suggested when the narrator updates Sethe’s thoughts in the following quote:

Nan was the one she knew best, who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked, had one good arm and half of another. And who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back … [Sethe] was picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood. Nighttime. Nan holding her with her good arm, waving the stump of the other in the air. “Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe,” and [Nan] did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea (62).

In the quote, the stream-of-consciousness dimension partly recovers the past for Sethe as she revisits a childhood, which includes Nan, a friend of her mother’s. This memory serves to remix African culture and language with the historic Middle Passage creating rememories for Sethe and new memories for her daughters. It is also a means to educate the reader about forgotten episodes such as sexual assault in black American history: “Both [Sethe’s mother and Nan] were taken up many times by the crew” (62). Through the sound loop of memories, the reader learns that Sethe’s mother and Nan
were shipped from Africa to America and, while at sea, repeatedly raped. Sethe’s mother threw away all her babies except Sethe, whose father was a fellow African:

The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away ... You [Sethe] she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him (62), said Nan.

The juxtaposition of Nan’s and Sethe’s different memories are sampled, recontextualised and transmitted as a series of vexed traumas, that include the historic rapes and infanticide, as a turbulent terrain that had been erased from Sethe’s memory and obscured by successive and dominant white American political and cultural discourses (Christian 1993, 204). In these terms, samples of Sethe’s and her mother’s motherhood resonate in the acoustic space and the non-linear, simultaneous difference shatters memories in a powerful disclosure. As Miller writes: “You can never play a record the same way for the same crowd.” He explains that this is why remixes occur, and it is the same with memory: “Memory demands newness” (Miller 2004, 113). Thus, the shifting current in the excerpts above, predicts a better future for the slaves as Sethe, unlike her mother, has the time and freedom to comb her daughter Denver’s hair. Unlike her mother, Sethe has no memory of the West African familial village and scant recall of the communal and social events with which her slave mother identified.

As such, African imagery and cultural references to the “little antelope dance” are sampled and mapped from Denver to Sethe and return suggesting it is one of Sethe’s forgotten memories. That is, the emotional content of her African culture is stripped away from Sethe, to be refitted and embodied by Denver.

But she could not, would not, stop, for when [Sethe] did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves. While she was walking, it seemed to graze, quietly—so
she walked, on ... Finally, she was horizontal ... A dying thought ... she waited for the little antelope to protest, and why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not imagine since she had never seen one (30).

Whilst I have argued the relevance of audio mixing strategies to Beloved, there are obvious differences between the technology used by an audio DJ and Beloved’s narrator. For example, in print technology an author manually uses the computer mouse to cut-copy-paste data as an interface in a written text, whereas audio sound requires the DJ to listen to the song and isolate an instrument, or vocal to build the song using a mixing console or sound desk. In spite of this, both styles of mixing strategies can be understood as watching the flow of content in order to spin and manipulate different tracks which endlessly loop as iterative extensions of various parts to the whole. In the above excerpt, Denver’s loop is continually cut and flipped to include Sethe’s memories of her treacherous escape from her slave master. As Denver’s mix spins the narrator uploads more historical information:

it must have been an invention held on to from before Sweet Home, when [Sethe] was very young ... she remembered only song and dance ... Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma’ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach (30-1).

This mix which creates “something other” is uncompromising in portraying black history in terms of the art traditions of African and African-American culture, including the narrator’s reference to the antelope dance. Sethe’s memory of the antelope dance returns with the story of Denver’s birth. In terms of better understanding the

39 Shipboard accounts during the Middle Passage document Africans forced to dance by the crew. Naturally, they performed their native dances. Further studies were observed and documented in diaries, journals memoirs kept by slave holders, travellers and missionaries (Burnim and Maultsby 2006, 8).
novel’s remix strategy, Miller suggests that music’s qualities are endlessly flexible and contextualising (2004, 21). Miller explains that a DJ “mix” permits the DJ to take the best source material available to create a new invention. In Beloved’s mix, the DJ-like narrator challenges the limits of historical accounts requiring the reader to witness and piece together fragmented parts into an evocative and inventive (or innovative) record of black African slave practices in America.

Another important remix strategy, developed and discussed above, is starting the novel in medias res. In this way, the narrator extends the remix of the novel by introducing the baby ghost (Beloved) and a supernatural world that is neither social nor historical, and is not mentioned in Garner’s story. The baby girl’s death is a memorable recombinant strategy that allows the novel to foreground the symmetry of the different scenarios that align Garner’s text with Sethe’s, while simultaneously making them different. The space formed by the baby’s murder builds as a cyclic sound interface in this work, and it pops up in all the characters’ dialogues and monologues. This gives the reader a sense of the events surrounding and contributing to the murder. In this way, the DJ-like narrator manipulates, rotates and organises the sound material representing the characters’ experiences, collective memories and emotive responses. Miller explains that such sampling can transform any expression and sensation heard in any culture (2008, 7). A particularly striking example of this flexibility occurs when Baby Suggs’ loop opens up new channels (heard in the following quote) to express Garner’s mother-in-law’s sorrow and mediated loss of children through slavery.40

40 In the historical account, Simon and Mary Garner, Margaret’s parents-in-law, were separated from each other for more than half their married life. Most of Mary’s eight children were sold to other slave holders (Reinhardt 2010, 11).
So Baby’s eight children had six fathers … Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her … for hearing her two girls … were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye … “God take what He would,” she said. And He did, and He did, and He did, and then gave her Halle who gave her freedom when it didn’t mean a thing (23, italics in original).

God gave Halle to Baby Suggs, she believes, to make up for hearing that her two girls were sold and gone before she could say goodbye (23).

As a monument to the character of the historical figure of Margaret Garner, who emerges as intelligent, articulate and steely, in the records, Sethe’s strength is represented as unbounded in Paul D’s and Denver’s monologues.41 Paul D says Sethe had “iron eyes and a backbone to match” (9) when she first arrived at Sweet Home as a twelve-year-old. But just before she escaped Sweet Home, Paul D saw that the psychological traumas she had endured as a slave had destroyed her sensitivity and her eyes now “needed to be covered, lidded, marked with some sign to warn folks of what that emptiness held” (9). Now reunited with Sethe in Cincinnati, Paul D sees that her vitality has returned and she is strong enough for him to trust her. Within a few pages in the text, Paul D’s memories and understandings of Sethe drift into Denver’s maelstrom where Sethe appears as:

The one who never looked away, who when a man got stomped to death by a mare right in front of Sawyer’s restaurant did not look away; and when a sow began eating her own litter … And when the baby’s spirit picked up Here Boy and slammed him into the wall hard enough to break two of his legs and dislocate an eye … still, her mother did not look away … Now here was this woman with the presence of mind to repair a dog gone savage with pain rocking her crossed ankles and looking away from her own daughter’s body. As though the size of it was more than vision could bear (12).

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41 Bassett records that in his interview with Garner she “almost chills the blood in one’s veins” (Bassett in Reinhardt 2010, 215).
With Paul D’s arrival, Sethe is untethered as she regresses to adolescent-like behaviour, sitting barefoot and rocking, and embarrassed by Denver’s obesity (12). Paul D, however, has no idea of Sethe’s criminal act of infanticide until Stamp, the Underground Railroad man, shows him a newspaper article. Paul D, illiterate, and distrustful of newspapers, refuses to believe what he sees, that the photograph in the paper is Sethe. Eventually, when he hears the story, he accepts the truth and confronts Sethe: “‘What you did was wrong’” (165). Although Paul D loves Sethe, his blunt judgement creates a temporary fracture in their relationship as the novel, not a sentimental remix, challenges the reader with Margaret Garner’s decision to murder her baby girl to save her from slavery. Through Paul D’s response to Sethe’s crime, the text provokes the reader to unpack the moral complexity of the historical slave mother’s decision.

In the inclusivity of the remix, Miller explains, an ever-shifting network of familiar and unfamiliar territory echoes and reconfigures the relationship of the original narrative to various scenarios (2008, 10). On this basis, a sumptuous party was held at 124, hosted by Baby Suggs, to celebrate Sethe’s escape. The party overflows with food, song and dance and is subsequently recorded, adapted, exaggerated and circulated as gossip and jealousy through the black community.

It was Stamp Paid who started it … [he] went off with two buckets to a place … where blackberries grew … he got back to 124 and put two full buckets down on the porch … She [Baby Suggs] made pastry dough … three pies, maybe four … Sethe thought she might as well back it up with a couple of chickens. Stamp allowed that perch and catfish were jumping into his boat … it grew to a feast for ninety people … Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry … Baby Suggs’ three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe’s two hens became five turkeys … (135-7).
The celebratory party causes contention and envy in the African-American ex-slave community because they come to believe Baby Suggs and her family have too much wealth and happiness (137). As on the morning of the murder, when nothing seemed to be wrong, there was no sign of death, “yet the smell of disapproval was sharp” (138). Baby Suggs knew the dissent about the party was directed at her by people like herself. At this point in the narrative she has a premonition. She hears horsemen thundering into town, and the hostility in the black community toward Baby Sugg’s kin, fails to warn Sethe of the approach of her slave master. A warning by a member of the community might have provided a way to escape, and prevented Sethe’s decision to murder her child.

The link between memory, time and place in Baby Suggs’ vision is subsequently cut and reset to the morning of the murder where reference is made to the Biblical book of “The Revelation” as “four horsemen came—Schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave master and a sheriff” to re-capture Sethe and her children (148). However Sethe’s quick thinking and murderous act confuses the horsemen and they are left dumbfounded: “What she want to go and do that for?” (150). As Sethe is taken into custody by the Cincinnati sheriff, the four horsemen, thwarted by the slave’s act, return empty-handed to Kentucky.

The mix described above mirrors the divisive nature of slavery where different voices and visions collide. Baby Suggs imagines that her black community’s dissent prevents Sethe from hearing the men’s arrival. The depiction shows Garner frustrating the powerful slave owners, and shows the length slave-masters went to to pursue their property. The narrator’s skill in sampling historical, social, political information

42 The reference suggests the four riders of the Apocalypse in the Biblical book of the Revelation of St John, chapter 6 and verses 1-8, representing conquest, war, famine and death.
from archives, while regulating time, memory, subjectivity, and shared experience through characters’ interior monologues and dialogues resonate as an aural interplay of fact and fiction. This can be seen in the narrative when Ella, a long term Underground Railroad co-worker of Stamp (who gave Sethe and her newborn, Denver, safe passage to the house at 124), hears a rumour that 124 is occupied by an unknown ghost-like woman, and she is stirred into action.

On being told of the ghost, Ella remembers being raped at the hands of a white man and his son, and her resultant inability to touch her white baby, leaving it to die. Whilst Ella understands Sethe’s murderous actions of twenty years earlier, she and Sethe have been estranged. Sethe’s proud, haughty and independent attitude on her release from prison had ruptured their friendship. In spite of this, when Ella hears about the ghost she says she “didn’t like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present” (256). The task of rescuing Sethe from the daughter-like ghost named Beloved is eventually achieved by Ella because of her changes in attitude. That is, Ella comes to recognise the importance of love and forgiveness in the healing process. Ella finds the solution to the ghost Beloved’s demands on Sethe in singing. The other women’s singing, that Sethe hears, remembers and responds to, interrupts her actions for:

When the music entered the window she was wringing a cool cloth to put on Beloved’s forehead ... Sethe and [Beloved] exchanged glances and started toward the window ... For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her ... where the voices of the women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words (261).

As the women gather and sing outside the fence at 124, each is filled with memories of the singing in the Clearing (the space in the forest which was the
preacher Baby Suggs’ healing place). As they maintain their harmony, they recall their shared history, specifically the image of love for self and one another, which are the prophetic words used by Baby Suggs in her preaching (88-9). The words now represent an alternative future for Sethe, in this sense it is significant that the women’s singing samples a traditional African religious paradigm in an African-American context. In southern African American church services (the invisible church) functioned in the woods or fields and expressed themselves through an African cultural lens that included “prayer, communal singing, testifying but not always preaching” (Burnim 2014, 53). They composed their own folk spirituals instead of singing established repertoire (Burnim 2014, 52).

The deepest irony of the novel, given stories like the one above, and a most poignant example of remix, is Morrison’s decision to give the name Garner to Sethe’s slave master. Sethe’s dead daughter born at Sweet Home, is therefore Beloved Garner. This suggested forgiveness is an example of how remix challenges the original source and claims autonomy by adding to and deleting original components, creating a new medium where both history and fiction are related to yet independent of each other (Navas 2010, 10). The remix, however, is always dependent on the legitimacy of the original, sometimes the only original element that is recognisable is the title. The novel relies on the original historical account and by sampling the name Garner, the text come to acknowledge the Garner name self-reflexively, signifying and acknowledging Margaret Garner’s story while validating it as an important and relevant remix.

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43 Navas cites as an example the Mad Professor’s famous dub/trip hop album No Protection, as a remix of Massive Attack’s song, Protection. The only recognizable feature left intact by Mad Professor, is in the title (Navas 2010, 159).
Conclusion

Morrison’s audio approach to Garner’s historical account in Beloved replicates sounds, ideas, stories and images in loops to effectively demonstrate the unspoken thoughts of the slaves, omitted from the original slave narratives. These thoughts are in turn developed through new and emergent forms of interconnection and communication. Audio culture strategies, such as sampling, looping and remixing, shape the novel to undermine and deconstruct the original slave account. The strategies allow the novel to diversify, fragment, recycle as its multilayered remix is re-presented in the narrative’s interior monologues, stream-of-consciousness writing and in the characters’ dialogues.

Repetition, as Gilles Deleuze suggests, “makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also sets us free” (1994, 19). As repetition, loops and remix start a forgotten story in Beloved, the novel demonstrates the necessary freedom to sample and remix a variety of historical, narrative and imaginative material to set both past and present in a new relationship; the past no longer forgotten but actively engaged in by the present. Beloved is a multilayered, multifaceted and polyphonic text; it offers the reader many experiences in familiar and unfamiliar ways. To repossess historical memories and reclaim a forgotten ancestry, Morrison’s narrator remixes the past in the present. On this basis, Morrison’s novel serves as a monument to healing, as well as to a nation’s forgetfulness. Morrison speaks about Beloved “as a prayer, a memorial, a fixing ceremony for those who did not survive the Middle Passage and whose names we do not know” (Morrison in Christian 1993, 11) as such the novel takes the historic opportunity to resituate and rename Margaret Garner as one who is beloved.
Chapter 2

Cloud Atlas Sextet

Introduction

David Mitchell’s novel, *Cloud Atlas* (2004), comprises six separate novellas each written in a different form and each of approximately equal length.\(^1\) Situated in distinct historical periods and geographical contexts, the novellas are subtle yet complex hybrid texts nestled in one coherent work. The entire work can be likened to a Matryoshka (Russian) doll, where each doll-like piece is bequeathed in a tangible form—published journal, cache of letters, music recording, unpublished novel manuscript, film, and catechism (recorded on an “orison”)—to the protagonist in each succeeding story.\(^2\) The overlapping pieces trace a story from the nineteenth century in the Pacific Rim to a futuristic, dystopian narrative set in the twenty-fourth century on a post-cataclysmic Hawaiian-like island. Each novella is encountered in two parts in the work, one in the first half and the other in the second. The first set of five stories suspends each novella in mid-section, then the sixth and central story is written in its entirety, before the second set of stories picks up on the first set. Each story is continued and drawn, one after the other, to the novel’s conclusion. The six protagonists’ individual narrative voices vocalise the central theme of hope in a world where greed and the will to power permeate its histories, and focus the reader’s listening on the corresponding yet diverse stories (Smyth 2008, 55).\(^3\)

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\(^1\) References to *Cloud Atlas* are from the 2004 Random House edition and will be cited parenthetically.

\(^2\) An orison is an egg-shaped recording machine in the fifth novella, “An Orison of Somni-451”.

\(^3\) Besides Smyth’s (2008) brief synopsis of music form and expression in *Cloud Atlas*, there are no other musico-literary analyses of *Cloud Atlas*. 

In the first novella, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”, I argue that music is interwoven as a supplement, to the narrative of Adam Ewing, the protagonist, as a means of signifying and underscoring the radically unequal relations of power, which variously trouble him on his travels. Following Lawrence Kramer’s work on musical narratology, I aim to demonstrate how harnessing music in this way draws attention to musical sounds, form and practice in analysing the stories of the oppressed and marginalised groups. Kramer writes:

In relation to a narrative, music is a supplement, in the deconstructive sense. In relation to narrativity, music is performative, in the sense of the term developed by speech-act theory. And in relation to narratography, music is something like an embodied critique of discursive authority (1996, 100).

I have drawn on Western art music, non-Western music and musical experiences more broadly to help me in this endeavour. I highlight the novel’s music form and the underlying musical interconnections that shape the text as a whole before analysing the first novella.

**Music matters in Cloud Atlas**

In the second and arguably most musically inflected novella, “Letters from Zedelghem”, the main protagonist, Robert Frobisher, is a musician and composer, who writes a work titled *Cloud Atlas Sextet* which mirrors the structure of the novel *Cloud Atlas*, in which each novella is envisioned as a solo performance. As the second novella’s protagonist and composer Frobisher explains to his lover, Rufus Sixsmith, a scientist in the third novella, that the narrative form is his musical masterpiece:

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4 The socio-political, cultural, and black and white voices common to all three novels framed my choice of analysing the first novella of *Cloud Atlas* rather than the more musical second novella set in the 1930s. The second novella will be a significant study, but is beyond the remit of this thesis.
a “sextet for overlapping soloists”: piano, clarinet, ‘cello, flute, oboe, and violin, each in its own language of key, scale, and colour. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor; in the second set, each interruption is recontinued, in order” (445).

The title *Cloud Atlas* has been described by Mitchell as inspired by the classical piano music piece, *Cloud Atlas I–X* (1985-99), by the Japanese composer Toshi Ichiyanagi: “I bought the CD just because of that track’s beautiful title”, Mitchell remarked in 2010 (interview with Adam Begley, 2010). In another interview in 2007, Mitchell explained to James Naughtie:

In the title itself, "Cloud Atlas", the cloud refers to the ever changing manifestations of the Atlas, which is the fixed human nature which is always thus and ever shall be. So the book’s theme is predacity, the way individuals prey on individuals, groups on groups, nations on nations, tribes on tribes. So I just take this theme and in a sense reincarnate that theme in a different context (Naughtie 2007).

Insisting on creative experiment, Mitchell informs the reader about how the narratives in his oeuvre are constructed by inserting a miniature model with an explanatory note in his texts (interview with Harriet Gilbert, 2010). The formal structure of *Cloud Atlas* resembles a Western art music sextet and this is made clear for the reader in the second part of the second novella.

Tonality, assumed by contemporary musicologists to be the foundation of Western music is more than a parsing influence in *Cloud Atlas*. Thus, Frobisher’s composition is structured like a music scale with each note setting up its own harmonic history. The sextet reflects the structure of *Cloud Atlas* itself which can be understood

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5 Mitchell, in an interview with Begley for The Paris Review (2010), is surprised to learn that the phrase ‘cloud atlas’ is mentioned in his preceding novel *Number9Dream*: “The cloud atlas turns its pages over” (Begley 2010).
6 Mitchell suggests that reincarnation in *Cloud Atlas*, is visually represented by a comet-like birthmark on the body of all the protagonists except, the sixth protagonist, Zachry (Naughtie 2007).
7 Key signatures, scale and tone colour reference the harmonic background of tonal compositions (McClary 2000, 66).
as beginning on the first half of the home-key novella, ascending uniformly in one direction, through the first half of the five key-like novellas, and reaching a terminal point in the sixth novella, before descending as a melodic inversion of the ascending scale to the second part of the first novella or home-key.

In the first set of the second novella, the visual analogy for Frobisher’s revolutionary music, and therefore for *Cloud Atlas*, is the set of nesting stories represented in Vyvyan Ayrs’s composition, *Matryoshka Doll Variations*. (52). In the novel, Ayrs, is a well-established composer in the Western art music world, suffering syphilitic paralysis and progressive blindness. Frobisher is employed as Ayrs’s amanuensis, and he seeks to exploit Ayrs by surreptitious theft, including the sale of a rare book from Ayrs’s library: *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing*. Ayrs and Frobisher, loosely based respectively on the English composer Frederick Delius and his amanuensis Eric Fenby, are represented as equally egotistical and tempestuous (Smyth 2008, 56). Each is bound in a working relationship, by the art of music composition, to a callous world of artistic influence (70, 446, 455). The composition *Matryoshka Doll Variations* anticipates Frobisher’s own composition and *Cloud Atlas*, as in it two halves of a whole are pulled apart to reveal a smaller modification of itself “encased in a nest of ‘shells’” (393). Ayrs’s composition is an ingenious ploy in *Cloud Atlas* as it provides imagistic clues for an aural reception and understanding of the novel, when Frobisher’s music composition is reviewed late in the novel (445, 468).

A difficulty with Western art music is that it developed “as something to be listened to ‘for itself’ as art or entertainment rather than as something mixed in with social occasion, drama and ritual” (Kramer 2002, 1). This is also true of Frobisher’s *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, and Frobisher himself indicates to the reader of the second novella
that his sextet is a stand-alone work (445). The reader now assumes this refers to the underlying structure of the novel, but Frobisher goes on to say he is unsure if the composition is radical or gimmicky as his metaphorical clarinet cadenza has “spectral and structural peculiarities ... semi-invented notation and singular harmonics” (468). Such commentary by Frobisher about his composition risks jeopardising the coherency of the work just as it unnerves the listening Verplancke, a Belgian policeman, amateur musician and baritone vocalist. As a musician in the Western art music tradition, Verplancke is eager to perform the piece and urges Frobisher “to post a published copy of the score for his ensemble” (468).

Mitchell privileges Western art music throughout the novel, which begins with the artistically rich, yet individualistic musical context of the west in the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the novel, the six protagonists’ voices embody different aspects of Western art music expression, which configures instrumental sound in a particular tonal approach, developed and built into the imaginative harmonic composition. As mentioned above, each of the protagonists’ voices in *Cloud Atlas* corresponds to a solo for a different Western orchestral instrument: Adam Ewing—piano; Robert Frobisher—clarinet; Luisa Rey—‘cello; Timothy Cavendish—flute; Somni-451—oboe and Zachry—violin. These solos then affect the music histories, syntax and language of each novella. Of particular interest to this chapter is the piano voice of Adam Ewing, the protagonist in the first novella. This novella links the reader to Ewing’s voice and thereby to the rising popularity of the piano in the mid-nineteenth century when piano music was known by music historians as “black and white” (Dunsby 2001, 502), since piano music is organised on the “black-versus-white patterns of its keys (Cook 1990, 102).
Ewing’s piano voice is therefore given narratorial freedom in the first novella to record all the characters’ voices, both black and white, as inclusive sound, and for the reader to hear the socio-political, historical and economic injustices endured by the marginalised characters in its story. In that a pianist uses both hands and each finger of their hands, they have been described as independent “sound-producing agent[s]” (Cook 1990, 101). As such, the pianist has an extensive register of bass and treble sounds at their disposal (unlike the violinist or oboist who produce music in the treble register). Hence, the pianist has a wider sense of harmonic structures than the cellist, flautist, oboist and violinist who are all confined to single staff scores (Cook 1990, 102-04). In these terms, it is Ewing’s nineteenth-century piano voice that starts and ends *Cloud Atlas* registering a tonal range of seven plus octaves underscoring the harmonic tension and unequal relations of power in the protagonists’ voices.

In a 2010 interview, Mitchell suggested that though *Cloud Atlas* “is not too overladden with music … [it] doesn’t mean it is not there” (Gilbert 2010). As such, reading the subtle presence of music in the novel requires the reader to be attentive to the protagonists’ voices. In the second novella, for example, the reader is indirectly told of the multiple meanings, forms, and implications of the novel in reference to the sound of Frobisher’s clarinettist voice: “it’s an incomparable creation. Echoes of Scriabin’s *White Mass*, Stravinsky’s lost footprints, chromatics of the more lunar Debussy, but truth is I don’t know where it came from” (470). The description calls up Walter Pater’s celebrated quote: “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” (Pater 1973, 45).

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8 Mitchell has suggested Olivier Messiaen’s “Quartet For the End of Time” and Toshi Takamitsu’s music as influences on the novel (Gilbert 2010).
Whilst *Cloud Atlas*’s overarching narrative structure is that of a Western art sextet, a variety of Western and non-Western music styles inform and are referred to in the six novellas. In the third novella set in the 1970s, the protagonist, Luisa Rey, a journalist investigating an atomic energy conspiracy is reading a text titled *Harnessing the Sun: Two Decades of Peacetime Atomic Power*, while listening to a playlist of hits from Carole King’s album, *Tapestry* (110). The song lyrics for the album title “Tapestry” speak of meeting a man and the world unravelling. In the novella Rey meets the scientist, Dr Rufus Sixsmith, (Frobisher’s lover in the second novella) in a lift during a power outage. Sixsmith is targeted by corrupt politicians and conservation groups, he is murdered, though appears to have committed suicide. Through her link to Sixsmith, Rey discovers that the *Cloud Atlas Sextet* has been recorded but is rare: “Only five hundred recordings pressed … In Holland, before the war, my, no wonder its rare … *Cloud Atlas Sextet* must bring the kiss of death to all who take it on” (119).

In the fourth novella, “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”, set in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a jazz sextet is heard playing in the background, at Jake’s Starlight Bar, by Cavendish, a book publisher, on the night of the Lemon [book] Prize Awards. In these passages, Jazz is associated with the body, as the music “kicked off a rumba” (147) and sets the atmosphere by provoking lively and emotive conversation amongst the attendees. This mood disintegrates during the course of the evening resulting in the murder of the prize-winning author (150).

The fifth novella, “An Orison of Somni-451” is set in an identifiable Korean technological political dystopia. The fabricant clone-like protagonist Somni-451 is born, lives and works at Papa Song Corp where the cycle of time is “indistinguishable from any other” (185). Somni-451 escapes Papa Song but is recaptured. An archivist
(interviewer) asks Somin-451 questions and her oboe-voice answers are recorded on an orison that is bequeathed to the protagonist in the sixth novella. Somni-451, who is in a position to answer questions on social issues of the past, present and future, is shown in the text to be fascinated by sounds:

“I heard off key-singing; a popsong about Phnom Penh Girls” (204).
“I first encountered birds ... For whom did they sing?” (205).
“Passing thru cloisters, I heard music. Not AdV or popsong but naked, echoing waves of music. ‘A choir’” (217).

Music informs Somni-451’s experiences of freedom and understands how “one’s environment is a key to one’s identity, but that my environment, Papa Song’s, was a lost key” (229). Past environments no longer exist for Somni-451 and the testimony of her life, recorded on the orison, offers spiritual guidance to the marginalised community in the sixth novella.

In the sixth novella, “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Everythin’ After”, Zachry, the sixth protagonist, reveals through his violin voice the genesis of music, the cataclysmic Fall understood as giving rise to the language which evolves in his community after “[a] sqeezywheezy an’ banjos an’ catfish fiddlers an’ a presh rare steel guitar ... then the drummin’ started up, see ev’ry tribe had its own drums” (287). Zachry dances to the music and with each beat of the drum memories return of life before the Fall (287). Such passages in the novella highlight not only the auditory and the physical aspects of music, but also its social-temporal character: “an’ boom-doom an’ pan-pin-pon till we dancers was hoofs thuddin’ an’ blood pumpin’ an’ years passin’ an’ ev’ry drumbeat one more life shedded off me” (287). But Zachry cannot describe his memories in words because the language he spoke before the Fall no longer exists: “there ain’t the
“words no more” (288). In this sense, his “violin voice” represents the language of the new and emerging civilization that is an aural means of transmitting information:

This heavy dialect implies that the story has passed directly from Zachry’s lips to his son’s ears, and will continue to pass thus from generation to generation ... until more advanced media comes into play and the cycle begins again” (Hopf 2011, 118).

This futuristic understanding of the origins of language and music echo Herbert Spencer’s (1858) nineteenth-century evolutionary view that music “had originated in emotionally heightened speech, becoming gradually refined as a separate form” (Spencer in da Sousa Correa 2003, 12-13).

In these separate but overlapping novellas, Western art music represents the continuity in the novel via the virtuoso-like protagonists’ solo voices. The protagonists’ voices articulate music as a means for protesting against adverse social conditions and the recurrent predacity of dominant cultures on marginalised individuals and communities.

I now turn from the general significance of music in Cloud Atlas to its specific role in the first novella “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”. I argue that the narrative and the style of narration draws attention to and highlights musical sounds, form and practice in the telling of the stories of oppressed or marginalised groups and individuals. I aim to demonstrate that music as inclusive sound is interwoven into Ewing’s story as a supplement to the narrative adding an alternative means of signifying social-political, historical and economic injustices in the radically unequal relations of power that trouble, the key protagonist Ewing on his travels.
The music supplement to Adam Ewing’s story

Narrative is a recognised story, combining sequences of events over a given period of time (Kramer 1996, 100). In these terms, the language, settings and characters in “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” are full of intertextual and historical references to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851), and Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), in addition to Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (1997) (interview with Begley, 2010). The intertextual influence of Melville’s and Dana’s canonical works and Diamond’s text thus connects the reader’s understanding of the “situatedness” of the novella to a larger nineteenth-century cultural canvas (Orr 2003, 83-4).

To explore Ewing’s narrative and the marginalised characters’ stories in relation to their time and place, I have divided the following section into the five geographical contexts depicted in the first novella which, I argue, act like a metaphorical song cycle in classical music style form where the stories of each geographical setting acquire their own space and landscape. Musical effects, forms and experiences in Ewing’s narrative transport the reader out of the every day and into the characters’ stories, which variously relate narratives of unequitable power relations and predacity. Generally, the words in each song of a classical song cycle are written by the same person and usually sung to a piano accompaniment, as is the case in this novella. Of all the musical instruments associated with the novel’s protagonists’ voices, as described earlier, the piano provides an instant image for the reader who is able to visualise each key on the keyboard. Thus the black-versus-white plan of a keyboard reinforces the idea that each note has its own position, a specific history, feel and distinctive sound in
relation to itself and the other notes. Similarly, each character in the novella, whether black or white, has a unique history, and distance/interval between their stories.

1. Chatham Isle

The first and last stories of the novel, which make up the two parts of the first novella, are written in the first person. The first part begins mid-way through the nineteenth century and mid-way through Ewing’s journey from Australia to America. Ewing is a young, white and wealthy American middle-class lawyer, who is married to Tilda, and father to young Jackson. He is on his way home to San Francisco from Australia aboard the English mercantile ship, *Prophetess*. He is detained for a week in an “Indian hamlet” (3) on Chatham Isle, now part of New Zealand. Here the ship must await repairs after a storm at sea. During a nature walk, Ewing notices recent footprints and these lead him to a white man who becomes his confidant, doctor and potential murderer. Dr Henry Goose is a London surgeon, rejected by London’s nobility for malpractice. Following the damage to his reputation by the noble Marchioness of Mayfair, Goose had travelled with the intention to practice medicine away from England. Recently, he had worked as a doctor on a mission in Fiji. Goose is waiting for a long overdue Australian sealer, *Nellie*, to transport him to Australia, where he wants to get work as a ship’s doctor on a passenger ship to London.

Following their initial meeting, Ewing suspects Goose is a lunatic but, after a lengthy conversation the following morning, Ewing realises that this judgement is premature and “unjust” and based on professional cynicism (5). A day later, the pair walk together and hear the first musical sound referred to in Ewing’s stream-of-consciousness narrative. The musical sound—a beelike “hum”—interrupts their
conversation and they determine to find its source. Through listening to the musical sound, they discover a small poverty-ridden community on the outskirts of Chatham Isle. The lament represents both “natural space and natural language” for the slaves. Benson writes “‘wordless’, [music] creates ‘a space we might enter/in innocence’” (2006, 42). Ewing and Goose see wretched slaves suffering from scabies sitting in the mud and humming and they watch a brutal and public flogging of a young male slave. Here, the hum works to undercut the narrative’s linear trajectory by delaying Ewing and Goose in the village. They are confused by the slaves’ humming, and are unable to tell whether the collective hum is made in sympathy for, or in condemnation of their fellow slave (6).

Ewing and Goose, are perplexed by the wordless lament sung in unison by the slaves. The two men are represented as the only whites amongst the Indians who exist within a socio-political hierarchy of three castes, and God-like, an Indian chieftain sits on his “throne” (6) dressed in a feathered cloak. Around him thirty tattooed Indian men stand with their women and children to watch the punishment. All the while, the lowly caste of “duskier [and] sootier slaves” (6), less than half the number of their masters, continue to sit and hum.

According to Kramer, music becomes disruptive in the narrative when it seeks to destabilise the dominant regimes of “musical composition and reception” (1996, 101). In these terms, the slaves in Cloud Atlas are powerless to overthrow the dominant culture of their community, but their humming in unison draws Ewing’s attention to

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9 Jim Samson argues that noisy interruptions to daily life, for example, Ewing’s investigation of the humming noise in the first novella, have a rational function that changes the way listeners, including Ewing see the world (2001b, 9).

10 Georgian–Australian ethnomusicologist and evolutionary musicologist, Joseph Jordania, lists humming in his research on music and emotions as a contact call, a call that warns a group of impending danger or as an audio measure for an individual maintaining contact with a group (2010, 43).

11 In Maori singing, the “Waiata tangi”, or weeping lament, is a dirge-like wailing, sung on a chanting note or microtones ranging two intervals, the second to the fourth (McLintock 1966). www.teara.govt.nz/en/waiata-tawhito-traditional-maori-songs/page3.
their story. The slaves, Ewing, Goose and the reader discover later in the narrative, are Moriori, the original inhabitants of Chatham Island who were brutally colonised in the 1830s by Maori warriors.12

Ewing and Goose do not understand the highly specific social context of the flogging scene, but the narrative works to facilitate an understanding for the men and the reader of the spectacle to address the suffering inherent in the slaves’ story. In my reading of the text the “hum” establishes a cohesive order within the slave group in contrast to the singling out of the slave for flogging. The hum, in general, has also been read as “the primal form of song and its tone as the first language behind all words” (Tomlinson 1999, 45). In this sense it may signify the intimate hope of freedom for the slaves marginalised within the hierarchical power system. Countering the hum is the dynamic lash of the whip in the hand of the tattooed “Goliath” striking the prisoner’s naked flesh: “His body shuddered with each excoriating lash” (6). The humming drone of slaves, the striking of the whip, and the hovering silences of the Indian chief, the tattooed masters, and their wives, and children cause Ewing to swoon “under each fall of the lash” (6). Attali suggests that “primitive sounds of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of the relation to self and others” is coded. Music, or any arrangement of sounds, including noise, therefore, produces or assembles a community of inclusiveness that projects a centre of power (Attali 2009, 7).

Ewing, who imagines the slave already “in the care of the Lord” (6), is unprepared when the beaten slave lifts his head, and stares at him. The eye-to-eye social interaction is described in Ewing’s story as “uncanny, amicable knowing! As if a theatrical performer saw a long-lost friend in the Royal Box and, undetected by the

12 The Moriori tribe of the windswept region in a pre-European era numbered less than 1000 inhabitants and was considered primitive, non-confrontational and peace-loving this set them apart and made them vulnerable to their Polynesian neighbours (Sutton 1980, 67-9; Evans 2006, 2).
audience, communicated his recognition” (6). The association of the moment with a theatre audience, and the description of the look between the two men as expressive and egalitarian, anticipates a powerful moment later in the narrative, when Autua saves Ewing’s life.

The theatrical reference locates Ewing’s position in his own society, as well as his sense of responsibility to vulnerable individuals, and his own self-importance. In particular, as a mid-nineteenth century middle-class white male in a non-Western colonised culture, Ewing knows that he could intervene in the flogging. As such, after the men’s eyes meet, and despite being confronted by a domineering, knife-waving tattooed slave master, Ewing inquires as to the slave’s misdemeanour (7). But Ewing’s attempt to intervene is thwarted by Goose who leads him away saying: “Come, Adam, a wise man does not step betwixt the beast [and] his meat” (7). The statement, together with other of Goose’s pessimistic philosophy on predatory human nature as well as his lyrical rhymes suggest the influence of Spencer’s position on natural selection and the survival of the fittest influenced in turn by Charles Darwin’s On the Origins of the Species (1859).  

The day after is a Sunday and Ewing, Goose and the “God fearing of Ocean Bay” (8) hear the ringing of the chapel bell as a call to worship. The church service serves to unite what is referred to as the “rattle bag” of Christian denominations, although the underlying structure of the worship service is influenced by Lutheran traditions. The reader is informed that the German church founder, a Lutheran, died over a

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13 Spencer coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” in his essay, “Progress: Its Laws and Cause” (1858, 536-8) which was influenced by Charles Darwin’s text On the Origins of the Species. Conversely, Darwin first used Spencer’s new phrase alongside his phrase “natural selection” in his 5th edition of On the Origins of the Species (1869, 91-2).

14 Church bells were Asiatic in origin and brought to Europe by the Celts, but the bells of the later period were Gothic and had an important role in moderating daily lives (Lang 1963, 81).
decade ago. The service is characterised by references to the Bible and the choir. Bibli cal passages were read ... we joined in a hymn or two nominated by rota” (8). A rota, or round, a vocal work that dates from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, does not have a hierarchy based on an instrument or voice of superior value but works toward an equitable and harmonic unity. Johann Forkel, a nineteenth-century German musician and music theorist, suggests communal singing creates a “community of equal citizens who all work independently but harmoniously toward the common good” (Forkel in Butt 2001, 214).

The rota of the narrative’s key religious scene is the impetus that empowers and privileges the voices and connects the protagonist to the marginalised characters of Chatham Isle’s worshipping community. When hierarchical relationships of pitch or tone in a musical composition are drawn together in a single governing impulse they tend to remain unnoticed (McClary 2000, 73). This is true for the church setting, as Ewing discerns, through the communal prayers offered spontaneously by the congregation, that the gathering resembles more the concerned and neighbourly Early Christians of Rome than the latter day Church “encrusted with arcan[a] (and] gemstones” with which Ewing is more familiar (8-9). The plainer service means that the repertoire of instrumental and vocal music with which he is more familiar is absent: “No organist played a Magnificat but the wind in the flue chimney, no choir sang a Nunc Dimittis but the wuthering gulls, yet I fancy the creator was not displeased” (8).

The privileging of nature and culture here gestures perhaps towards the inherent value
of creation and conservation. Historically—music theorists, according to McClary, have attempted to analyse music in terms of mathematics and science and have “shaped our perceptions ... conditioning us not to recognize silencing—not to realize that something vital may be missing from our experience ... [of] the imperfect material, social world we inhabit” (1985, 150). Alternatively, Henry David Thoreau in his text *Walden* (1854) exalted nature and argued that man’s activities damaged the environment. This sentiment, I suggest, is linked to the pessimistic and predatory theme, and characterised in all six novellas of *Cloud Atlas*.

After the service, Evans, an elder at the church, who is a white settler and sheep farmer, invites Ewing and Goose to join his family, along with the lay preacher, D’Arnoq, for the customary Sabbath meal. Evans invites his wife to say the grace for the meal, an interesting scene in a faith more usually represented as patriarchal and puritanical where women were generally silenced. Over the meal, the narrative draws attention to the voice of D’Arnoq, who is marginalised within the wider Chatham Isle community for his work amongst the Moriori. Because of this work he is derogatorily referred to as: “A White Black, a mixed-blood mongrel of a man ... a Bonapartist general ... a Polak” (16). Thus the vocality and project of listening to D’Arnoq’s story might be read as positioned “on the borders of language and music, and of textuality and musicality” (Benson 2006, 59). The specific manner in which D’Arnoq’s voice is heard in the narration is said to unlock “a Pandora’s box” (11). As such, Evans, Ewing, Goose and the reader hear an emotive and lengthy monologue that is “unbroken three hours later” (11). Here I refer to Spencer’s text “Essays” (1858), as discussed earlier, to support the idea that emotional speech and, in particular, D’Arnoq’s monologue, is the foundation from which music developed (Spencer in da Sousa Correa 2003, 32).
Ewing, transported back in time during the monologue, elevates D’Arnoq’s voice to the calibre of canonic literature: “His spoken history, for my money, holds company with the pen of a [Daniel] Defoe or Melville” (10). Since D’Arnoq’s tone of voice and narrative is represented of virtuoso standard, I use the idea that the origins of language came from “warnings, cries for help … that is a kind of music … eighteenth-century opera could see an ideal image of itself reflected in the artless natural cry” (Thomas 2006, 70-1). With an ear to the relation between voice inflections and song the narrator opens a space for an association between operatic music and literature. For example, D’Arnoq speaks (or rather, sings) of the demise of the Moriori tribe of Rēkohu (11-12). Blow by blow by blow by blow, D’Arnoq’s tonal voice sounds:

The first blow to the Moriori was the Union Jack, planted in Skirmish Bay’s sod in the name of King George by Lieutenant Broughton of HMS Chatham … needy sealers, the second blow to the Moriori’s independence who disappointed the Natives’ hope of prosperity by turning the surf pink with seal’s blood … The third blow to the Moriori was the whalers … Fourth, those motley maladies … however, the tattooed Maori conquistadors … impaled [Moriori men and women] … children hiding in holes, scented [and] dismembered by hunting dogs. Some [Maori] chiefs … slew only enough to instil terrified obedience in the remainder. Other chiefs were not so restrained … fifty Moriori were beheaded, filleted, wrapped in flax leaves then baked in a giant oven with yams [and] sweet potatoes (12-15). The excerpt above, refers to the series of desecrations that silence the Morioris’ voices and culture. In short, Ewing’s Christian hope is shaken by D’Arnoq’s revelation of greed and white and black brutality (17). Only Goose is resigned to the Morioris’ fate heard when he responds to Ewing’s project of civilising the Black races by conversion to Christianity:

After years of working with missionaries, I am tempted to conclude that their endeavours merely prolong a dying race’s agonies for ten or twenty years. The merciful plowman shoots a trusty horse … might it not be our duty to likewise ameliorate the savages’ sufferings by hastening their extinction? (16-17; italics in original).
On a mid-week morning some days later, Goose attends a woman patient at the request of Evans. While he does so, Ewing strikes out alone to canvass “Conical Tor”, a lookout to the north of Ocean Bay. As he scales the hill, Ewing imagines he hears music and talking. From this point on he is guided by sound, which he relates to musical effects and fantasies fuelled by fear. Musicologist Nicholas Cook after John Cage (1966), suggests that “composing music becomes not so much a matter of designing musically interesting sounds as such, as of creating contexts in which sounds will be heard as musically interesting” (1990, 12). For example, in the jungle environment, Ewing interprets a sudden downpour of hailstones as “frenzied percussion”; and the song of the tui becomes speech repeating the Old Testament law: “‘Eye for an eye!’” (18). The frightened “hoo-rush” of a mollyhawk’s flapping wings morphs into a fantasy of a wild boar that then becomes a spear-waving, hate-filled Maori warrior (19).

In this mix of nature’s sounds, Ewing accidentally falls into a well, and knocks himself senseless. In his unconscious state, he imagines he returns home to San Francisco. He sees his wife Tilda and son Jackson, but is dismayed when he attempts to speak and a rough Indian language escapes his lips. Because of these primitive sounds and indecipherable speech, he is rejected by his wife and son. This scenario echoes Spencer’s nineteenth-century theory of music’s evolutionary function derived from two separate functions of speech, “expressive and intellectual” (Spencer in da Sousa Correa 2003, 13). That is, Spencer orders the speech of nationalities according to his criteria of expressive inflection and monotony. Ultimately, Spencer’s psychology of “‘language of sympathetic discourse’ by which we communicate and share happiness develops simultaneously with the civilising process” but Spencer’s view of this process
is restricted to “‘a cultivated few’” (Spencer in da Sousa Correa 2003, 20). Ewing’s primitive vocal utterances, as an imagined state, allow for Ewing’s personal experience of exclusion and rejection demonstrated by the inharmonicity of his own voice, to be made known to the reader.

After a week in dry dock, the *Prophetess*, a British sailing ship, sets sail on a Friday for Bethlehem Bay, with Ewing but without a full crew. The crew of fifty is described as a mix of nationalities, including Swedish, British, Dutch, American, and five Spanish Castilians sailors who, along with Goose, jump ship at Chatham Isle. Goose, the quack opportunist, becomes the *Prophetess*’ medical officer. Goose’s intention is to prey on Ewing, for he believes Ewing is carrying great wealth. Over lunch at the Evans’s farm, Ewing had disclosed to D’Arnoq, Evans and Goose his difficulties in locating an Australian beneficiary of a will effective in California. Moreover, Goose convinces Ewing, a hypochondriac, that Ewing is suffering a potentially fatal ailment caused by a parasitic worm infection in his brain. According to Goose, Ewing needs constant medical supervision.

Once at sea, Ewing experiences a dramatic awakening when the figure of a man unfurls himself from under the hawser (coils of rope) covering the floor of his cabin hissing: “Missa Ewing” (26). Ewing jumps with surprise as he identifies the intruder’s “uncut language” as Indian. The intruder introduces himself saying: “‘My name is Autua’” (26), a friend of Mr D’Arnoq, the Christian lay preacher of Chatham Isle. When he mentions the Maori whip, Ewing identifies him as the battered Moriori slave. Autua dabs at his eyes with his fingers and then at Ewing’s eyes, to remind Ewing of the look of understanding they had exchanged while he was being flogged.
The gaze, is the dominant way in which Western society engages with and understands the world. But Attali argues, “the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing” (1985, 3). Similarly, ethnomusicologist Philip V. Bohlman argues that music might be something else: “multiple ontologies of music exist at both the individual and local level, as well as at the global level” (2001, 17). Here Bohlman recognises both individual musical experiences and music cultures other than his own. I apply these ideas to Ewing’s narrative as his story cycle moves into the space of the open sea and aim to show that music is embedded in the narrative as a process of illumination on the barbarism of dominant groups seeking to exert power over marginalised groups and individuals.

2. Sea shanties and a sailor’s song

In this section, music, as Peter Erspamer suggests, serves as a locus for representing unequitable power relations, social coherence and as a means to overcome the divides of “class, ethnicity, and religion” (2002, 150).

By reciting his own history in pidgin English, Autua’s distinctive speech undercuts D’Arnoq’s story as he represents (the) authentic cultural voice in the underlying dynamics of the Moriori story. In this sense, the black and white notes of Ewing’s imaginary piano voice records all black and white characters’ distinctive stories in an inclusive narrative.

Autua tells Ewing how his father was one of the first Moriori to encounter the brutality of the Maori landing on Chatham Isle. He refers to the sighting:

of the “Great Albatross” … of the Albatross servants’ gibberish (a bird language?); of their smoke breathing … of those “shouting staffs” … every Moriori who had not perished became a slave of the Maori … Maori thrive
on wars [and] revenge [and] feudin’, but peace kills ‘em off ... Then last week, Missa Ewing, I see you [and] I know, you save I, I know it (29-32).

In the above excerpt, following Kramer, I read Autua as lending his voice to the dead. The relevant poetic device here is prosopopoeia, defined by Kramer as “the lending of a face or voice to things faceless and voiceless, among them the dead—to appropriate that coherence and claim that authority on behalf of the living” (1996, 116). Autua’s voice is assigned its own distinct mode of subjectivity to highlight the genocide of his race and how his culture might have evolved in the present.

Later in the narrative, Ewing discovers that it was D’Arnoq who had hidden Autua in his cabin so that Ewing could assist his escape. But Ewing has been ostracised by the ship’s captain and first mate, Boerhaave, and he is loathe to help. Autua, determined to escape his enslavement, believes death is better than living as a slave. But death has no voice and it risks destabilising Ewing’s narrative of recording injustice inflicted on a marginalised community by dominant powers. By tracing the music supplement through Autua’s speech the narrative articulates a “private, passionate, confessional self [and] give[s] its authentic identity a social face” (Kramer 1996, 104). Autua presses a dagger into Ewing’s hand and insists that Ewing kill him, but faced with this proposition, Ewing promises Autua that he will approach the captain in the morning. Though he is tempted to betray Autua, he says “in the eyes of God my word was my bond, even to an Indian” (27). The “even to” here indicates his own consigning of Autua to a low status, in spite of his sympathy. When Ewing’s good conscience overcomes the temptation to betray Autua an imaginary sea shanty is sung by the wind:

The cacophony of timbers creaking, of masts swaying, of ropes flexing, of canvas clapping, of feet on decks, of goats bleating, of rats scuttling, of the
pumps beating, of the bell dividing the watches, of melees [and] laughter from the fo’c’sle, of orders, of wind shanties [and] of Tethy’s eternal realm (27).

During the night, however, Ewing and Autua are awakened by another musical noise: “a falsetto yell” (27). A drunk Castilian sailor, Ewing discovers after a hasty analysis, has fallen from the rigging to his death on the deck. Ewing remains on deck with Goose to observe the Catholic ritual of committal of the body to the elements:

I stayed to watch the Castilians perform their Catholick [sic] death rites over their countryman before knotting up the sack [and] committing his body to the deep with tears [and] dolorous adios! (28; italics in original).

Music in *Cloud Atlas* is a vehicle for and resistance to cultural assimilation as heard in the Castilians’ performance and ritual of burying and valuing their dead in the above excerpt. Music, Erspamer suggests can also precipitate change in individuals and society (2002, 147-8). This idea is suggested in the novel when Ewing returns to his cabin and coaxes forth Autua’s familial history and his crime against his slave master, Kupaka (29-32). Ewing is shaken by the injustice inflicted on Autua, but he knows he must reveal the stowaway’s presence to Captain Molyneux. On this basis Autua is eventually added to the ship’s crew (32-3).

In the novel musical effects establish musical moments which record and add a rich, aural dimension to the significance of the characters’ stories. For example, one Sunday evening shortly after Autua’s acceptance on the crew, Bentnail, a sailor working in a team on the front deck, sings ten bawdy verses of an improvised sea shanty on the subject of the world’s brothels. The obscene song shocks Ewing but Goose enjoys it and adds an eleventh stanza about “about Mary O’Hairy of Inverary
that turned the air yet bluer” (38). Of particular interest here is Bentnail’s improvised sea shanty considered in relation to the sailors’ task. The sailors are laying grass flat on the deck to turn twine into ropes. While sea shanties developed from the essential rhythms associated with particular shipboard tasks, the music produced from the labour of the repetitive rhythmical chores mutate into “strident laments or an epic alleluia in the face of a hard existence” (Lloyd 1975, 270). Shanty repertoire insists that the sailors hear the leader’s (shanty man) voice sing out an impromptu rhythmical verse of rhyming words, which is then typically accompanied by a chorus. This chorus is repeated between the verses and sung by all the sailors working on the job. It was discovered that sailors worked better when they sang (Lloyd 1975, 278). After Bentnail’s shanty, the sailors are “coerced” (38) into singing solos. Rafael, a young Australian on his maiden voyage, is the next sailor pressured into doing so.

Rafael, the same age as Ewing’s son (499), “sat on the ‘widow maker’ [a reference to the ship] [and] sang these lines in a voice unschooled yet honest [and] true:—Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you …” (38). His melodious tenor voice is beautiful and stuns the sailors into silence. In this way, in terms of reading the musical effects in narrative, the young sailor’s solo produces a profound silence in the characters’ stories that are unfolding on the ship. The silence in the text is an uncanny instant where the absent voice of music is heard by the audience; instead of representing a failure of sound it powers Rafael’s narrative to what Benson terms “full individuation” (2006, 51). The question, therefore, arises for Ewing: “Why should Rafael, an Australian-born lad, have an American song by heart?” (38). Rafael answers Ewing’s unexpressed question: “I din’t know ’twas a Yankee un … My mam teached it me before she died”’(38). Rafael’s

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17 Saunders attributes the original sea shanty to Western music culture, and in particular to the British sailor. He dates the first recorded shanty to 1549 (1928, 339-57).
18 A ship was termed a “widow maker” in the nineteenth century relating to lives lost at sea.
voice, in Benson’s terms, is both “internal and external ... it makes manifest the self, but in doing so, puts the self elsewhere” (2006, 51 n 23).

Thus “Shenandoah” can be understood as a hybrid song, in that it is a sea shanty, but also an art song.¹⁹ The intimate, persuasive art song has its birth in the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century and is autobiographical in essence (Samson 2001a, 272). As such, Rafael’s song selection shifts the shanty sung by the men, away from its obscene references. It now recalls a musical memory of Rafael’s absent mother (and, by association, of all the listeners’ families who are absent). The song is the only trace Rafael has of his mother, and his life memory of her is captured there. Through his singing voice, Rafael privileges the memory of his mother’s voice, and experiences his mother’s love for him through its lyrics: “I’ll leave you never ... I’ll love you ever” (38). “Shenandoah” holds a marginal place in Western art music, but in this scene, the song articulates the poor, young sailor Rafael’s gentle and vulnerable nature.

Kramer convincingly argues that it is a common experience to remember being moved by a singing voice, “in which the text serves as a supplement or point of departure” (2002, 52). Thus, Rafael’s mother’s voice provides Rafael with both pleasure and identity: “It’s the only thing of hers I got still. It stuck in me” (38). Here Rafael’s story momentarily halts Ewing’s narrative’s to become the primary dimension of depth and interiority that is in Kramer’s terms “borrowed from the responses of our own bodies as we listen to the insistent production of rhythms, tone colours and changes in dynamics” (1996, 112). Once the distance between the spirit of the mother and the son’s voice has collapsed into silence, Kramer’s claim that there is an intimacy between the listener and the spirit behind the voice is realised (2002, 52). Rafael’s

¹⁹ According to Saunders, the song is completely unsuitable for a hard-working sailor’s rhythmical sea-shanty, “Shenandoah’s” rhythm is unpredictable, as it is based on broken rhythm or rubato and more akin to the art song (1928, 341-2).
singing voice precedes a silence which creates an emotion in Ewing and the others that goes beyond the words and the music (39). This silence can be read as representing “the apparent absence or temporary cessation of any organised or intended sound; as such it is linked with some of the most fundamental emotions and experiences of which the human subject is capable” (Smyth 2008, 167). Ewing, for example, subsequently remembers his own boyhood and absent mother. Like Rafael, he was subject to foster care and, as such, looks to help Rafael: “How I wish I could help him” (39; italics in original). The closeness of Rafael to Ewing has already been established in the novel, for example, the first emotion experienced by Ewing after the death fall cry of the Castilian was ‘relief’ that it was not Rafael’s (28).

Through combined experiences, the reader first learns of Ewing’s meeting with Rafael in the Tasman Sea when they were both seasick. Ewing knows that Rafael’s foster mother, Mrs Fry of Brisbane, unlike Ewing’s foster parents, “my Mr [and] Mrs Channing”, provided Rafael with the “smatterings” of an artistic education, and that this sets him apart from the crew. Rafael’s excitement and great anticipation of a life at sea is expressed through Ewing’s narrative: “that sprite lad, aglow with excitement at his maiden voyage [and] so eager to please, has become this sullen youth in only six weeks” (39). Ewing observes that Rafael’s “luminous beauty is chipped away … Already he looks rather given to rum [and] water” (39). These changes in Rafael’s demeanour trouble Ewing (39). To Ewing’s mind, Rafael has become a brooding melancholic but, without saying why, Goose suggests the change in Rafael is predictable.

The climax of the final scene in this section, and in turn the first part of the narrative, is a conversational image between Ewing and the ship’s cook. “I asked Finbar [the cook] if he thought [Rafael] was “fitting” in well.” Finbar’s Delphic reply, “Fitting
what in well, Mr Ewing?” left the galley cackling but myself quite in the dark” (39; italics in original). The essence of this scene lies in the motley crew’s explosive response to Ewing’s question and Ewing’s inability to recognise the transgressive energy of the crew, which unfolds later.

3. Bethlehem Bay

In the second set of the first novella, Rafael’s tenor voice is heard starting the third song of the song cycle, singing the passionate call to the sighting of land: ““Land! Ahoyyyyyy”” (475)

It is Sunday as the Prophetess glides through the pristine waters into the bay.

Standing on the deck, Ewing describes the raucous noise, “daubed with cacophonous jungle” (475), before describing the design of the settlement dwellings. A hierarchy of buildings from the thatch dwellings built on stilts by the seashore to timber buildings built up the hill by craftsmen, and just below the hill top, a “proud church” with a cross symbolising the pinnacle (475). This image of the Bethlehem Bay church stands in stark contrast to the Chatham Isle church’s “modest cruciform” (8). In Bethlehem Bay, the church’s lofty position suggests a superiority and elitism that is traced in the stories to power and wealth (478-9, 480-1, 482, 489-491).

Later when a skiff transfers Ewing, Goose, Captain Molyneux and Boerhaave to the bay (475), the captain says that he is going to ““Call on the King in his Counting House”” (476). The allusion to the nursery rhyme evokes images of economic greed and predacity. Most important in this allusion are the implications for the captain’s identity and voice. Captain Molyneux’s voice is given a sarcastic, disrespectful tone; he uses

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20 Economic liberalism in the nineteenth century was organised by individual decisions rather than institutions (Adams 2001, 20).
profane words, and has materialistic interests. He cannot understand why the main street is deserted, and the shops vacant until a church bell rings and breaks into his story of the bay’s silence; only then does he realise it is Sunday: “It’s the Sabbath, by G—[and] these holy s—s’ll be a—braying in their rickety church” (476). After a steady climb the captain, Ewing, Goose and Boerhaave reach the church, where they are viewed with suspicion by the silent Nazarene Indians.

In comparison to the Indians, Giles Horrox, the preacher–leader is bold and direct:


Although Horrox interrogates the visitors, he is easily seduced by the captain’s verbal introduction of the men as respectable, an effect largely achieved through speech inflexions, and the men’s titles, such as, Mr. Boerhaave “of the Dutch Reformist Church,” Dr. Henry Goose, “Physician of the London Gentry [and] late of the Feejee Mission” [and] Mr Adam Ewing “American Notary of Letters [and] Law” (477). Seduced by the captain’s charade, Preacher Horrox, welcomes the men to the parsonage for lunch. Over lunch Horrox’s voice sounds out the colonising battle between the missionaries and the Spartan-like warriors of Borabora on the beach at Bethlehem Bay (478).

After lunch, Ewing walks the main street of the settlement alone. Hearing the sound of singing, he follows the sound to the church. But when he arrives there, the singing stops and he sees: “A rotund White stood in the pulpit sermonizing” (481) on

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21 The London Missionary Society was established in 1795, through William Carey’s missionary work with Bengal Mission. During the nineteenth century the society expanded to the Pacific Islands after the establishment of a British colony in New South Wales, Australia (Houghton 1980, 205).
the benefits of smoking to an Indian congregation. Here music is shown as not only important for Ewing as an individual but for the social connections and interactions it brings about. He hears the quasi-preacher instructing the local blacks in lyrical, Biblical-style to intensify the importance of his message:

“So it came to pass, see, Saint Peter ... taughteth ... what was what with the Old Baccy, an’ this is what I’m teachin’ you now, see ... Nah, Tarbaby, you’re doing it all wrong, see, you load your baccy in the fat end ... Do it like Mudfish next to you” (482; italics in original).

Even at this mundane level the music in Ewing’s story effectively articulates radically unequal relations of power. Foisting a smoking culture onto the Indians, and thereby creating a nicotine addiction, the mission coerces locals to work for them, and to earn money to buy tobacco. A young white missionary named Mr Wagstaff observes the farce with Ewing. He tells Ewing that the practice has its history in a missionary endeavour in Tahiti, where the missionaries believed that Polynesians “spurn industry” because they have no need for money (482).

Ewing’s narrative presents competing interpretations of greed, lust for power, and hope, and in this context the lengthy discussion over dinner between Horrox and Goose that night is illuminating. For example, Horrox embellishes a theory that “Nature’s Laws [and] Progress move as one ... The superior shall relegate the overpopulous savages to their natural number” (488). The speech is influenced by Spencer and Goose interrupts to promote his own thesis on the laws of survival influenced by Darwin (489). As such, the reader hears the civilising intent of the mission, as well as Goose’s pessimistic view of the necessary extinction of certain cultural and racial others.
To Horrox’s displeasure, Goose argues that the white race of all dominions are rapacious “for treasure, gold, spices [and] dominion … This rapacity, yes, powers our Progress; for ends infernal or divine I know not” (489). Horrox’s belief that white races dominate the world with divine grace and Goose’s counter-thesis are heard in echoes the following morning through Ewing’s stream-of-consciousness narration. He observes Indian workers singing while weeding a copra field. Wagstaff is the assigned overseer of the Indian quasi-slaves and he carries a whip but is said to use seldom. Mission-appointed Indian guards have the job of “leading hymns (“land shanties”) [and] reprimanding slackers” (491; brackets insitu). The music referenced here suggests it has a social purpose of unifying and calming a group that might otherwise be disorderly or un-productive (Locke 2001, 504).

Without comment, and in silence, Ewing moves away from the plantation and into a schoolroom where five white and five black females are participating in a revue. The schoolroom scene links Ewing’s narrative to the wider nineteenth-century debate on the role of music in women’s lives and female education. Literary theorist Delia da Sousa Correa suggests that advocates for radical reform of women’s education in Victorian times, including Mary Wollstonecraft, condemned music education on the basis that it favoured emotional sensitivity, domesticity and marriage at the expense of reason (da Sousa Correa 2003, 61-2). da Sousa Correa explains that feminist reformers were not against music as such, but suggested its inclusion in a “professional” education rather than domiciled in a “conventional feminine preoccupation with trivia” (da Sousa Correa 2003, 63).

According to Erspamer, music, like lyric poetry “possesses semiotic value” (2002, 145) that could “transcend barriers created by differences in social class, ethnicity, and
religion or it can accentuate such barriers” (2002, 146). Thus the power and influence of the religious leaders in Bethlehem Bay over the Indigenous community is heard in the voice of each girl as she recites a commandment and sings a choral work: “O! Home Where Thou Art Loved the Best” (491). Music in this sense, Erspamer explains, becomes a focus for “social interaction”, therefore, of injustice, or of interest between the performer and the listener (2002, 146). In the above, Ewing is not interested in the lyrics; instead his attention is diverted from the voices to material matters and specifically to nostalgia and the piano, “whose past was more glorious than its present” (491).

Music in the scene above is prevented (by the narrator) from becoming a universal carriage of change that embraces differences in class and race. Instead, the reader hears the repercussions faced by the black girls following the choral performance: when they are silenced and excluded from the question-and-answer time with Ewing. Singing in the colonisers’ language, but unable to understand the meaning of the words is shown to raise barriers and to accentuate conflict as “only White misses raised their hands” (491).

As Ewing, Goose, Captain Molyneux and Boerhaave depart the island, Mrs Horrox informs Ewing that “departees’ were once presented with a garland of plumeria, but the Mission elders deemed garlands immoral. ‘If we allow garlands today, it will be dancing tomorrow. If there is dancing tomorrow … She shuddered. [Ewing says] ‘Tis a pity” (492). The irony heard in Ewing’s voice characterises the reality that the Indigenous people of the Bethlehem Bay community are exploited, manipulated and inaudible to those in authority.
4. Back at sea

The fourth song of the song cycle begins with Goose interrupting Ewing’s journal writing, by seeking the latter’s help with rhyming words for his epic poem dedicated to the once whipped slave, the “True History of Autua, Last Moriori” (492), written in the Byronic heroic tradition. Ewing, troubled by his experiences at Bethlehem Bay, meditates on Melville’s recently published novel, Typee (1846), which details crimes against Islanders committed by Pacific missionaries. Ewing considers whether or not Indians of Raiatea and Chatham Isle would prefer to remain undiscovered. The context for this question in Ewing’s narrative has its roots in Spencer’s deliberations on progress and human endeavour echoed in Horrox’s account of assisting Indians in their climb up “Civilization’s Ladder” and Darwin’s theories on the survival of the fittest implicated in Goose’s pessimistic rhymes on survival (488-9). Ewing, more optimistically, decides that in all professions there are “some good, some bad … Is not ascent their sole salvation?” (492). The ascent here implicitly refers to the role of the church, although he recognises that his youthful ideas of Christian hope and common good have diminished, as have his deeply held beliefs in social progress. Such ideals are incompatible with the inequality he observes on land and at sea.

Ewing hears the seven bells signalling the first watch change at 11.30 pm. He walks the deck unable to sleep through the noise, the sailors’ songs, and the debilitating effect of his “worm” (497). On the deck, he is baffled to find Rafael in a drunken stupor, and lying in the foetal position. The next day, while Ewing is leaning over the ship’s bulwark vomiting, a side effect of his cerebral “worm” infestation (498), Rafael’s hanged body is found. The discovery is heralded by the muffled cry of Mr Roderick, the ship’s second mate, the cry expressing deep emotion and disturbance. Rafael died, it is
discovered, between the end of his watch and the sound of the first bell. Goose, repeating the words of Bentnail, tells Ewing that Rafael, entrapped by Boerhaave and his lackey of preying sailors, had been sexually abused for weeks. Ewing seeks justice for Rafael, but Goose sounds caution as “innocence falls prey to savagery” (499). In the aftermath of Rafael’s death, the reader learns more of Ewing’s own childhood woes. Finally, Ewing confronts the captain over the abhorrent assaults, but without evidence he is powerless to implicate Boerhaave as the perpetrator. Dismissed by the captain, the final note to Rafael’s story is heard in Ewing’s determination and belief that: “no state of tyranny reigns forever” (500).

Goose’s story of moral and emotional bankruptcy in his private and public life are woven together in all the characters’ stories. For example, the reader learns that Ewing’s health has been deteriorating because Goose, as an opportunist predator, has been poisoning him. When Goose reports to the captain that Ewing’s condition is contagious, Ewing is isolated in quarantine. At this point, Goose can murder Ewing without fear of being seen. While in the grip of death, Ewing overhears Goose’s nihilistic, venomous, and deceitful words to Autua, who is seeking to visit Ewing. When Goose falsely says that Ewing does not want to see him, Ewing realises the truth: “My worm? A fiction, implanted by the doctor’s power of suggestion! Goose, a doctor? No, an itinerant, murdering confidence trickster!” (503). But Goose’s capacity to deceive is boundless and, in a dramatic turn, he imitates the stricken Ewing’s voice in a poetic performance with ventriloquistic, operatic undertones:

Let me guess what you’re trying to tell me—‘Oh, Henry, we were friends, Henry how could you do this to me? [He mimicked my hoarse, dying whisper.] … “Surgeons are a singular brotherhood, Adam. To us, people aren’t sacred beings crafted in the Almighty’s image, no, people are joints of meat; diseased, leathery meat … He mimicked my usual voice very well. ‘But why me, Henry, are we not friends?’ Well, Adam, even friends are
made of meat. ‘Tis absurdly simple. I need money ... ‘But, Henry, this is wicked!’ But, Adam, the world *is* wicked ... You will be dead within the hour [and] for me, ‘tis hey, ho! For the open road (503-4; italics in original). 22

In the excerpt above, Goose colonises Ewing’s voice and renders him silent before fleeing the scene. Then Autua, quick-thinking and persistent, discounts Goose’s lies and breaks open the door to save Ewing from certain death. This spectacle is reminiscent of one of Wagner’s dramatic operas as Autua sends the ship’s first mate, Boerhaave, a Dutchman, flying over the ship’s bulwark, before he carries Ewing down the gangplank to the dock. The scene draws the fourth song to its conclusion.

5. On land once more: Honolulu

The fifth and final song in the song cycle of the first novella is set in Honolulu. Ewing records that, from the harbour through lanes

bustling with innumerable tongues, hues, creeds [and] odors. My eyes met a Chinaman’s as he rested beneath a carved dragon. A pair of women whose paint [and dress] advertised their ancient calling … (505)

colouring the street with unity and diversity. As Autua carries the incapacitated Ewing through the streets he enquires of strangers:

“Where doctor, friend?” Thrice he is ignored … before an old fish seller grunted directions to a sick house (505).

The foreign sounds establish a mix of languages and cultures that Ewing hears, sees and determines as exotic difference in race, creed and vocations. In spite of the socio-political-cultural-religious mix, he also hears prejudice against Autua’s black face,

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22 **“Hey Ho! For the Open Road”** is an old song listed in the *Catalog of Copyright Entries: Musical Compositions, Part 3* (United States Government Printing Office 1939, 2369).
a prejudice that may now affect his survival: “‘No medicine for stinking Blacks’” (505).  

Through patience and commitment Autua finally makes his marginalised self heard, in a different language.

A nun tried to “shoo” us away with a broom, but Autua enjoined her, in Spanish as broken as his English, to grant his White charge sanctuary. Finally, one sister who evidently knew Autua arrived [and] persuaded the others that the savage was on a mission not of malice but of mercy (506).

In the above excerpt, Autua defies the nun’s order to “shoo” (506). In his persistence, Autua communicates his message in Spanish. Although his voice sounds unusual, “broken”, it is recognised by one sister who manages to convince the majority on the truth of Autua’s story. This is the starting point for a new appreciation of the role that language and music must perform in this narrative. Each story harnessed so far in Ewing’s story is unfulfilled. It is as if, as J. Hillis Miller suggests: “Each story and each repetition or variation of it leaves some uncertainty … And so we need another story, and then another story, and yet another” (Miller in Kramer 1996, 101). In this novella, alternative—and/or “foreign”—sounds must enter the narration to rupture the dominant order and accommodate a variety of experiences that suspend endings, create divergence and instability until Ewing’s narrative metaphorically threads these stories together.

At night, as a patient in the hospital, Ewing has time to philosophise about his experiences. He hears imaginary music that sounds like a running stream, “the stream grinding boulders into pebbles through an unhurried eternity” (507). The water image is represented in Ewing’s story as if the flow of the thoughts to scholars formulating histories and laws “that govern the rises and fall over civilisations” (507).

23 In 1848 Richard Wagner wrote: “I will destroy the order of things that turns millions into slaves of a few … ” (1966, 237).
The final image in Ewing’s story, and thus the novel as a whole, is significant and poignant. From the infirmary, and at a distance, the reader hears Ewing deliberating:

Belief is both prize [and] battlefield, within the mind [and] in the mind’s mirror, the world. If we believe humanity is a ladder of tribes ... If we believe that humanity may transcend tooth [and] claw, if we believe diversified races [and] creeds can share this world ... if we believe leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable [and] riches of the Earth [and] its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass (508).

Ewing’s musing refers to all the stories in his narrative and to his own conscience, and he informs the reader of his transformation and intent to make a difference in his society when he returns to San Francisco. “I shall pledge myself to the Abolitionist cause, because I owe my life to a self-freed slave [and] because I must begin somewhere” (508).

It appears Ewing’s aim is to tell the truth of what he has learned through his travels and how he will work at a localised level. But this response is only possible in as far as his invented fiction is heard. Such grand thinking by Ewing is immediately contested in an imaginary dialogue with his father-in-law: “Oho, fine ... but don’t tell me about justice ... Naïve, dreaming Adam ... your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limited ocean!” (509). Then, the reader hears Ewing’s resilient response: “Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?” (509).

The sound of one drop dropping in an ocean composed of multiple drops is, of course, inaudible, but as literary theorist Peter Dayan writes, “while the music is in the process of vanishing, literature lives ...” (2006, 133). Paying attention to music in a narrative is an act of listening in to the depth of stories that need to be heard as an intersection of “rhetoric and history” (Kramer 1996, 121). The conclusion to the music supplement heard in Ewing’s piano narrative decentres the authoritative speaker, as
histories of excluded voices are told as imaginary voices and sounds and songs that can be recognised and answered, but never heard the same way twice.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the various historical and geographical spaces traversed in the first novella of *Cloud Atlas*, music and sound signify diversity, resistance, hope and freedom for the narrator-protagonist and for the marginalised characters. Music effects in narrative are supplementary, and comparable to a film score. In this chapter, I have established how Western art music, non-Western music and musical experiences draws the reader’s attention to marginalised voices and to the protagonist Adam Ewing’s solo in the novella “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”.

In particular, I have shown how the narrative and style of narration in Adam Ewing’s narrative draws attention to the musical sounds, form and practice in the telling of stories of oppressed and marginalised groups and individuals. In this way, I have demonstrated how music as supplement to the narrative is interwoven in Ewing’s narrative as an alternative means to signify radically unequal relations of power and prejudice endemic at local, national and global levels. Each novella in *Cloud Atlas* creates a paradigm shift in key and style heard in each virtuosic individual solo. The key to the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*’s success is heard as all solo performers provide insight into the role of music in their experiences. Of significance, the intimate silences often suggest something missing or unspoken, and this absence can serve to begin the process of uniting communities by drawing attention to persistent social injustice in various times and places. Changing attitudes, overcoming prejudices and pessimism in the novella begins and ends with Ewing’s story. Like the ripple effect of a drop of water
in an ocean, music has the power to touch the heart and change the attitude of all who
are listening. Following Ewing’s example, the novel implies that change begins within
the individual and this suggests to the reader that it is up to each one to heal
relationships in the world.
Chapter 3

*Dirt Music Sonata*

**Introduction**

Tim Winton’s seventh novel, *Dirt Music* (2001), is set in Western Australia during the last decade of the twentieth century.¹ In this chapter, I read the novel as structured like a sonata and argue that the sonata form interacts with the subject matter of the narrative to enhance the reader’s understanding of a range of Australian issues, such as conservation and the environment, cultural diversity, and Indigenous issues.² In this regard it must be noted that both the novel and the sonata form, a classical European music form, share their roots in the eighteenth century and express themselves in part through conventions that evolved in Western history (Witkin 2005, 28).

Sonata form is generally used as the first movement in a multi-movement composition, such as a symphony or concerto. In music theory terms, the sonata form is a single movement divided into an exposition, a development section and recapitulation (a ternary structure). The sonata form is written ABA or ABA¹. A literary sonata is more often written as ABA¹ (the numerical indice is used in music to distinguish a repetition of the same key or theme). The recapitulation repeats expositional material but with a difference. Overall, the large-scale sonata form in music has a binary structure that unites two contrasting themes—a primary and a secondary theme—into a coherent whole (Brown 1948, 162).

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¹ References to *Dirt Music* are from the 2009 Picador edition and will be cited parenthetically.
² Narrative design structured on the sonata form has been observed to inform work by writers such as Anthony Burgess, James Joyce, Thomas Mann and Virginia Woolf (Chamberlin 2006, 11).
Sonata form is the most significant of the macrostructure individual music movements from the eighteenth century and has been described as neither “a set of ‘textbook’ rules nor a fixed scheme” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 15). I aim to demonstrate that the sonata form’s built-in dynamic tension advances the linear trajectory of Winton’s novel with the sonata’s contrasting themes present in the novel as the tonal realisation of past and present tenses. I draw on Kramer’s (2011), McClary’s (1991), James Hepokoski’s and Warren Darcy’s (2006) work on hermeneutic inquiry and sonata form analysis respectively to demonstrate how reading the novel through the sonata form constructs particular understandings of Dirt Music. As I will discuss, Kramer argues that a hermeneutic interpretation of a work reinforces “singularity” rather than “generality” of a phenomena that is historically peculiar, culturally arbitrary and debatable (2011, 2, 8-11). Hepokoski and Darcy suggest that their “Sonata Theory” analyses “form as dialogue” in music in relation to norms, such as themes, deformations, tonality and tempos (2006, 11; 558).

Winton himself stated at the launch of Dirt Music, that “on a literal level there is a lot of music in the book” (Ben-Messahel 2006, 211). In the first book-length critical study of Winton’s oeuvre, Salhia Ben-Messahel acknowledges that Dirt Music’s story “arises from the music of the land and is a symphony on the theme of Western Australia” (2006, 12), but she, and more recent work on Winton, provide little discussion of the role of music in the text (McCredden and O’Reilly 2014). The title Dirt Music, unlike Brian Castro’s The Bath Fugues (2009) or Toni Morrison’s Jazz (1992), does not literally suggest a music form or genre, but is a metaphor for both the environmental sounds and country blues music heard at the surface level of the narrative, as well as, I will argue, the political tensions in Australia at the time of its
writing. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s environmental groups across the states and territories of Australia formed alliances to strengthen and consolidate their long-term environmental and conservation reforms. However, it was not until 1992 that these alliances came together to form the political party, the Australian Greens, part of a global movement which in part aims to protest against and prevent potential environmental disasters (Brown and Singer 1996, 5-42).

The pairing of dirt with music in the title may be read not only as an enviro-musico motif but also as a pairing of image and texture with sound. These two recur throughout the novel and are often used to refer to and bring together disparate elements. For example, nature is represented as sound consistently as: “The paddocks thrum with cicadas, crickets, birdwings” (86) and the tides are represented as “ebbing and flowing in a nearly incessant murmur” (353). Nature’s power as a representation of mental and environmental disturbance is also evident when the water is associated with “delirium … something special in the way the reef morphs and throbs” (126), and when the “earth thrums beneath [Fox], stirs a thousand grinding clanks and groans” (232), and “the sound of the world is raw” (369).

In this chapter I show how the novel’s sonata form and ternary structure—exposition, development and a recapitulation—interacts with the novel’s key binary themes of dysfunction and dislocation. These binary themes move towards relationship and connection in the development before returning to the themes of dysfunction and dislocation in the recapitulation section. In this sense, the sonata form ensures the inextricability of content and form; as Adorno writes: “Form can only be form of a content” (1992, 6). Hence, the exposition, development and recapitulation

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1 Words can never become music, but as Prieto explains, writers can use musical syntax in word patterns, with the differing length of sentences as tension and resolution to harness allusions to musical models and technique that metaphorically affect the “real-world” issues for the reader (2002a, 53).
patterns of the sonata form act like markers to divide the text into three sections. In this sense, central to the sonata form design is the inherent progression toward a predetermined aim (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 16-7). Section one of the novel comprises the exposition, sections two to seven the development, and section eight the recapitulation. In this regard, the novel encourages the reader to make connections and identify contrasts between the three different sections and it is in these interconnections, contrasts and correlations that I have read in relation to sonata form.

Overall, the sonata form is a musico-formal movement that can evoke the broadest and most intimate concerns of humanity by “telling the grand themes of quest, renewal and closure” (Burnham 2001, 208). It is worth noting that Leonard Ratner likens sonata form to a “debate”, while Hepokoski and Darcy compare it to an utterance that instigates a dialogue at the acoustic level of the text that the reader then hears (Ratner in Chamberlin 2006, 11; 2006, 9-11). The binary structure in Dirt Music—its primary theme of dysfunction and secondary theme of dislocation—is informed by the novel’s central relationship between Georgie Jutland, a forty-year old ex-nurse, and seasoned overseas traveller, and local musician Luther Fox. The third significant protagonist is Jim Buckridge, Georgie’s wealthy and powerful lover who adds a third dimension to Georgie and Fox, represented as the binary subjects in that he threatens to destabilise them. It is Georgie’s dysfunctional theory of love, her

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4 Calvin Brown describes instrumental music as narrative in terms of the composer’s ability to represent “a series of actions involving characters and objects in their progressive relationships” (1948, 257). Kramer considers the idea of music as narrative troublesome (instrumental music cannot tell stories), but he concedes that Renaissance instrumental music has constantly accompanied stories (1995, 110-11).

5 Georgie Jutland is referred henceforth as Georgie, and Luther Fox, as Fox, as is consistent with the novel.
wishes, her confusion and her longing for guidance that becomes eroticised through explicit and implicit references to music in the novel (333).

The theme of dysfunction personified in Georgie’s story, launches the sonata form’s trajectory and emotive tone. Dysfunction establishes the specific key and mood of the drama in the sonata and initiates the events of the exposition, instigating Fox’s journey away from home (enacting the secondary theme of dislocation), as he embarks on a quest for identity. The two-part outline leads into a progressively comprehensive and diverse narrative that, I argue, is shaped by the sonata form. I aim to demonstrate how, in the novel, the sonata form’s dynamic tension interacts with the ternary form to advance a linear trajectory in echoing the wider issues of the binary themes including identity, conservation, reconciliation, and forgiveness. In order to explore these ideas further a brief synopsis of the novel is provided below.

**Reading *Dirt Music***

In *Dirt Music* the erudite musician Luther Fox abandons his hobby farm located at the perimeter of a marginalised seaside community named White Point. White Point is represented as a typical Western Australian coastal town, with a fluctuating, seasonal population. The novel shows that during the 1950s, White Point was a lawless, violent town populated by returned soldiers, drifters and migrants. Though women arrived later, the town remains fractured, dysfunctional, and racist. There are no black or Asian faces in White Point, just gaudy-looking houses that replaced tin sheds when the rock lobster boom made local fishermen wealthy overnight. Like much of Winton’s work, *Dirt Music* depicts marginalised characters living in regional, isolated communities in Western Australia.
Fox is portrayed as full of grief one year on from a tragic car accident that claimed the lives of his only sibling William (Darkie), his sister-in-law Sal, his nine-year-old nephew Bullet and his six-year-old niece Bird. Fox was nine years old when his mother died after being speared by a falling tree bough during a storm. Eight years later his father Wally died a slow death from mesothelioma. Such losses have changed Fox and now he refuses to play or listen to music, though as a boy, he had tuned into the intimate sounds of nature: “the breathing leaves, the air displaced by birds” (104).

Although his intuitive ear and vivid observation dulled after his mother died, as a boy he kept his music. As an adult, without music, Fox is unable to express himself and his daily life is a repetitive project of forgetting and deliberately disremembering (103). His work of pilfering fish at White Point and selling his catch to a Vietnamese restaurateur, whose own history is one of war and retribution, gets Fox through each day.

Rejecting her privileged background, Georgie comes to live in White Point with her wealthy lover, Jim Buckridge, a recent widower and the father of two young sons. He has power in the White Point community, and a reputation as an intimidator. Georgie’s and Fox’s paths cross when Fox is on his way home from an early morning dive with a truck load of illegal fish, and Georgie is stranded next to a broken-down car. The meeting leads to a brief affair. Fox then receives a violent, anonymous threat to his life that forces him into a quest for self-discovery. He hitch-hikes north to Broome, and from there organises a flight to Coronation Gulf, an isolated island off the Kimberley coast of Western Australia where he re-discovers the art of playing and listening to music.

The event that shapes Georgie’s story begins with a dispute over a video game between Georgie and Buckridge’s younger son, Josh, and his retaliation in calling her
stepmother: “She could barely believe that a single word might do her in” (10). The crisis, which prevents her from sleeping, becomes a catalyst for change in Georgie’s future at White Point. This is also the night she unveils the fish-poaching life of the thirty-six-year-old Fox. In contrast to Georgie and Buckridge, Fox has no identity in the seaside town and a family history of alienation pits Fox against White Point’s community. This history in turn links to the local Aboriginals’ story of dispossession from the land that is yet to be fully acknowledged in Australia. In this sense, the structure of the sonata form informs Dirt Music’s themes of dysfunction and dislocation in terms of an ongoing search for identity by Fox as he journeys away from White Point toward the north of Australia and the idea of his recuperation. In the following section I discuss sonata form and tonality in theory and practice to demonstrate how Dirt Music’s themes advance the linear progression of the novel’s plot to address a range of Australia’s cultural, environmental and socio-political issues.

**Sonata form and tonality in theory and practice**

Emerging during the period of Enlightenment, the sonata form in music enabled audiences without a musical background to anticipate the shape of the musical piece, and to judge its harmonic (tonal) and rhetorical themes or subjects (Smyth 2008, 44-7; Prieto 2002a, 49). In particular, sonata form over the course of the nineteenth century, was modified by a number of composers, including Beethoven (1795-1822), who resisted the form’s traditional adherence to uniformity in favour of developing its diverse and individualistic elements. This was consistent with encouraging a more spontaneous personal response by the listener to a musical work (Smyth 2008, 45). In

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6 McClary argues that musical practice has been reconfigured differently in different historical eras according to the praxis available to the composer (1991, 25).
a nineteenth-century sonata, the opening theme of the binary form was customarily associated with an energetic, dominant masculine subject in comparison to a secondary, feminine, lyrical theme. In reverse, Dirt Music’s primary theme, I argue, is personified as an antiphonic female protagonist and the secondary theme manifests through a lyrical male lead.

Music theorist and musician Charles Rosen argues that unless the listener understands the oppositional tonality behind the changes in the sonata form, the music itself will not be understood (Rosen in Cook 1990, 47). I suggest that the same principle applies to the representation of music in Dirt Music, where certain voices or tones characterise the different protagonists’ stories. In particular, the interwoven, yet distinct and alternating stories of Georgie and Fox accentuate the tension as each story is narrated in a different tone, tense and voice. Georgie’s story of dysfunction is told in an atonal voice narrated in past tense (as in the first excerpt below) while Fox’s story of dislocation (in the second excerpt below) unfolds in a free-flowing melodic voice narrated in present tense.

When Georgie sat down before the terminal she was gone in her seat, like a pensioner at the pokies, gone for all money. Into the welter of useless information night after night to confront people and notions she could do without (4).

When he coils droplines back into tubs and racks up hooks by their crimped traces, the diesel generator drones behind the wall. He stows the gear up on the boat, checks his batteries and steering, tilts each motor up and down before wiping off the screen and console (51).

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7 German composer and music theorist Adolph Bernhard Marx (1845) considered that the secondary theme might be determined as feminine. His suggestion quickly transpired into music theory (Marx in McClary 1991, 15).

8 McClary argues that the history of tonality was gendered—the sonata form in particular—and theorised as “masculine and feminine themes” (up until the 1960s) (1991, 13).
The narration of these subjects’ monologues and dialogues in different tones and tenses modulates Georgie’s and Fox’s voices and represents rising tensions between past and present. In an interview with Magdalena Ball, Winton explained that the use of the two tenses in *Dirt Music* “helps to distinguish the worlds that [Georgie and Fox] are in ... to make them seem to be inhabiting worlds of their own ... to express their own personalities and experiences” (Ball 2003). Representing different characters’ voices in different tenses is also evident in the sonata form in music. For example, McClary acknowledges a dissociation between two voices in most opening movements of the nineteenth-century symphony (1991, 68). The different tonalities in *Dirt Music*’s sonata form consolidate the key characters’ identities by accentuating the harmonic disparity in Georgie’s and Fox’s stories. This strategy of dissonance, which draws the attention of the listener, has been identified as significant to the sonata form in music. For example, Gottfried Leibnitz (1697/1969) defers to great composers mixing dissonant with consonant chords to incite or “sting” the listener into appreciating the outcome of their work (Leibnitz in Attali 1985, 27). In *Dirt Music*, the dissonance works to create contrast, and develop tension and release as shifts in tempo and mood.\(^9\)

Section one (the exposition) is composed of forty-one snippet-like modules where the primary theme of dysfunction (Georgie’s story) dominates the first half, and the secondary theme of dislocation (Fox’s story) dictates the second half.\(^10\) The primary theme initiates the linear trajectory of the novel: “One night in November ... Georgie ... had to wonder what was happening to her” (3-10). The primary theme, an important element of the sonata form, denotes the “personality and drama of each individual

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\(^9\) Tempo as the pace of a piece is often modulated by the length of the sentences whereas mood is developed by word choice.

\(^10\) Hepokoski and Darcy argue that a musical sonata’s exposition is split in two halves by the medial caesura (MC) which is a pause-like break in the middle of the exposition (2006, 23).
work” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 69). Hepokoski and Darcy argue that the primary theme of the sonata form might display a number of characteristics and emotional states (2006, 65). This is true in *Dirt Music*, as dysfunction is styled in the novel as a multidimensional succession of emotions, including, depression, loss of self esteem, and rage. It includes the voices of a number of characters, such as Beaver (the local White Point garage proprietor), Buckridge and his sons, Brad and Josh, and other disaffected individuals within the community. In *Dirt Music* the quieter beginning befits Georgie’s mundane existence as the reader learns that her social life is reduced to connecting with the outside world via internet chat rooms and a variety of websites: “nice to be without a body for a while; there was an addictive thrill in being of no age, no gender with no past” (4).

After consolidating dysfunction as the primary theme early in the exposition, the narrator creates the first of a series of intermittent transitions that introduce the secondary theme of dislocation. In the music form of sonata, such transitions are bridge-like phrases that occur when the primary theme modulates toward the secondary theme before the secondary theme is fully acknowledged around the middle of the exposition (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 117). For example, after Georgie gets up from her swivel chair (4), the reader learns that she goes through the sliding doors to the terrace where the breeze is fresh and thick with the scents of the sea: “On the beach something flashed ... probably just a gull ... And now the sound of a petrol engine, eight cylinders ... A moment of unscripted action in White Point” (5-7). This excerpt develops the idea of the primary theme of dysfunction (represented by Georgie) modulating toward the secondary theme when she stumbles across a boat trailer and a dog tied to the roo-bar of a truck, she hears a boat splutter off into the
distance. At this point, the relationship between the theme of dysfunction and dislocation is withheld. As in a musical sonata, after arousing the curiosity of the listener/reader as to the identity of the person on the boat (representing dislocation), the primary theme of dysfunction returns when the reader learns Georgie’s thoughts about her partner Buckridge. Buckridge, the only child of the founding father of White Point, has a complex reputation within the White Point community (37). To Georgie, he had seemed respectable, but after three years with him, Georgie is apprehensive: “recently something in her had leaked away” (9).

A subtle progression of emotions associated with the primary theme of dysfunction continues to dominate the expositional writing in the first sixty pages. In Georgie’s narrative, regret is linked to her theory of love, a sudden end to her nursing career, and the loss of her independence (11-12). Another level of dysfunction is represented as the harsh reality of life during the early days of White Point’s first settlement. White Point is represented as a wild and racist coastal town, with a history of lawlessness, intimidation and treachery (17). Arsonists, acting on behalf of Bill Buckridge destroy fishing boats and family businesses, and gun shots are fired at poachers who contravene local protocol (37, 87). The male residents of the town have brutal relationships with women, and the women are represented as rough and tough in a place where silence protects criminals, deviants and racist “red necks” (17-18).

The primary theme of dysfunction links to the secondary theme of dislocation in a number of ways. For example, while music had given Fox some credibility in the town, he abandons the idea of playing music after the car accident. Fox’s more recent and clandestine work of fish mongering refers to another connection in relation to the character of Go, a Vietnamese restaurateur to whom Fox sells his catch. Go lives in the
city and works within the Vietnamese community, but is isolated from the wider community. Fox himself links Go’s ethnicity to the Vietnam gangs, the Triads:

You got abalone, Lu?
...
No abs, says Fox.
Ah, that’s bad.
You could buy it legit, you know.
Two hunnerd dollar a kilo? You fuckin crazy?
...
Fox doesn’t mind not bringing abalone. He knows most of it will go to the Triads. It’s a shitload of trouble (27-8).

Fox’s assumptions and preconceptions link Go’s ethnicity to the Triad gangs, albeit without evidence.

With an increase in Asian immigration into Australia during the 1990s, new cultures, traditions, and stories challenged dominant ideas about what it meant to be an Australian. At the time, a growing concern about immigration, and particularly Asian immigration, created anxiety amongst some sections of the community. As a result the political party One Nation emerged under the leadership of Pauline Hanson. The One Nation party sought to abolish multiculturalism, restrict immigration and foreign ownership to protect and preserve Australia’s history and sovereignty.\footnote{By the end of the 1990s internal disputes led to the party’s demise (Koleth 2010).} The theme of dislocation in Fox’s narrative shows his attempt to identify himself with Go:

We’re both in the same position, you know.
Bullshit! I been through a war. And then South China fuckin Sea and Malaysia camps and Darwin. And fifteen people looking up to me, Lu. Not the same!
Go, there weren’t any abalone, ooright? It was too rough to dive.
...
Next time abalone.
We’ll see.
...
Shake hand now (29).
In keeping with the rotation inherent to the sonata form, the primary theme of dysfunction returns when Georgie’s relationship with Buckridge disintegrates, and she spies on Fox (43). Of significance is Georgie’s sudden decision to leave Buckridge (58). At this juncture in the novel, the sequential and rhetorical narratives of Georgie and Fox alternate more quickly, creating rapid shifts in tempo and mood. Georgie’s story jumps forwards to a meeting with Fox as he is on his way home from an early morning dive. Fox is late out of the water because he has attempted to fulfil Go’s order for abalone. Coincidentally, Georgie is there next to her broken-down car. Fox stops to assist and when he discovers Georgie is going into the city (to seek refuge from Buckridge) he offers her a ride. After a period of silence, discussion between them develops around the topics of literature (72-4). Through the omniscient narrator’s voice, the reader learns of Georgie’s irrational theory on love (75) and Fox’s love of books (73, 75) and his distaste for music (77).

A clash voiced in the past tense (Georgie) and present tense (Fox) is heard as events unfold and conspire against Fox on their arrival at the hotel. First his dress is inappropriate for bar service and he is refused entry. Then when Georgie suggests a drink in her room: “She grabs a fistful of his shirt and drags him inside ... She kisses him; he stands there and lets it happen” (78-9). After sex, “Fox lies back a mess. He tries to swim up through pangs of guilt, his unfocussed sense of betrayal. But betrayal of whom?” (81). The goal of the primary theme in a two-part exposition (of a sonata form) is to fully disclose the secondary theme. As such Georgie is represented as insensitive to Fox as she presses him for answers to her questions: “So how does it feel

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12 An acceleration of tempo in the final transition is the most common convention of the two-part exposition that forecasts a medial caesura and the complete identity of the secondary theme (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 23).
to be a poacher?” (81). Without waiting for Fox’s answer, Georgie launches from another angle:

You got away without telling me your name, she says. He likes the straight line of hair across her eyes.
Lu.
I’m Georgie.
Pleased to meet you (81).

In accord with the sonata form, the primary theme of dysfunction sounds out the secondary theme of dislocation in that Fox is represented as a poacher both in relation to the fish, and in relation to Georgie. During the discussion that ensues their conversation focuses on fishery laws and conservation:

Don’t you feel you’re ripping off the sea?
No.
But you’re breaking the law, you admit that.
Why would I admit anything to a stranger?
Well, ouch for that. It’s just that ... there are rules. You know, to protect the environment.
You honestly believe that?
Well, yes.
...
I only take what I need, he says. I’m one pair of hands.
Without a licence (82).

Such challenging questions and answers which relate to Australian environmental laws and conservation create tension between the two themes of dysfunction and dislocation. These are also raised in the narrative when Fox travels through the town of Wittenoom and recalls his father’s slow death from mesothelioma and the “monumental bastardry of the cover-up” (229).

In the sonata form, the secondary theme is not less important than the primary theme, and the idea of the “other” theme attracts “considerable allure and even with a measure of ... power and truth” (Kramer 1996, 37). In Dirt Music, once fully identified in the writing, the secondary theme of dislocation drives the narrative’s trajectory.
forward to the exposition’s closure, and on to the development section. Hepokoski and Darcy argue that the secondary theme is essential in that “what happens in the [secondary theme] makes a sonata a sonata” (2006, 117). In these terms, within the wider sonata form structure, the secondary theme has sole responsibility for drawing the exposition to a close, as well as finally, the sonata. But that is to jump ahead. In the second half of the exposition the secondary theme of dislocation enhances events when new material defines a number of “tonal moments” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 117). Examples of tonal moments include instances of confrontation such as the moment when Fox learns that Jim Buckridge is Georgie’s partner:

Who is he?
Jim Buckridge.
Fuck
...
The shamateur sat up so fast it reefed the sheet off her (85).

Paying attention to what the narrative reveals at the surface level of the novel shapes the way the reader responds to the binary form of the sonata. In these terms, a discussion between the binary themes, Georgie and Fox, on the style of music the Fox band played, affects the cultural force and definition of its title: Dirt Music.

So what did you play?
Guitar.
I mean, what kind of music.
...
Dirt Music.
As in ... soil?
You can’t mean country and western?
Nah ... But mostly it was blues. Country blues, I spose.
...
Um, she says blankly.

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13 Genette suggests that there are three levels to narrative design: a surface level that includes word choices and length of sentences; a second level contends with the organisation of the story as the events and characters’ stories unfold in the narrative, and finally, the critical third level that details the structure or design of the narrative (Genette 1980, 25-6).
Rootsy stuff. Old timey things.
Folk music.
I spose. No, not really. Well, I dunno (95; italics in original).

Georgie has limited music knowledge and although Fox is represented as a brilliant musician (202), he is unable to clearly categorise the styles he used to play. In this sense, the two protagonists complement each other as each adds a social and personal dimension to the understanding of what “dirt music” refers to. The dysfunction and dislocation themes continue to alternate in the exposition, while the secondary theme of dislocation dictates the writing by introducing new material. In Fox’s story the narrator reconstructs a particularly troubled era of Australia’s historical past by highlighting the “Stolen Generations” of Aboriginal children from the late 1800s to the 1970s.14 The reader “hears” this history during a conversation in the novel between Fox and his niece, Bird:

Kids used to run away from the camp, Bird. Lookin for their families. Your grandad used to let em stay down the creek where no one would find em. Then what happened?

In the above excerpt, the reader can draw analogies between Fox’s story and the Aboriginal story of cultural and geographical dislocation, as echoes of dislocation and dispossession are heard in the text when an explosion destroys Fox’s truck and dog and sets up a sequence of events that force Fox to flee White Point by boat, leaving him at the mercy of the environment:

Fox goes and goes across the flat sea. The wind in his teeth ... He stares at the fuel gauge ... He considers the radio ... But he knows who will come

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14 The Stolen Generation is the title of the government report on the children of Aboriginal descent, and some Torres Strait Islanders, who were forcibly removed from their families by past Australian federal, state and territory governments and church missions.
looking ... He goes over the side ... The sea is caramelising in the heat of the afternoon ... Like a landslip; the more you dig the more there is to be dug (135-138).

The excerpt suggests that Fox is both physically and psychologically ill-prepared for the battle still to come as he explores the relationship between his individual freedom and the White Point community. He questions both his feelings for Georgie and his poaching. He decides to abandon his farm on the margin of White Point and journey to the north of Western Australia in search of his own identity. This decision leads to the exposition’s closure and, in this sense, it can be described as the most important “tonal goal of the exposition” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 117).

Fox follows the coast all the way. The far north looks fractured. So many bay and islands. And he gives a little snort of surprise to see it named. Yes, right at the top near the Timor Sea. Coronation Gulf. He turns the light out and goes back to bed but he doesn’t sleep (160).

This highlights a discussion which took place earlier in the text between Georgie and Fox about special places. Georgie indicates to Fox that her special place is Coronation Gulf. “There was somewhere once ... Coronation Gulf. And it’s way up north? In the tropics” (102; italics in original). Identifying Coronation Gulf on the atlas gives Fox hope for a new beginning and effectively draws the exposition to a close.

_Dirt Music_’s long development (B section), comprises sections two to seven in the novel. The development section follows the typical sonata form where the binary themes of the exposition are enhanced, with new themes inserted or contrasting material highlighted to reflect the deeper, interior integrity of the sonata (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 196). It is important to remember at this point that at the centre of the musical sonata form are issues of identity that create social tension within the tensive binary relationship. Manipulation and selection of motifs, and ordering of
thematic material in a musical sonata are indicative of choices, techniques and treatment by the composer and each of these govern linear and tonal motion.\textsuperscript{15} In the novel, as the themes of dysfunction and dislocation move forward towards relationship and connection, they advance the linear trajectory of content and form. In commonly accepted techniques of a sonata form’s development section, the composer, as discussed, is free to engage numerous possibilities by “modifying, fragmenting, complicating, and embellishing as much as his talent will permit” (Chamberlin 2006, 14). In music, a development is not an indiscriminate sequence of events but a carefully orchestrated selection of significant material. That is the sonata composer must gradually weaken the secondary theme during the development phase (compared to its strong position at the conclusion of the exposition) so that the ultimate recapitulation and future demise will appear as reasonable and “acceptable to the listener” (Chamberlin 2006, 14).

A music sonata development section has been described as having “a restless, modulatory plan that stakes out one or more nontonic [secondary themes] local goals ... registering the expressive implications ... of earlier themes” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 196-7). Dirt Music’s interrelated yet fragmented development may be read as a creative “sonata game” that alternates between the cross-referencing narratives of Georgie and Fox “pulling irresistibly on each other’s sleeve for attention” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 252). Due to the limits of language—unlike polyphonic instrumental music—the narratives cannot be heard within the same temporal period; Georgie’s story unfolds in sections two, four and six and Fox’s narrative resonates in sections three, five and seven.

\textsuperscript{15} So many composers have developed sonatas that an analysis of the development section requires a creative, flexible approach as it is too difficult to “generalise”. (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 205)
The development sections of *Dirt Music* imitate a traditional sonata form rotation as the primary theme returns to dominate the writing. Georgie has little time to fantasise about Fox as she is faced with the sudden death (cerebral haemorrhage) of her mother and she returns briefly to her family home, in an affluent, riverside suburb near the city. Georgie with her sisters, Ann, Judith, and Margaret (from whom she is estranged), their partners, and her father Warwick Jutland QC, with his second wife Cynthia, gather at Georgie’s mother’s home before the funeral (166-73). Again, the development parallels a musical sonata form’s tonal expansion through introducing new characters’ voices. For example,

[Ann’s husband] greeted Georgie with an embrace of consolation from which he took more than he offered. They’re on the terrace, he said. ... It’s Margaret who’s a mess, [said Jude] ... Georgie watched as he [Judith’s husband] moved Jude with a firm hand between the shoulderblades ... Mum’s dead, Dad [said Georgie]. You don’t have to say anything ... Wasn’t last night enough for you [Georgie]? Ann cried. The kids are here. It’s Saturday, the day of your mother’s funeral, and you’re skinny dipping like a teenager in her pool? Georgie looked up at Ann in her Chanel suit (169-176).

These voices provide the reader with new insights into Georgie’s past and her difficult familial and domestic relationships. Georgie is the eldest of four daughters, and due to her individualistic, defiant and tomboyish adolescence she is the odd one out in her family. She was unable to conform or to please her fashion-conscious, shopaholic mother, and deliberately rebelled against her father (166-77). The narration picks up this theme of dysfunction as Buckridge and his sons, Brad and Josh, arrive at the crematorium to pay their respects and offer support to Georgie. After the wake, when Buckridge wants to talk about Fox, Georgie silences him, and he returns to White Point. On the morning following the funeral, the reader learns of Georgie’s premeditated scheme to go to the Fox farm. But Fox has disappeared, and his
departure unravels Georgie’s plan of moving out of her dysfunctional relationship with Buckridge and into a new arrangement with Fox with whom she associates peace: “The peaceful silence of the place. And music. A houseful of books” (184). In Fox’s absence she returns to Buckridge.

Fluctuating between living with Buckridge in White Point, grocery shopping in the city, and visiting her sister Judith, who has been diagnosed and hospitalised with mental health issues, Georgie maintains a low profile in the White Point community. But she is filled with an unidentified, simmering rage instigated by Fox’s disappearance: “She was gone on [Fox] the way she had never been before and he turned out to be just another self-absorbed prick” (191). Her rage enhances the plot as in a musical sonata: “for within this model of identity, construction and preservation, the self cannot truly be a self unless it acts; it must leave its cozy nest of its tonic [home], risk this confrontation and finally triumph over its Other” (McClary 1991, 69). Georgie is represented as desperately seeking her independence from Buckridge, but with nowhere else to go. Like the primary theme in a musical sonata, Georgie’s story moves here and there at a local level where, in conversation with White Point residents, she discovers more about Fox. The story of Fox’s history anticipates and strengthens the larger purpose of the sonata structure.

Fox’s narrative, involving his journey away from White Point begins its development rotation in Section three where his story embellishes expositional material, such as his refusal to play or listen to music, while inserting new ideas. Through seemingly random conversations, cultural exchange, and environmental landscapes, important voices and tones are introduced that enable the reader to understand the logic of the narrative.
As Fox is represented as never having ventured far from his hobby farm on the margin of White Point, a nameless narrator guides the commentary. Beginning close to home (the tonic key) in the familiar floodplain country, Fox hitches a ride in an old truck driven by a local who prefers listening to cricket than to music. A white cross and a pair of old boots on the roadside creates visual and aural memories for Fox of his father and a Burl Ives song. These memories give Fox direction as he heads for Wittenoom. At Paynes Fyne the commentary changes as music is heard and this weakens the secondary theme in readiness for total recapitulation. That is, as a passenger in a Bedford van, Fox hears what he describes as the American jazz rock band Steely Dan’s best album, 1977 Aja (pronounced Asia) repeated on the van’s tape deck: “The music hammers at him ... Full of angular licks and slick changes, lyrics that peck at you. Music unstitches him now; he can do without it” (225). The music heard by Fox allows both he and the reader to aurally imagine the sounds, techniques and lyrics and therefore the reader can empathise with Fox’s emotions. The music stimulates his memories and violates his self-imposed rule of not listening to music, “I don’t play anymore” (94).

Later, outside the mining town of Newman, the narrator weaves a socio-political and enviro-musico landscape through metaphorical language, mixing visual images with imaginary sound, for the reader to imagine the beautiful landscape, hear birds screeching, and the risk to nature of iron ore mining:

the Ophthalmia Ranges whose bluffs and peaks and mesas rise crimson, black, burgundy, terracotta, orange against a cloudless sky. Gully shadows are purple up there and the rugged layers of iron lie dotted with a greenish furze of spinifex. You sense hidden rivers ... the smooth white trunks of snappy gums suspend crowns of leaves so green it’s shocking. Mobs of white cockatoos explode from their boughs (228).
Of significance to Fox’s developing story is his meeting with Bess (a retired drama teacher dying of bowel cancer) and her husband Horrie. Bess shares with Fox her philosophy of harmony and unity in nature: “A school of fish turns as one. Yes, and a flock of sparrows. They resonate. And so do we” (248). She speaks to him over a Prokofiev tape playing in the background and this “sets [Fox’s] teeth on edge and blunts whatever it is Bess is saying” (248-9). Horrie’s choice of European classical music, disturbs Fox emotionally and affects his concentration. As such he fails to understand the enormity of Bess’s observations. The effect on Fox of Shostakovich’s Piano Quintet is represented as jarring:

The music is jagged and pushy … the outbursts of strings and piano are as austere and unconsoling as the pindan plain … This music feels like it’s peeling his skin … Since that terrible night in which everything seemed to unravel in a series of jumpy, uncertain moments, everyone dead so sudden like that, all he’s wanted is to be left alone, and music is a fucking bully—it’s the last thing he needs; it’ll rip him to pieces (249-50).

One of Shostakovich’s best known works is his Piano Quintet in G minor for piano and string quartet. Here, I suggest this is the composition heard by the reader and of significance to Fox’s emotional response, as the G minor key is associated with psychological influences on mood, such as, “frenzy, despair and agitation” (Steblin 1996, 111). The sound of music is represented as inescapable and as such it undermines Fox’s search for self-identity, as he continues his resolve not to play or listen to music.

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16 Bess’s idea returns later in Fox’s narrative as an energetic flurry in the prolongation toward the development’s closure.
18 Beethoven insisted the first thing the general reader need know about tonality is that “the names of keys do not represent important aesthetic facts” (Tovey 1944, 8). Other composers disagreed. I use Steblin’s references to key characteristics and temperament devised by the Italian violinist Francesco Galeazzi (1796).
In Section four, the primary theme of dysfunction moves the plot forward as Georgie persists in a cycle of frenetic activities, including swimming and sailing with the Buckridge boys, where she accidentally injures her back. A White Point massage therapist, Rachel Nilsam, manages to alleviate Georgie’s back condition and provide her with new information on Fox’s music background and on Buckridge’s violent history (265). As with a musical sonata, the cross-referencing builds over the ternary structure and strengthens the novel’s thematic coherence. That is, together with the threads of love, mothering and music in Georgie’s story, a composite picture is built of the novel’s principal characters. Through Rachel, Georgie discovers that Darkie, Fox’s only sibling, was “sly” with a “junkie look” and he and his dim-witted wife Sal were an odd couple, though they were natural musicians (267).

In Section five, after studying survey maps, Fox travels on to Derby, where he finds a pilot willing to take the risk with the weather and fly him to an airstrip near to Coronation Gulf (297). Alone in the wilderness area, a shift in tone occurs when Fox meets an Indigenous man named Menzies. When Menzies interrogates Fox as to his mission—“Science fulla … Guvmint … Adviser … Lawyer … Mine boy … station boy …” (301)—the reader hears that the north of Western Australia has been exploited by various vested interests. When Menzies invites Fox to stay the night at his campsite, Fox meets a younger Aboriginal man named Axle, who becomes an influential voice in reuniting Fox with his music. Axle is described as “not a proper Aborigine man” (304), because he has never been initiated. Land in Aboriginal culture is a sacred place: “your umbilical place. To be separated from the land is to be put into limbo, to be stuck between life and death” (Philips in Ben-Messahel 2006, 104). The figure of Menzies is represented as coming from a mix of races, including Chinese and Bardi people. He is
shown not to have a naval but he remains connected to the land although his life is
shaped by institutions. Axle and Menzies are represented as part of the Stolen
Generations’ story of dislocation, a reference to the Indigenous activities of the
narrative’s exposition. That is, the development section embellishes the sub-themes of
Fox’s narrative heard in the exposition through a dialogue with Bird about Aboriginal
children running away from the Mogumber camp (114). Through Menzies’ character
the narrator elaborates on the conflict that exists in the north of Western Australia
between various groups over entitlement to land in the National park: “Everybody
fightin now. Blackfullas too. This mob, that mob. Lawyers. Awful” (308). The reference
is likely to be to 1992 when the High Court of Australia delivered the Mabo Decision,
ruled in favour of Indigenous native title. The subsequent Wik Decision, relating to
Indigenous native title and pastoralists leases was handed down in 1996.¹⁹

Still shrinking from the popular and classical music he heard on his travels, Fox is
ordered by Axle to play his (Axle’s) out-of-tune guitar: “What music d’you like? [Fox]
asks. Slim Dusty, the boy announces and Fox plays ‘Pub with No Beer’” (306).²⁰ The
song reference here has an irony to it as alcohol abuse is a significant problem in
remote Aboriginal communities (Hudson 2011). The men sing the lyrics to the song but
when the song ends Fox continues playing, breaking into the silence with a
melancholic Irish air that morphs into an elaborative improvisation. Fox’s realisation
that: “Music. And it’s not hurting anybody” is interrupted when Axle walks off
humiliated because he can’t play the guitar (307). In correspondence with the logic of
the sonata form and the denouement of the secondary theme of dislocation, Fox

¹⁹ In 1998 the John Howard-led Liberal government amended the Wik Decision.
²⁰ “A Pub With No Beer”, a poem written by Irish-born Australian Dan Sheahan, and adapted by singer-
songwriter, Gordon Parsons for Slim Dusty, became an international hit in 1957, reaching number five
on the British charts.
offers to de-tune the guitar to an open D. Using an open D allows strings to be strummed together. Fox then instructs Axle that you can play many tunes using the intervals on one string. During the night Axle interrupts Fox’s sleep to offer him a wundala (boat) as a gift for the music (308). This tonal interruption, represented by the encounter with the two Aboriginal men, transforms Fox’s attitude to music.

In Section six, the narration returns to Georgie’s story. In keeping with the development phase of the sonata form, new material is inserted and the reader learns that Georgie is energised by visits to the abandoned Fox farm. A complete change of pace allows her time to flick through Fox’s books and listen to his LPs (330-2). These recordings awaken in her an erotic, obsessive desire for Fox that parallels her new discovery of music as she teaches herself to play chords and tunes on Fox’s steel guitar. This is significant as prior to this the reader has been told Georgie is not musical and part of her experience is being forced to have piano lessons as a child (95). She is aroused by the feel of his instrument as it:

zinged and jangled on her legs ... She lay for hours in the bathtub ... did nothing more than try on [Fox’s] many fingerpicks. She lay on the sofa ... the sunlight flashed off the brass and plastic and tortoiseshell. They made her feel like a different creature, those glinting claws (333).

The scene draws the reader into a display of eroticism through music. As McClary argues, music, in particular tonality, is often dependent on metaphorical imitative sexual acts and stirs erotic energy that withholds or unleashes fulfilment (1991, 12-3). However, Buckridge is also undergoing change and late one night he resists the temptation to raze Fox’s homestead. His resistance is apparently rewarded when, soon

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21 Open D is characterised as “easy” in the “open/stopped string” theory devised by Hector Berlioz (Steblin 1996, 142).
22 Heinrich Schenker (1973) was the first music theorist to identify and examine the “libidinal energy” of tonality (McClary 1991, 13).
after, he hauls in a huge, supernatural catch of fish (338–40). Fate is important to Buckridge and he decides he wants to amend his past wrongs by flying to Broome with Georgie, to reunite Georgie and Fox (341-2). This decision precipitates the closure of the development section.

We have seen how the sonata form has, so far, involved alternating primary and secondary themes in the narrative’s development. In Section seven, environmental-music images and sounds are shown to stimulate a memory for Fox that relates back to his mother’s death. The reader learns that Fox’s sitting still and watching the lapping of the tides is rewarded as: “mantra rays begin to roll ... baitfish form like storm clouds ... a pack of sharks glides in ... Every day they come like a bouncing, bickering pack of dogs” (354-7). When an incoming cyclone distorts these activities, he hears and sees a “waterspout rises ... the wind screams ... the shriek of trees” (359). When the cyclonic season abates, and the hot dry weather threatens, Fox relocates and finds alternative fresh water and food supplies. Paddling north, he discovers a cave with Indigenous paintings of minute, dancing stick figures on the outside ledges and a large mouthless head on the ceiling inside the cave. The Indigenous rock art not only reminds Fox of Axle, but creates a visual connection for Fox between the living and the dead (364-64), between himself and his mother.

In this development section, when Fox oils his fishing rod, he accidentally plucks the nylon leader and hears a B-flat. B flat “is a tender key, soft, sweet, effeminate, fit to express transports of love, charm [and] grace” (Steblin 1996, 112). The sound excites Fox and he runs a length of nylon line between two branches of a fig tree. Tightening the line creates a pleasant-sounding tone and pitch. Fox hums the note
before plucking the string and the sound he hears creates a memory of Darkie.²³

Though Fox still considers music dangerous, he gives in to the sound and experiences a temporary liberation.

God knows, music will undo you, and yet your whacking this thing into a long, gorgeous, monotonous, hypnotic note and it’s not killing you, it’s not driving you into some burning screaming wreck of yourself (368).

Fox plays the liberating, foot-stamping, humming chant as a blues note. This life-saving, talking blues music is described as producing an out-of-body experience and sensory response in Fox: his body sizzles and his skin bubbles, his eyes see dancing strings and his ears chirp (368). Emotions run high for Fox and, before long, his imagination is running back to White Point. This scene is significant as he rebels against his self-imposed rule of not playing music, then as his will gives way to pleasure, he thinks of home. It is relevant here that music has been said to “encapsulate the process of desire, gratification and frustration - what we call ‘life’ - into which the subject is locked” (Schopenhauer in Smyth 2008, 74), and provide temporary relief.

The links between Fox’s development story and his expositional narrative allows for the revision of his memories. That is, through his imagination he visits the farm and every book on the shelves of his mother’s library, and chants lines of poetry as a “monofilament manifold monotone” (369). A chant then arises in the stream-of-consciousness writing of the novel to show Fox’s mind as he travels back in time, to a painful “exquisite intimacy” (370). He regrets not having anyone to share his life and he thinks of Georgie (369), who flutters in his thoughts “like something you can’t quite believe in” (222). Having just met Georgie, Fox is unsure that she exists and is not a

²³ Suzannah Clark argues that a sound (pitch) of the past, modified in the present, creates a reminiscence within the harmonic context, and is always aligned to our present experience (2011, 181-5).
figment of his imagination. This is a significant feeling for Fox and is finally resolved in the recapitulation section of the sonata, as I will show. In the days that follow, Fox plays music and sings, remembering the intimacy of his family life and relationships. He experiences relief from his pain, until he senses Bess’ passing, and the tolling of bells of the Arvo Part composition resonate in his mind. It is relevant here that during his time travelling north with Bess and Horrie, Bess informs Fox that Arvo Part’s music is death music (251-53). Fox remembers the dead, but also smells Georgie, and remembers the one night they spent together. Such are the emotions and thoughts rising in him, Fox decides that singing and playing music may send him insane:

No more singing. No more music … You had to put yourself out of reach. Of music first, and also of memory because one lived in the other, but people too, because they could say anything, do anything, bring anything out at any moment and do you in without even noticing (373-4).

Though he stops playing music again, past memories continue to monopolise Fox’s thoughts. However, music continues to be a balm, as when he accidentally shreds the soles of his feet while fishing, and sings a little ditty to pacify his mind, producing an improvisation on a “humming, groaning, wincing trance, never letting go of the riff” (378). The sound soon morphs into the Blind Willie Johnson country blues spiritual: “Nobody’s Fault But Mine” (378). This blues song allows Fox to express his ideas of love, sex and self-sacrifice. In his hallucinating, improvisatory, musical trance-like riff he remembers his brother Darkie and wife Sal:

Hard thoughts in the pain. Disloyal thoughts … Their need for one another was ravenous but it didn’t extend to anybody else … The music wasn’t in them. They barely felt it … He wanted something more intricate, more animated. He wanted some wit, some memory, some kindness, someone who saw him, saw through him, saw the music of him … he might have wanted something better than to be his brother and to have his wife … All

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24 According to Prieto, song is like a “peace pledge” between the subject and the outside world, mediating between the inner emotions and the wider experiences of life. (2002a, 101-09)
he can do, while he lies there with his feet throbbing, is to wonder why he stayed, why he persisted. Why he’s lived this last year in homage to these people even after their death. Why? ... Because you loved them ... And owning up to what they were really like won’t change that (378-381; italics in original).

As the lines above show, Fox empties his past memories and clears his conscience in the present giving him hope for a better future. He thinks of Georgie, when he was “unafraid” and decides that at the centre of her wildness there was calm (383). But Fox is restricted by injured feet and, out of boredom, he returns to singing and bangs away on a nylon thread. He thinks he strikes the note E and gets into a groove that sounds like a one-chord boogie. He imagines the sounds of blues musicians’ playing, such as John Lee Hooker, Elmore James and Sleepy John Estes (388). Music makes him realise that he is not one of anything, but a multiplicity of possibilities. In this sense it is relevant the note E (as in major) is affected with “noisy shouts of joy, laughing pleasure” and in E minor as “naïve, innocent sounds of love” (Steblin 1996, 170-1).25 This revelation comes from his music-making “you go up and down your note ... until you’re not one moment empty, nor one bit lost ... you’re not one of anything. You’re a resonating multiplication” (388). Blues cultures tend to link the body and eroticism to experiences of human life (McClary 2000, 45). This dramatic turning-point introduces the onset of the final transition as the development section ends with the secondary theme of dislocation ready to recapitulate, as the narrative prepares for a return to the primary theme of dysfunction (Georgie’s story).

Historically—since the genesis of the sonata form in music—the recapitulation section has included a full revision of the exposition. As Hepokoski and Darcy argue, recapitulation conveys the goal of the sonata and implies “a post developmental

25 Here I refer to early nineteenth-century key characteristics referenced by Steblin.
recycling of all or most of the expositional materials, beginning again with the module that had launched the exposition” (2006, 231). However, according to Kramer: “Form cannot even be considered a stable or ‘objective’ category; it may change, erode, or emerge as expectation or desire shifts from one type of performative address to another” (2011, 48). Thus, while a recapitulation can establish the idea of a new start for the binary themes (after the secondary theme’s harmonic fracture at the end of the development), it will vary with each work. A music sonata might repeat, in the recapitulation, the themes, mood and sound heard at the beginning of an exposition bar by bar. An exact repetition in the novel would clearly not be in the interests of the reader. In Section eight of Dirt Music, the exposition is repeated, but with a difference in its recapitulation; it is a move which does not diminish the sense of a new beginning.

Section eight, the dramatic turning-point of the novel, is half the length of section one but, like that section, it is divided into two equal parts, with the theme of dislocation dominating the second half. Section eight is marked by a double return to the format of the exposition and the primary\(^1\) theme of dysfunction repeated with difference in Georgie’s narrative. The theme of dysfunction reoccurs when Georgie is lured away by Buckridge to Broome. The scenario parallels the fraught atmosphere of the exposition when Georgie sat at the computer for six hours aimlessly surfing web sites (3). Now she similarly “sat by the resort pool listless and heat-stunned” (391) noticing other guests lounging by the pool playing with their laptops and mobile phones. Georgie walks down to the beach where there is white sand, but no wind; the reader learns she is “expecting to see Luther Fox” (392). The scene recycles the earlier exposition with difference. That is, in the exposition, the reader had read that in the house Georgie shares with Buckridge, Georgie moved across the kitchen floor and
through the sliding doors to the terrace where the breeze was fresh (5). She then noticed a light flash and unveils the secret life of Fox, “a non-fleet boat going out under cover of darkness and slipping back at first light … There was something shonky about it” (15).

Georgie likes Broome: it is multicultural, unlike White Point. But as she reacquaints herself with the town (she had visited Broome years earlier), she is represented as confused and bewildered by the crowds and the climate. She believes Buckridge’s sons blame her for their banishment to boarding school. The background to this is that Buckridge’s mother committed suicide and Buckridge experiences regret over his past, including a one-night stand with Sal Fox when his wife was giving birth to their elder son, and he believes his background is catching up with him (429). In addition, Bill Buckridge, Buckridge’s father, was a ‘monster’ who passed on his unenviable reputation to his son (37-8). Thus, the theme of dysfunction dominates the first half of the recapitulation, with intermittent transitional interruptions to the secondary theme of dislocation.

A recapitulation in the musical sonata form is usually uncomplicated, and resolved in the second half; however, new material is often inserted in the secondary theme. In the musical form, the secondary theme in the recapitulation parallels the expositional closure and contains the most significant event in the sonata: the structural closure where all issues are resolved in tonal agreement. The secondary theme, according to Hepokoski and Darcy, is the most “privileged” space in a musical sonata (2006, 117). In Dirt Music’s recapitulation, the secondary theme of dislocation represented in Fox’s story is shown experiencing a new beginning as he plays and listens to music. His story
develops along Orpheus-like proportions. “[Fox] greets every day with music and likewise bids it goodbye at sunset” (402). It is through this musical activity that Fox imagines his deepening relationship with Georgie. Though Fox is practical and active, a fever is beginning to make him inert, and his hallucination informs the final scene when “Georgie Jutland breathes into his mouth” (404). That is, during his bout of illness, after playing his music, Georgie returns to Fox’s imagination, as a life saver, anticipating the final scene in the novel.

In Broome, Buckridge had discovered that months earlier Fox flew to Coronation Gulf. He employs Red Hopper, a tourist guide, to track down Fox. Red has his own experiences of the violence of White Point: “White Point ... They take no prisoners in that town” (408). When Georgie and Buckridge fly in to the archipelago they meet Red on a shelly cove. He indicates that someone has been stealing food from his wilderness campsite: “That’s our man, said Jim ... I think I know where he is, said Georgie” (411). As in the exposition, the primary theme moves towards the secondary theme of dislocation, creating suspense as to Fox’s whereabouts. The primary theme returns when Georgie, Buckridge and Red, make their way across the sea to Coronation Gulf and Georgie’s thoughts focus on Red’s boating skills as Buckridge appears uncomfortable with someone else at the wheel (411).

In keeping with the theme of recapitulation, Georgie says that there is something unique about Fox, something to do with music: “Music wants to be heard ... She found him once ... She’d just have to find him a second time” (415-6). When Fox’s story begins again, Fox has decided he is not nomadic and wants to settle, connect and live in one place. He thinks he will die in the wilderness if he does not return to the

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26 Orpheus, the famous poet and musician of Greek mythology, greets the dawn every morning chanting verses to Apollo, his father, the god of the sun and music (Graves 2003, 112-13).
mainland (419). As Buckridge, Red and Georgie search for Fox, he knowingly eludes them. Buckridge is mute with rage (420). Fox’s health is weakening, as he steals food and medicine from Red’s campsite. At the camp, he spies himself in a mirror; a bearded “thing” with matted hair. Confronted by his self-image, Fox delays his return to the mainland (425). In these scenes, the recapitulation is suspended. That is, the secondary theme does not behave as expected, and paves the way for a double recapitulation.  

As the primary theme of dysfunction reappears in the writing (referred to earlier as primary\(^1\)), Buckridge suggests that Georgie call Fox’s name (427). Dominated by Fox, or the other characters’ thoughts of Fox, the narration proceeds, with Georgie reasoning that Fox has had years of living with his memories of the dead and is not about to commit suicide; he wants to live. Moreover, she believes in part that he desires her (429-30). Psychologically weakened by his frail appearance, Fox is paralysed by indecision and an inability to return home. He reasons with himself, and when he decides he has nothing to fear, he makes a move to come in. He is momentarily stalled when he imagines he sees Georgie fishing, and Buckridge standing on a ridge at Coronation Gulf (433). Buckridge is telling Georgie that Fox’s hasty retreat from White Point was precipitated by fear that Buckridge was pursuing him (435). This answers the novel’s primary question as to why Fox abandoned his hobby farm. This explains the ternary form’s clearly sustained discussion which begins with the expositional and contrasting themes of dysfunction and dislocation. It leaves important

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\(^{27}\) In music sonatas, double recapitulations are unusual, and manifest when a recapitulation commences but fails to resolve its “tonal issues”. The second recapitulation rebegins in the primary theme and then moves onto the secondary theme and structural closure. Hepokoski and Darcy suggest that a failed normative recapitulation is significant and facilitates issues of musical and cultural importance (2006, 232, 279, 603).
questions raised in the exposition of Fox’s identity, to be resolved by the secondary theme of dislocation in the recapitulation section.

When Georgie decides to call off the search for Fox, “Red ... I want you to call the plane in. Today” (441). The act is a point of destabilisation. Georgie’s decision to recapitulate and return home increases the emotional tension between her and Buckridge and jeopardises the final resolution of the entire sonata.\footnote{McClary defends composers who break well-defined music codes within “socially grounded” contexts affirming that “everything ... is actually ordered, rational, under control” (1991, 102).} Simultaneously, Fox announces his desire to leave the island and return to the mainland: “There’ll be no more treks now and the knowledge of it lifts him a little” (455). In music, when such forms are destabilised, McClary argues, the music produces powerful effects that shape the listener’s experience of emotions, desire, cultural contexts and practices (2000, 7-8).

These powerful effects are heard in Georgie’s and Fox’s dissonant stories as the seaplane airlifting Georgie and Buckridge back to the mainland flies over Fox as he paddles his kayak in the same direction as the plane. When Fox realises that Georgie is on the plane he reacts with shouts of emotion, but his voice is inaudible over the roar of the engine. Airborne, Georgie cannot see him. To her the Coronation Gulf below appeared “like some bearded, featureless head rising, perennially and pointlessly from the water” (456). This image has its roots in the Orpheus myth, where Orpheus met his end at the hands of the Maenads who tore him to shreds and threw his head into the river where it floated, “still singing, down to the sea” (Graves 2003, 113). Buckridge notices something in the water and argues with the pilot. Fox sees the plane wobble, then crash into the sea (458).
As in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, Fox dives into the plane’s body to free Georgie. When Georgie feels his lips pressed on hers, she recognises him: “Luther Fox” (459). Sonata form in music depends on the primary theme’s necessary “grounding of whatever ‘large-scale dissonance’ occupies the second narrative position” (McClary 1991, 16). Issues of dislocation, including self-identity, are at the root of Fox’s narrative. When the novel turns the Orphic myth upside down, Fox is portrayed lying on the deck: “blue”, breathless and wondering whether or not Georgie is real. Georgie freezes when Fox begins to retch; however, she comes to life when Red reminds her of her role: “You’re the nurse. Yes, she thought. This is what I do. She fell on Luther Fox, pressed her mouth to his and blew. She’s real” (461). These last words of the novel are articulated as a dramatic revelation for Fox. The suggestion that Georgie is real also suggests an end to Georgie’s association with the primary theme of dysfunction. The secondary theme, in keeping with sonata form, draws the narrative to a close, and the reader to an abrupt, and incongruously happy ending. That the lovers are not only reunited but recognise each other is relevant as the “recognition of self against other is positioned at and as the end of discourse, both as aesthetic pleasure (in finality, totality, unity) and of critical recognition (the binary as truth, structure, insight)” (Kramer 1996, 37). The underlying form in *Dirt Music*, therefore, affirms a double recapitulation as Georgie’s and Fox’s stories fold into each other’s narratives invoking writing as a quest for identity, triumph over adversity, and redemptive love.

**Conclusion**

I have read *Dirt Music* a quintessential Australian novel steeped in references to Indigenous landscape and culture, through the sonata form. Overall, in my analysis of
I have taken up Ben-Messahel’s suggestion that *Dirt Music*’s story “arises from the music of the land and is a symphony on the theme of Western Australia” (2006, 12), and I have shown that *Dirt Music* can productively be read through the sonata form, playing with a number of key terms, particularly dysfunction and dislocation, without eroding the legitimacy or flexibility of either term.

During the last decade of the twentieth century in Australia, contentious issues, such as immigration, mining, economic and Indigenous land right reforms enacted critical moments in the political history of Australia. The individual and community stories in *Dirt Music*, through the sonata form, encourage the reader to forge new connections and understandings in relation to Australia’s broader ongoing concerns and conflicts. By drawing on the sonata form in making sense of the novel’s composition, the reader may engage in the deeper responses to Georgie’s and Fox’s individual journeys, in a way that mitigates doubts and fears about Australia’s future and that may lead to affirmation, forgiveness and love, for example, in relation to Australia’s past and present treatment of Aboriginal people. *Dirt Music*, therefore, provides an alternative model for understanding that at this moment in history there are possibilities for but no easy solutions to the challenges besetting Australia’s socio-political, environmental and cultural life.
This thesis has focused on reading and writing music in contemporary fiction. Music, I have shown is incorporated into these novels and is utilised in various ways by writers and theorists seeking to forge new compositional and analytical methods with inventive modes of listening, creating and understanding the worlds in which they inhabit. Both *Impromptu I—X* and this dissertation engage with questions that concern the relationship between music and literature, the role music can play in writing narrative fiction and how reading a work of fiction through a music lens enhances an understanding and interpretation of a text.

Reading music in fiction according to da Sousa Correa highlights the “extraordinary” literary outcomes of a novelist’s work (2003, 192). But Benson suggests that:

> the deormalization of the object of music and the recognition of a set of shared methodologies for dealing with music and language - has had far more impact in writing on music, and on a conception of music as text, than it has in the intermingling of these texts with literature and literary studies (2002, 86).

Benson elaborates on literature’s engagement with music as a literary text that “resonates with the silent sounds” (2002, 87). Prieto similarly describes the interdisciplinary engagement of the “musicality and literariness that could be directly applied to works from the other art” as a metaphorical exercise (2002b, 52). According to Prieto, the fact that literature uses words and not tones, means there is no literal transfer between the two arts, except in song and opera (2002b, 52). Considered on these terms, the metaphorical music of the novel per se, penetrates the inner and

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29 The literary text referenced in this instance by Benson is T.S. Eliot’s 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*. 
outer lives of characters, and engenders narrative techniques, such as rhythm and repetition, to provide the reader with musical references which allow for the interpretation of contemporary issues embedded in time and place, echoing trends in readers’ communities.

Methodological inferences and formal models represented in analysis can be subjective, and each reading may differ as unexpected literary effects of representing aspects of music in language are observed: “To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music” (Adorno 2002, 115). My thesis adds to interdisciplinary work where music is harnessed in the writing of critical and literary texts.

Music represented in my creative piece includes: references to musical theatre and the operatic overtones of Gladys Moncrieff and Dame Nellie Melba; and tonality including key changes represented as first, second and third person narration. I also refer to music as an organising tool; and to vocal and instrumental music performances, music lessons, and popular, old and classical music works, songs, songwriters and composers. Above all, my hope is that the reader of Impromptu I—X will hear music in the sounds, cadences and rhythms of the narration, speech, dialogue of the characters, and in the impulse and turn of the stories that are interwoven in the text. Using music to express the inner thoughts and the expressive power of characters in fiction, in addition to traditional literary techniques provides the writer with different sounds to differentiate characters’ stories and ideas through inflections in voices, narrative and themes. In Impromptu I—X, music governs story, form, character and idea. The stories are grounded in two different communities, in present day Park and in the early days of Mena. In this sense, the text’s music comments on and depicts
society, offering the reader a visceral and emotional experience of a specific time and place. I developed the impromptu music form to organise the novel as a free-flowing fantasia suggesting the re-presentation and continuation of the past in the present, and providing glimpses of a possible future.

In reviewing work by critics of both literature and music, Benson asserts that music is largely absent in analytical accounts, such as The Cambridge Companion to Modernism (1999), apart from intermittent references to interdisciplinary projects (2002, 87). Building on Benson’s idea that the narrative text be engaged with in association with music, I have analysed three contemporary novels, Beloved, “The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing” (Cloud Atlas) and Dirt Music as performative acts of listening. Hearing remix in Beloved emphasised sound technology and repetition to record the nineteenth-century slave mother, Margaret Garner in time and place to reimagine a forgotten practice (slavery) that must not be repeated. My use of music as an interpretive means to loop the fragmentary samples in the practice of remix locates Beloved within the culture and history of black experience. Thus, the music metaphor enables the DJ-like narrator and the reader to reconfigure and empathise with the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the slave characters, experiences, thoughts and feelings absent in the original slave narratives.

The sounding of music as a supplement to the narrative of Adam Ewing’s journey through the islands of the Pacific Ocean in Cloud Atlas, signifies and highlights the voices, both black and white, of individuals and marginalised communities, and draws attention to the radically unequal relations of power of the characters in this story. As such, the idea of music in this reading is not a response to new musics but an
engagement with and re-reading of a conservative melodic form influenced by nineteenth-century ideologies.

A metaphorical conception of music-as-structure is pivotal to my reading of *Dirt Music* as a sonata. The formal innovation establishes a dynamic binary tension between the themes of dysfunction and dislocation, shaped by a ternary form to illuminate the cultural, socio-political, Indigenous and environmental issues confronting Australian society during the last decade of the twentieth century.

These readings are not intended as a conclusion to the discussion of music and literature in fiction but as a starting point for analysis. An absence of music in current critical response to the three novels is noteworthy and intimates music is not a privileged tool to unpack and investigate the role of music in fiction. The ability of critics and novelists to read and write music embedded in socio-political, environmental, psychological and cultural contexts as those are evoked in narrative fiction might help focus their attention on the broader meaning and significance of human concerns in nature and society.

Music, according to Benson, has the capacity to “transform reading into a form of listening” (2002, 38). If this is true, given that we live in a highly visual culture, sharpening our auditory senses may help readers to be more attentive (to the other) in order to make different sounds, to communicate differently in a way that moves us beyond dominant and problematic values (beyond the already heard). This music-literature project has afforded me the opportunity to write experimentally; to read closely and to offer an alternative analysis of musical fiction, to variously work with the metaphorical connection between the two fields, and to highlight the cultural role each plays, when in dialogue, to communicate problematic issues of individual human
experience and collective memory and address problems of communication and understanding in the contemporary world.
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