

Reflection Statement

Terra Divis 'us

“Change don’t come at the end of a pencil, change comes in each mind that’s ready to embrace a new way of seeing things.”

– Kate Tempest

The reality of the experiences of Indigenous communities in rural and regional Australia has, in recent years, become a vehicle for political point scoring and idealistic platitudes. ‘*Terra Divis 'us*’ presents an intimate narrative of an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, where the disregard for traditional borders and group dynamics has fed growing social instability and distrust, as well as increased the challenges faced by the people. The setting, “*Palumpa Station*” embodies these issues and it is a place that I have lived in, sporadically, for over a decade. It is a microcosm of the region’s social unrest and ‘*Terra Divis 'us*’ frames this through individual recollections. Emotions and anxieties permeate the text, repeatedly compelling the responder to “*Listen – Observe*,” encouraging them, as Kate Tempest states, to contemplate “*a new way of seeing things*.”

Initially drawn to both the Short Story and Performance Poetry forms I began attending a number of performances of live poetry, including Miles Merrill and C.J Bowerbird, and events such as the *Sydney Writers Festival’s*; *Mouth to Mic*. Experiencing first hand the contiguity of human voice and its impact upon an audience, I chose Performance Poetry. Its verbal immediacy would allow me to sustain and control the creation of tone, through word choice and vocal expression;

ensuring I controlled textual gravitas and appreciation. The vacillation between first and second person pronouns in CJ Bowerbird's 'Clicktivism,' "*Even if you comment ...I don't care*" honed my understanding of the form, in that the poet is *exploring* with their audience, rather than *talking* at them. My reoccurring request of "*Listen – Observe*" emerged from this premise. Live performances became integral to my developing style as the dynamic nature of the form was not readily replicated in *YouTube* clips.

Given Performance Poetry thrives on the active engagement between audience and poet, demanding the audience share in the emotional underpinnings, it confines its appeal to that of the form itself; a niche market. Conceptually, 'Terra Divis 'us' is accessible to politically and socially engaged Australians, but my chosen form further directs this audience to those in attendance at open mic poetry nights at venues such as '*Sappho Books*,' where nuance of performance is more readily embraced.

Engagement with my Major Work is achieved through the transition between first, second and third person perspectives; emphasising the relevance of the concept to the audience, "*Now we're back... You'll seek answers...*" The introductory stanzas feature a present tense, first person narrational perspective, which seeks to draw the responder into the voice's intimate emotions and reflections, achieved through the repetition of the singular pronouns "*I*" and "*my*" in the lines, "*See for my self what I hoped existed... / As I stand a stranger... / I'm reminded of why I continued, persisted.*" The isolation of a moment in time, "*a snapshot of earth*," was derived from my study of Kenneth Slessor's poetry in *Module B*, as seen in his surrealist depiction of a setting being "*Fixed in a sweet meniscus... Lensed in a bubble's ghostly*

camera...” Focusing audience attention on a solitary moment allowed me, as it did Slessor, to grapple with the effect of an “*imprinted*” memory on one’s outlook. The verbal “*painting*” of this memory and context, is central to my Major Work, as the evocative images create an absorbing *reality* for the responder.

This intimacy is further enhanced through the voice of the “*Aboriginal Child*,” a construct of the candid conversations I’d had with the children on my return to Palumpa Station in late 2012, and achieved through apostrophising this persona’s deceased grandfather, “*Granddad ave you eard ‘em...can ya see ‘em?*” The filial connection central to this section elucidates an insight into the denigration of the traditional culture and the cultivation of violence from the perspective of a child seeking to reconcile his grandfather’s cultural teachings, “*You told us to respect and accept...*” with his current reality, “*they hate’n’t they fight...*” This innocent perspective is integral to the poem, as it provides an outlet for blunt depictions and emotional responses, “*I tell ‘em t’stop.*” The innocent and perceptive narration by Scout, in Harper Lee’s ‘*To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ provided the inspiration for this voice. She, like the *Aboriginal Child*, grapples with a reality that doesn’t square with the moralising teachings of her father, and the immediacy of her observations, “*he was real nice,*” removes any contextual prism that may distort a responder’s view of the issue.

The power of alternating between the adult and child voices was realised through analysis of Rebecca Sandridge’s ‘*Theirs*.’ This juxtaposition contrasts an holistic discernment, “*colonial shrapnel*,” with immediate personal observations, “*up the street is a fight.*” In developing the contrast and authenticity of the boy’s voice, I drew

on Sandridge's nuanced child, so that her, "*He was the one grwumbelling...with green psggetti hair,*" became my, "*Yeah, hie bin told to think'n'act like him farda, he brudda too...*" which heightens the integrity of voice and character in my work.

My work's evocative nature was enhanced through rhythmical rhetoric, where the ebb and flow of meter first builds, sustains, then releases tension. Initially I struggled with how best to create a flow that was not verbally forced but discussions with Merrill and Tempest suggested that a minimalist approach to adjectives and punctuation, coupled with interwoven rhyme, would aid the natural rhythm of an "*ardent*" performance. Tempest's flow in '*Bubble Muzzle,*' "*your temperament is militant, coz every other day brings the death of an innocent,*" exemplified the sense of urgency I had envisaged. Thus, the enjambment and internal rhyme in lines such as, "*On unlit roads of dirt and gravel / Tension spikes and people fight / We wonder why, but in our minds...*" creates this crescendo in tempo and emotional intensity. Poignant images evoked in this way, ensured the resonance of the poem's ideas, which was further enhanced through my plosive delivery.

The contentious nature of my concept demanded discerning honesty and I was conscious of the fine line that existed between angst and legitimacy and the potential of the former to overshadow the reality. In order to move beyond "*sound bites,*" I was conscious to avoid platitudes and socio-political rhetoric, to instead convey an authentic, pointed narrative that explored the ongoing effects of colonialism on many Aborigines in the Northern Territory as reflected in Xavier Herbert's '*Capricornia*'. This text embodied the casual racism towards Aborigines in the 1930's in realistic characters, whose derogatory and degrading remarks - "*heard of yeller-fellers*" are

punctuated with plainly spoken criticisms of the situation, "*Oh the paltriness! The foul neglect!...*" By alternating between introspection and observation, I utilised a personal narrative to enhance the concept's authenticity, marked by lines such as, "*The film of my mind reminds me...I'll remember! I insisted...*" which is juxtaposed with critical, negatively connotated and asyndetic remarks "*A few token seconds... / Confined to a sound bite, headline, by-line - tucked away on Lateline.*" Like Herbert, placing the realistic and earnest narrational voice of the "*Observer*" in the context, provided the critical judgments, "*No-these tokens for homes won't stop any bloodshed,*" more integrity. With the crux of '*Terra Divis 'us*' being the conveyance of a frequently misconstrued reality, it was paramount that the poem's voices were authentic and not merely adding to the miasma of misunderstanding.

I incorporated dreamtime allusions, "*A serpent that carved - defined borders of land...*" drawn from Dan Davis' poem, '*Moonthanguddi*,' where the personification "*He tell me how peaceful it was, back when he was creating. /... We all knew our boundaries, and respected our own dirt,*" rang true with my understanding that the forced blurring of tribal borders was at the heart of the issue. The incorporation of this deity serves to contextualise this subject in a traditional sense whilst enhancing its significant undertones.

Moreover, the motif of the "*shit hawk*" serves to unify the poem. This poetic principle was inspired by the poetry of Kenneth Slessor, namely, '*Five Bells*,' where the motif of "*Five Bells*" encapsulates the theme of time's relentlessness, by framing and unifying the various stanzas. Similarly, the "*shit hawk*" embodies the desecration of traditional culture through a relentless defilement of clan structures and customs. This

was manifest in the extended metaphor of “*picking and hacking*,” likening the European acquisition of traditional land to the “*ruthless scavenger*” of the bird. However, there is a duality to the “*shit hawk*,” as both an omniscient mythological being, that witnessed the creation of land and culture by ‘*Moonthanguddi*,’ and experienced degradation by the colonialists - “*Desecrated, decimated – persistence diminished*.” This motif reinforces the cyclical form with the birdcall punctuating the conclusion symbolically implying that nature will have the final word and if we are to improve where we have failed, we must change our ‘*nature*’.

What I have learnt from the Extension 2 course transcends my knowledge of both my concept and chosen form. It has taught me patience and humility of thought, to “*seek answers to questions*,” and to challenge my preconceptions. I believe I have succeeded in bringing significant issues into the conscience of my audience, and for that, I am immensely proud.

