

Reflection Statement

The Road to Molong

When my audience reads my work I aim to take them with me on a physical journey from the NSW coast to the inland town of Molong, and in the process encourage them to imaginatively explore the theme of the inter-relationship between the land and its people. I would like to make heard the imagined stories of people who live within this isolation and invite empathy with their love for it or their alienation through it. This is ultimately the goal of *The Road to Molong*; it is a study in appreciation of the understated, an experience of rural/suburban Australia grounded in emotional and sensory language. In a discussion I had about my major work with Felicity Plunket, Australian poet and Poetry Editor at the University of Queensland Press, she raised the ancient Greek idea of cledons that she was exploring in her own poetry and I saw the relevance to my own poetry. Cledonism began as a concept expressing the belief that the answers will show themselves to you in little things, quiet phrases you accidentally catch of conversations, landmarks, and passing animals. The truth is that people have been exploring similar concepts to mine since the beginning of literature. Joy, wonder, alienation; they are hidden in the little things a simple passenger catches out a car window. This to me is quite profound.

My Major Work would be suited to The Red Room Company, a “not-for-profit organisation that creates unusual and useful poetry projects which transform expectations of, and experiences with, poetry”. They run many side projects including a project called “The Disappearing”, an innovative app that connects the viewer’s geographic location to the stem point of local poems. In this way, one can actually map their geographical journey and trace the poetry inspired by the area as they travel through it. This project is an actual manifestation of my original purpose; to specifically link poems to places. The internet and digital processes are a booming field in harnessing unique creativity and poetic expression.

Although The Red Room Company is associated with city based projects such as the Sydney Writers Festival, they also “aspire to make poetry accessible to all, especially those who face the greatest barriers to creative opportunities”. Through their support of my own project, I believe I would reach the broadest possible audience; city dwellers looking to escape, seasoned road trippers, and right out into smaller communities and their people.

I wanted to investigate people’s relationships with each other and the land – the belonging to place I have explored in several texts in my HSC Advanced course. I also drew inspiration from feelings of disillusionment present in English Extension one Module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking, Elective 1: ‘*After the Bomb*’. Poems including *stingray*, *stingray (2)*, and *The Private* explore some of the paradigms emerging in the Cold War era such as the attitude of the subject in *sting ray* where the rural landscape in which she lives provides her with no comfort or meaning, and ultimately leads to her escaping her stifling domestic existence via suicide. Plath’s exploration of crippling patriarchy still holds strong relevance to an area whose income is predominantly from hard physical labour, a man’s world. Her poem ‘Ariel’ also expresses an eloquent oneness with nature which I also strove to convey in some of my works such as *Inland*. Other poems also explore the interdependence of people to one another such as *Harvest*.

My research began by immersing myself in Australian poetry and literature. The “charred, unbroken road” of John Foulcher’s ‘Summer rain’ had a key role in the formulation of my concept. From the road on which the narrator travels he envisages the lives of those along the road, his sensual descriptions feeding into a feeling of wonder and intrigue. Like Foulcher, my contemplation of my surroundings was forced upon me incidentally by the desire to escape a bored and restless mind. His works resonate with me and were invaluable in their impact on my emerging poetic form and theme. Oxford Companion to Australian Literature describes his works as “simple, direct and convincing” which is something I hope to channel

in my own writing. Robert Gray describes Foulcher's poetry as an exploration of the "heroism of the modern, isolated individual", which links directly into my original purpose. Kenneth Slessor's poems captured vividly the life of Australian country towns, contrasting and integrating this with imagery from the city lifestyle. Some of his imagery linked almost directly to what I had in my mind and saw out my window on my original journey. It didn't take me much research to discover Slessor's hometown – none other than Orange, just next door to Molong. It occurred to me that Slessor, who spent most of his life living in Sydney, would have made the same journey as I did many times during his life. From here Slessor became a key influence in my work. The timeless awe of the natural landscape contrasted with the inevitable passing of time in 'A Sunset' acted as the inspiration for my own poem *The Boulder*. "Do you remember? / But now everything is changed" from 'A Sunset' mirrors the line "Oh that we remembered that place til we were older".

I drew on the inspiration of Bruce Dawe's poetry in some of my works, most notably the domestic tone created in 'Drifters' mimicked in my own poem *Homefront*, where the mother is presented as stoically as in 'Drifters' whilst plagued by monotony. Another influence present in *Homefront* is the poetry of Richard Tipping. His poetry has a distinctly visual quality, something that I have always tried to incorporate as part of my own poetry. Meaning is drawn from the specific and sometimes erratic placement of words, creating a feeling of disorder and often pace. In *Homefront* I have used the effect of syntax and spacing to instead create a feeling of order and monotony, again similar to that of *stringray (2)*, created in the list like approach to daily duties, mixed with a violent uneasiness, "she took the knife in her hand".

As my major work does not strictly follow a single story or person, I attempted to tie it together as a whole through repetition of tone, several linked pairs of poems, and subtle duality within the language. The key characters throughout are the wind, sometimes tender

“tugging on the hem of my skirt”, often unrelenting, “When it left his skin / Raw”, and the light which frames many of my pieces. *Boy (1)* and *(2)* act as a linked pair and follow the coming of age of two unrelated young men, experiencing first love and lust in two distinctly different settings, highlighting this as a universal theme and uniting conflicting setting with a common narrative. More subtly, repletion of language can be found in thematically isolated poems. For example, *Famine to Fathom* ends with the line “I understand hunger”, which is a reflection of both the persona’s fractured understanding of English and their desire to understand the world and the people around them. However, the line is also used in an earlier poem *Boy (1)* to express an epiphany moment of physical desire. It is through this duality that I have tried to create a permeating voice of myself as the poet and through this, create a textual integrity to the suite whilst still retaining the individuality of each persona. Joanna Burns, a poet whose works blur the distinction between prose and poetry, was another influence on my exploration of poetic form. I have tried to channel her prose style poetry in some of my pieces such as *The Harvest* and *The Wombat*. Her portrayal of domestic existence has also contributed to the mood of some of my poems. The repetitive inclusion of symbols of daily routine in ‘perspex at noon’ was the inspiration for *stingray (2)*. The opening line: “a tiny lull in the conversation/sorrow slips in camouflaged/after all the gossip anecdotal smudges:” created such a vivid image for my own poetic expression. I employed the understatement of character created through Burns’ removal of capitals and punctuation in both *stingray* poems and others such as *Homefront* as well as her erratic use of enjambment creating a sense of unease and disillusion. Capitalisation within my major work acts as an integral way to create meaning, and this has been influenced by many poets, including Robert Gray, referenced in my opening quote. Gray has a deeply artistic relationship with the landscape he describes, grounded in a background of painting. As an artist myself, I found the visual qualities of his work highly relatable and inspiring.

My major work does not revel in its own complexity but rather presents the human emotion and experience evoked in us in times of great beauty and adversity to which we can all relate. It explores the idea of home; a connection to it, a questioning of it, and is a testament to the unique beauty of the Australian landscape which we should never take for granted. It is a journey from one place to another, but also an inner reflection and an outward contemplation.

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