The Concerto Inn
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UWS Nepean
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
This work is submitted for examination for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Communication and Media) at the University of Western Sydney. I declare that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other institution.

Signed: ...
The Concerto Inn

Summary

When the famous writer is shot dead at his book launch, the horrified crowd does not notice the uninvited guest slipping from the back of the room.

The Concerto Inn tells the story of two sisters, each of whom kills a person she loves, each of whom is on the run.

In Hong Kong Isobel is confronted with a secret that she senses in the very fabric of the exotic city, but doesn’t at first understand. Her response to her husband’s betrayal sets her upon a journey from Katoomba across the world to Italy where she seeks to end her days in Ravello, the mythical place of her childhood. It is here that she finds herself becoming seduced by the richness of the day-to-day life of Luca, Paolo and Bia.

Ravello also becomes the destination of Isobel’s younger sister, Madeleine, who, many years before had sought her own refuge in Paris, far from the windswept peat country at the southern-most point of the Australian mainland where she and Isobel grew up. Madeleine was escaping the violent consequences of her own confrontation with the betrayal that occurred when the beautiful and enigmatic foreigner, Ariane, entered the world of Madeleine and her family. On the brink of being discovered, Madeleine must leave her lover, Xavier, and disappear. Was it the harsh landscape that shaped their fate?

The novel traces the strand of betrayal and violence that Madeleine and Isobel enact, and in its conclusion, makes clear that the two stories are the same story repeated.

The Architect’s Dream – Project Manual for The Concerto Inn presents itself as the workbook of the Architect who has been commissioned by the elusive author of The Concerto Inn to design and construct a library. It stands as an endnote, a companion piece to the novel and is part architectural treatise and part ficto-criticism. Infiltrated by a number of different voices in different registers, it considers aspects of narrative structure using the language and metaphors of architecture. Informed by foreign texts, lost plans, notes, and unrecoverable sources, it is a yearning for another reality, a reality that is harboured in the Architect’s dream...
Brian, this book is for you.
Isobel
There is a long phrase between the night notes, the end notes by the bell and
this brimming morning reverie amidst windflowers, Italian lavender, sea
anemones, and bellis perennis. Slaked lime and marble dust make polished plaster of
the air; the budding gardenia rests a heavy head; dogwood leaves lie against the air
like boats on still water. In the weeping mulberry a swaying worm spits silk. A
camellia drops from dark, tea-stained leaves to the earth, like bright pink origami
birds.

In this generous dwelling, a breath away from summer, she stands in the
mosaic of the moment, listening for the next note of the struck bell and enclosed by the
desiccating blossom of the pear tree; the sun first upon her head, then shoulders in
sheets of smoking gold. She stands tall and quite still, an iris gloved in green. Around
her forget-me-nots are rocked by bees and she can hear the panting of birds' wings. The
scent of the daphne is like a veil across her face.

In a pool of night rain the water swells with light under its skin, reflecting
pale iris with yellow throats; stroke after stroke of ixia stacked on pearwood; the
luminous muslin spider web; spent flowers like empty cicada shells.

The glissandi of currawong voices echo like running water in the morning.

In this illuminated manuscript of broken colour, the blue glaze of her eye is
set upon the rottweiler at the end of the road...
Falling, falling

Hong Kong.

The words form like two bubbles of blood on a dying woman's lips. Hong Kong: the collision of two texts. Betrayed by Britain, reauthored by China.

Here, the rain comes straight down. Plum rain.

Goodbye Philippe, I whisper very early each morning, leaving you sleeping as I walk from the university up the dark rock mountain to The Peak, above the pea-green harbour. I don't know what I'm training for. The concrete path winds through bauhinia trees. There is the odour of autumn decay, brown leaves curling in the heavy darkness of the undergrowth along the path that leads up to Hatton Road. Halfway, I stop at a hut and turn back to see the harbour below, still now, beneath the heavy air.

I hear a sound like tap dancing before rounding the corner and meeting the man who smacks his forehead with one hand while he walks. We pass each other on the narrow cement path.

Jo sun, Isobel.

Jo sun.
Elderly men and women, who walk in the groups of the villages they have left behind in China, greet me and become my silent companions on the journey.

Each day, after a breakfast of fruit and tea together in the dining room, you descend to write in your office in the old building, and I set off to find the travelator and ride down to Central. Today I get off half way down and wander the streets with my camera until I come across a street lined with cane baskets full of dried coin snakes and seahorses. I lean over to photograph the dark shapes repeating themselves under hot lights.

On Ice House Street I find an antique map, and upon my return I place it on the desk at the residence that will be my home for a time. I unfurl it, pass my hand across the wash of colour, hear the scrape of silk, allow it to spring back into a scroll and walk to the telephone. As you sit further down the mountain in your office, I hear my own voice tell you of the treasure I have found for you, for your novel:

*Philippe, a map of the Silk Road where travellers met wild beasts in steaming valleys and journeyed from the stone tower to a place called This.*

*Caravanserais of the gods.*

*The celestial horses of Kokand, sweating blood, watched traders carry seric cloth to Constantinople, to the gynaeaeums and monasteries to produce sumptuous brocades from tiny birds' feathers. Opus plumarium. And flower tissue.*

*And not simply silk. Stones that shone in the night, phosphorescent with the bile of the tortoise. A red coral, yellow amber, marble, cinnabar, green jade, the samite used for ecclesiastic vestments, sendal, siglatons from Andalusia, baldachins embossed with gold...*
The words fall from me like the soft wings of blue silk thrown over the shoulders of women from Damascus. It is the enchantment of distance I feel.

Outside the asphalt burns.

Then my tongue settles on the floor of my mouth and I become silent, simply a receiver of sound, light, and colour. My eyes move slowly in my face, stopped by the thick air from seeing the sun; I do not know east from west unless I look towards Guangzhou to the north to see the planes settle at Kai Tak.

In this northern hemisphere my blood moves in different directions.

You left Katoomba before me and travelled to Guangzhou and the conference. I remained to finish my work but my mind was set upon the journey I would make.

You rang me from China. Your paper had been well received. Dr Rose, the lecturer in Romance languages, had been located, and you had teamed up. She was arranging our accommodation at the university. Soon we will be reunited in Hong Kong. Just a few more weeks.

One evening I rang The White Swan Hotel. A woman answered. She spoke softly and I thought that it must have been very late in China. There was no answer in your room.

As the plane moved between the buildings, I saw a family eating dinner, their chopsticks working like scissors above their bowls. As I walked across the tarmac of Kai Tak, the humidity enfolded me and brightened the lights of Kowloon.
You were standing behind the barrier, your hands in your pockets. At first you did not see me. When I kissed you, there was a strange new scent. I laughed and asked what it was. Drakkar Noir, you said, dragging out the soft oir sound.

The car took us under the harbour, up the mountain from Central to the university, and as we passed through the darkness, you told me about the group from the university who went out together for the moon festival on the night of the lanterns. You ate moon cakes for the first time since you were a child growing up in Hong Kong with your French mother and Australian father. You had gone to visit the place where you lived in Pokfulam. The ledge where you used to hide your toy cars on your way to school was still there. You even ran your finger along the ledge.

Setting the scene for me, you told me that the university was on the western side of Hong Kong Island. Painted red with a dark tiled roof, the residence was set at the top of the campus to accommodate international visitors. Verandahs ran around each floor and the blocks were linked by a series of courtyards. Large shiny black doors led out onto Conduit Road.

You told me that the path down to the rest of the university passed through the Run Run Shaw building and the K.K. Leung building to the library which was a sweep of concrete. Below that was the old building built of red brick with cream edges and arches, glass, some wood. Inside was your office which looked out onto a courtyard where there were palm trees and a round fishpond in the centre. A bell tower overlooked the courtyard.

Arriving at the residence we carried the luggage to flat forty-one which had a sitting area, a bedroom and a bathroom with a tiny transparent lizard on the tiles. Beside the television, on a desk was a present for me from Guangzhou, a box
covered in ornate green cloth, with a label of Chinese characters. It had white latches and inside, five Chinese pens tied to the roof of the box. Their stems were made from wood of varying thickness. On the floor of the box was a pot of black ink.

I laughed. Pleased with the gift, the reunion, with the time ahead in Hong Kong.

The Fung Ping Shan Museum at the university, opposite the school on Bonham Strand, is a perfect disc enclosing smaller ones, and we climb its ever decreasing circles to see Escher’s early lithographs, his depictions of the Amalfi Coast, and the complexity of its gaze out to sea. When you move away, anxious to get back to the office to write, I remain a while longer in front of the pure lines which enter my open heart, and hear myself say aloud, I will go to Ravello.

We will go to Macau today, leaving the rock and its shadow for the day.

In Queens Road Central a woman’s face is white in a way that reminds me of a winding sheet. She is tall with black hair drawn back from her neck. I see that she has been very ill. A white mask covers her mouth. Taking very small steps, she walks tentatively with her eyes downcast, and is supported at the elbow by another woman. I avoid her carefully on the street and wait for you at the Macau ferry pier in Sheung Wan, the wet heat on my neck.

When you arrive at the last minute, you are out of breath.

Crossing the Pearl River estuary to Macau there is the sullenness of the water and the sky. Along its edges, the land is being reclaimed against its will.
A cab takes us to the Avenue de Republica where we find the Pousada de
Sao Tiago and the film director greets us wearing a black jacket. Underneath is a
black T-shirt with a red rectangle across the chest. The brim of his hat is curled
back where his hands have often felt for it. In his room, we sit in a circle and you
discuss the progress of the screenplay and film locations.

Then the three of us take a taxi. The driver stumbles over the directions as
we drive along the waterfront. Foxing. He draws out his street directory with a
heavy shrug of his shoulders.

The film director is enraged.

There! he stabs at the driver, pointing up to the yellow and white Bela Vista
Hotel, directly above us on the side of the slope, the Colina da Penha. There is a
heavy silence as the taxi winds its way up to the hotel. As he thrusts money at the
driver, the film director turns to you.

We might be able to use this place as I suggested, Philippe, he says, See what
you think.

On the verandah of the hotel the film director takes off his hat. The light
gives soft fur to his bald head as he turns towards us in his chair and leans his
elbow on the table. He lights a cigarette and then holds it in thick, square fingers
as if it is a flute that he raises to his lips to play from time to time. The broad fall of
his forehead is underlined by the heavy brows above the steady eyes, the large
nose, mouth. He frowns, remembering the taxi driver.

Fool.

Collects himself.

Now. Lunch!
There is a lemon, wrapped in muslin, to be squeezed over the Caesar salad. And jazz. The dazed eyes of the young saxophonist look surprised to find his best breath is into the instrument as he plays The Cow-Cow Boogie.

Your eyes are averted. In the mirror above the bar, I see them. They come from a place where there is a river, where several streams become one. There in the depths of the hills, transparent, smooth, green stones are washed down by the heavy rain. They are scooped out of the water from a small boat. They are said to be the reflection of stars shining on the earth's surface and hardened there.

Silently you contemplate the fall of Macau to the Praia Grande Bay, China across the bridge in the yellow light, the decay. There is a quarry, an open-cut mine in meaning somehow which the film director ignores as he tells me about the film happening back in Australia now, and the phonecalls to and fro in the middle of the night. He tells me of his problem with Proust, how he could never get past those biscuits. I smile and think of my father reading aloud to Madeleine and I by the fire.

You are looking at the famous bar room with the bullet hole in the mirror. Perhaps you dream of your childhood when you were on holiday with your mother in the Bela Vista, while your father played the saxophone in nightclubs back in Hong Kong, over the yellow sea. I know you had longed to be with him. To have Frank Sinatra pat you on the head, give you a coke. When your father went off in the night with his friend Gloria, you could have gone too and sat under the table near Gloria's long, cool legs. Perhaps right at this moment you are still longing to be with him?

You learned about betrayal while holed up in the Bela Vista Hotel.
Leaving the film director, we ride the jetcat back to Central, skimming over the mysterious currents of the South China Sea, skirting a scuttled pirate boat. You are like a patient lost in intensive care, my presence like a butterfly in a bottle. In the silence I imagine the relief if you would just throw me a line; I seek a word from you, but receive only the sinking sun.

From the huge glassed room in the university staff club, high above Central, I can see the New Territories and, beyond Lion Rock, the snakeline of high rise that is Kowloon Bay. The rain of the last few days has stopped and the sky is blindingly blue.

There are two people sitting by the window. A girl is crying silently, absorbing the whiteness of the huge air into her body. It fills her and empties her at the same moment, and she is shedding her grief in waves, leaning her head over the plate so that it catches the fluid, leaving her face dry. She has done this before.

The man is one of the academic staff. Older. He doesn’t move until he suddenly looks away from her with distaste.

She blows her nose on the serviette.

I move to go and speak to the girl, but you place a hand gently on my arm.

He’s ditching her, you say, with an authority that stills me.

It is Gravesweeping Day. Ch’ung Yeung. Mid-October now.

We are catching a cab to the other side of the island. The lecturer in Romance languages lives in Celestial Towers on Sha Wan Drive. A van appears
around the corner near the cemetery. As it swings out to avoid us, a coffin slides to one side in the back.

At the top of the tower her apartment hangs over the harbour. We stand on a tiny balcony. Far below I can see the pool where I often swim. The other guests include the film director in a white suit. When he sits down I see that he wears no socks. There is an Australian journalist, a playwright. A Melbourne academic.

The Filipina maid brings us drinks. I ask her name. She says it quietly, Flor, and there is a softness to her eyes as she moves away.

Dr Rose, the lecturer in Romance languages, is dressed in cream linen. Her hair is dark red. All the strands are the same length and fall from the crown of her head to a point that is one inch above her shoulders: a perfect, smooth helmet. She's the sort of woman who places a jacket over her shoulders, never puts her arms through the sleeves. She sits this way with her legs gracefully crossed. She coops back the hair from her forehead with manicured hands.

We are speaking of the expatriate community in Hong Kong and the exploitation of young students by washed-up English academics well past their use-by dates.

The journalist laughs, Everyone is having an affair with everyone else in Hong Kong.

Are you? asks the playwright.

Oh, I would, the journalist smiles, but no-one has asked me!

I learn later that she has committed herself to Hong Kong, having married a Chinese. She is the only one of those present tonight who will stay. All the others about the dinner table will slip away at midnight like the governor.
It is at this moment that the lecturer in Romance languages presents the rose-petal ice-cream. She tells Flor to bring it to me first and Flor places it carefully before me on the table. The petals curl and fall to the plate.

I am the honoured guest.

The lecturer in Romance languages has been working on the biography of a French woman who wrote novels in the forties. She speaks of the careful research, the bundles of letters.

One finds these love letters and you know that no-one else has read them since they were first written, first read. The excitement of that. One unpacks the language. It's seriously thrilling.

You pick up a glass of wine and hold it to your lips without drinking for a moment.

I tracked down a niece who knew a bit. A vamp from way back. Drove out to the farm to interview her. She was one of those people who arrange their books on the shelves according to size. You know, the big books with the big books and the little books with the little books. She didn't trust me. Thought there were things that were best left unwritten. I got it out of her in the end though.

As she speaks I become a little restless and suggest that the difficulty is in the choosing of the story,

In writing a biography you really invent it yourself, don't you?

No. There are the facts. So and so did this. Or that.

Isn't there always the other story? Perhaps the more interesting one is the one that remains unwritten. The alternative story.

The playwright sitting beside me speaks.
I came home one evening to the welcome of the green eye blinking in the dark. It was a message on the answering machine. That’s the way he did it after fourteen years. I pressed the play button and heard him tell me that it was over. He had met someone else. Then there were just the beeps.

The lecturer in Romance languages holds her breath, leans forward to receive the end of the story.

I didn’t ever see him again.

The lecturer in Romance languages impatiently touches her moist ochre lips, the golden earrings. With her other hand she reaches across, places it upon the other woman’s. Her grief threatens to spill onto the table.

So the talk turns to plagiarism back in Australia, legal suits, a play about dogs. The film director tells me more of his life story. Unconsciously his hands move to locate the cameras as he speaks.

I study the table on which Dr Rose keeps the precious boxes she has collected from around the world. Over dinner, while Flor is in the kitchen, she tells us she has given the maid a week’s notice. Flor had thrown away an ancient manuscript painted on silk that she had found on Hollywood Road and bought for her lover in Paris. The maid had mistaken it for a piece of rubbish and put it down the chute.

After coffee Dr Rose gives a little cough and turns her gaze upon you.

Philippe, I have asked you here for a reason. A proposal to put to you. Now that the biography is finished I’m at a loose end.

You put down your glass.

I thought I’d start on yours.

You look directly at her now, your eyes widening.
She glances at me, sees the expression in my eyes. A little smile at this, then she looks about her.

*I've made a start. The material you've already told me will be useful. I've taken notes from our conversations. But I want the rest. The whole thing.*

This last is like a rose that the lecturer in Romance languages throws you, and I see you give yourself up to its fragrance. You are about to be reeled in on the sure hook of narrative. This time it is you who silently smiles, and it seems there is nothing to be said, nothing more to be done. Touching your lips to the white damask serviette like a priest after tasting the wine, you lean towards the lecturer in Romance languages to speak about the beauty of thought. With the Melbourne academic, I discuss the best ways to encourage possums to leave a house.

*People are standing and farewelling each other at the end of the night. You and the lecturer in Romance languages are looking at the view one last time; across the dark sea of sky, your backs are to us for a moment. You lean down and kiss her upon the neck.*

As we descend Celestial Towers in the elevator, I am remembering the time when we saw them dragging a river. The ambulance cruising along the edge, waiting for the body to rise to the surface like a dead fish. I am also thinking of the differences between the word *neck*, and the word *throat*.

I am washing out with the tide.

*I take the minibus to Lower Albert Road down to the Fringe Club, next to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club. *Yau lok!* I call out, and the driver brakes for me to*
get off. You have arrived before me. The lecturer in Romance languages has had her hair cut.

_I am seriously in love_, she laughs, describing the scalp massage that came with the haircut, _That hairdresser was quite a number._

_Mama says, it's all right to dream_, croons the singer in the corner.

_It is the end of October._

_I return one evening to the flat to meet you as we had arranged, but you are not there. I pick up the phone but do not know where to call. It is late when the phone finally rings._

_Isobel, I'm so sorry for not ringing you sooner. After my class I caught the boat to Lamma Island to have a look. I came across this bar and I've been having a beer with a whole lot of Germans playing mah-jong. I've missed the last boat back._

_Your voice is fading on the phone._

_I guess I'll have to spend the night here somewhere. Don't worry about me._

_The long, heavy night awaits me. I look up Lamma Island in my guidebook. It lies off the southern side of Hong Kong, across the East Lamma Channel. Outside I hear waves of jackhammers, the brakes of buses on Conduit Road, the fall of population down to Victoria Harbour. In another hemisphere the frost cracks on the wood in the crystal air, sharp as a currawong call._

_The air-conditioner kicks in above the ceaseless noise of the deconstruction, reconstruction of Hong Kong. I lie in the hold of its roar, which is like the scream of CX-100 on its night flight from Sydney to Hong Kong. Someone brushes against the door. Then a sound from the next flat. I see the shadow of a crane in the night._
There is perhaps a death somewhere. I think that death is simply the sound, through a wall in a foreign city, of a body slipping on a porcelain bath.

The bell is hanging silently from the roof outside the window like a black tear. I pull the curtain back, lean on the desk and take a photograph of it, hanging motionless from the roof against the soft harbour lights, the silence of it now recalling the dying words of a poem:

_The dead bell, The dead bell. Somebody's done for._

Then I turn on the lamp and write in my exercise book so that the scratching of my Chinese pen keeps me company. My body bends over the pages under the lamp in the warm air, the pen in my hand ready to meet the urge to repeat, to see the teeth in the night, the bug-eyed bully that fear is. To write in the spaces created by your absence. But the hours are too long before me. I am restless in a restless city.

I seek distraction.

I go out into the night through leaves falling like grace. My brain becomes a roll of film against which images press themselves as I walk down Temple Street past snakes in glass jars, the Famous English Speaking Fortune Teller, the readers of faces who divined you from the partition of your brow, the fall of your cheek. Joss sticks smudge the air.

On the MTR a woman leaps, yelling, onto the train. She walks stiff-legged to the end of the carriage where she folds her arms across her breast, her face averted from the crowd. There she stands trembling with rage as I leave the train at Tsimshatsui and join the human wave under caves of buildings with bamboo lines of washing like signals on schooners at sea. Signals of distress.
Making my way into the cool of the Ocean Terminal, I wander along a
never-ending glitter of shops called The Silk Road: Venice, Istanbul, Baghdad,
Teheran, Samerkand and Tashkent. I sing each of these words softly to myself and
see the madder, indigo and saffron silk mixed with the perfume of spices and the
translucence of glass.

A tall, shaven-headed shopkeeper notices me standing before his shop filled
with rolls of silk, and comes to the door. He beckons me inside and begins to lay
out silk upon a polished desk, taking my hand and placing it upon the material as
if I am a blind person.

_We have everything here, everything you could possibly desire, madam._

And I wish that it could be so.

_This is the paj. It can be used for anything at all, and here, the twill silk, the
queen of silks. It has a nice sheen but doesn't sparkle too much. Not too gaudy._

There is the velvety texture of the crepe de chine, there is the douppion,
tussah, shantung, noil, the heavy, sensual charmeuse, and honan.

_Notice the colour blooming on this pongee._

Captured here by his words, I remain a few more moments.

_My grandfather was a Russian émigré who fled to Paris and earned his living
making men's silk handkerchiefs. So silk is in my family. And here I am in Hong
Kong._

He tells me that the Chinese judged their silk by its whiteness, its softness
and fineness. They made damasks of all kinds and all colours; striped satins and
the black satins of Nan King, watered moires. They used the fat of a freshwater
seal called _kiang tchu_, the river pig, to give the sheen to _tcheou tse_ taffeta...

He is still wanting to speak to me, but I must go.
Outside the Ocean Terminal a cruise liner, the Pisces, has docked and a crowd is swelling towards it, cries of Aiya flying up into the air. I push through them to reach the ferry terminal past a sign advertising a harbour cruise: Two Soft Drinks and a Vegetarian Meal.

On the Star-ferry, I rise and fall in the opaque air, resting in its moving heart. The ferry passes an island of cranes. The boats of the egg people hang in water as the Celestial Star groans softly, rumbles into reverse, leans, moans to the wooden pylons slick with wet and oil in the night lights. Ferries all named for stars: Lone, Morning, Meridian, Golden, Northern, Shining, Day, and Silver. From the water Hong Kong Island is lit up in the dark like a shop window on Christmas Eve.

I stop in at the Mandarin Oriental for tea, and see purple stocks held in a vase against black marble, an old man in a long grey gown giving a young woman a ring in a box. His glance at me tells me that I am his witness. The other couple is young, American. She suddenly lifts the cigarette lighter up to his face and snaps on the flame. He has no cigarette.

Outside again, I am assaulted by the heat.

The Stanley Ho pool is down Bisney Road past the cemetery and the olive mountain sprayed with concrete. In the pool I part water with my hands, gaze across Victoria Harbour to brightly lit tankers floating on the dark face of the sea. I swim alone. Another lap. And in the swell of the pool my smooth limbs meet silken water. Against my face and through my hair it sets me gleaming. I swirl down to the silent bottom through the fall of water and rise in a burst through the surface, spurting air and water, my strong brown arms throwing off drops, as they did when, as a child, I swam in the Tarwin river with my sister, Madeleine.
Outside the pool I wait for the bus, and when I climb aboard and sit down beside a woman, it is Flor, the sacked maid. She recognises me.

_You are the lady at the dinner party._

The bus winds past the hospital.

_I am going home,_ she says, _but first I must see my friends, then I am going home._

I do not know whether she means her home in Hong Kong or the Philippines.

When the bus terminates at Edinburgh Place beside the dockyards and the barracks, Flor takes my arm.

_I would like you to meet my friends,_ she says, and, as if we are allies somehow, she leads me to Statue Square. As though we are entering an aviary, there is a sound like a thousand starlings. The Filipina maids are perched everywhere in the night. A flock. High-pitched exchanges of news from home. Flor sits on the pavement outside the GPO. Crowds flow towards the ferries. There is a man selling round, golden food that he is flipping on a griddle.

Flor sits beside a large cardboard box that her friend, Connie, has been keeping safe for her. She places her clothes, her precious things in the box: the green silk happy coat she bought at the Stanley markets; postcards and pictures of Victoria Harbour at night. Addressing it to Manila, she places a piece of brown paper between two layers of clothing and puts the bribes for the custom officials on top. It will travel ahead of her.

Flor is going home.

I imagine the telephone ringing unanswered in the lecturer in Romance language’s empty flat. Soon there will be dust on the little boxes. Grime
accumulating. Without Flor there will be a steady decline. She tells me how angry she is: she threw the map out accidentally because she thought it was a piece of garbage, a piece of brown paper. Dr Rose should not have sacked her for such a thing, with a child to support. Her eyes grow large with the telling.

I sit with Flor and Connie who wears a bright pink shirt. Flor sets a radio on the ground. She speaks quickly, ceaselessly to Connie who cares for the children of an English couple in Sandy Bay. Then she turns to me.

**I would like you to meet my daughter.**

So we take the MTR to Kowloon Bay. Here there are hanging pigs’ corpses, bubbling pots on street stoves, trays of plastic, beeping watches.

She leads me up some stairs to a door that has bars across it. There is a beautiful sound falling through the bars. When Flor opens the door I see a young girl of about nine sitting with her back to us at a piano that must have taken Flor’s savings for years. As we come in she glances around, but Flor gestures to her to continue. Her black hair falls neatly and her white shirt hangs from thin shoulders. She plays The Swan without moving her body. When she is finished she quietly accepts my praise and brings me moon cake to eat.

I drink iced chrysanthemum tea poured from a can. The child plays again as I eat and drink and my fingers remember playing my mother’s Lipp piano so many years ago. The heat radiates from the street, the pavement below. A fan shifts the heat around the room. When the child plays there is a great stillness within me. I rest there, listening, for a long time.

It is very late when I return to the flat and sleep with the sea-roar of the air-conditioner screaming above the cries of the dragon flies and the sulphur-crested white cockatoos outside in the courtyard.
I dream of sitting on the edge of the fishpond outside your office. An old woman sweeps flowers from the flame tree into little heaps. Piles of flames lie at my feet. I am sweating and lower my head into the cool water, brush against a fish nest on a ledge, feel the tusk of a sleeping fish. Fish feed on my face. I throw in a coin and kill a goldfish that floats to the surface, belly up.

Your own return long after dawn awakens me from this dream, and the two halves of my brain are as split as a peach.

You sit on the bed and tell me the rest of the story,

After I rang you I asked the boy at the bar where I could stay the night. When he'd finished washing the glasses, he took me down along a path to the Concerto Inn where he said he worked during the day.

It looked a fragile construction of bamboo, one of those curly-roofed palaces of imperial dynasties. I could see several storeys and repeated roofs, steeply pitched with projecting, upturned eaves and ridges of coloured tiles. There was a bright lamp at the door. Inside, just opposite the entrance, there was a carved screen wall. There was no-one about. He led me through passageways to a red chamber where he said I could stay the night. One whole wall was constructed of a panel of windows and mirrors. There was a bed and a basin. I lay down and slept until the sun woke me. I couldn't find anyone around, so I left some money for them on the table and made my way to the dock. I was the only passenger aboard the ferry that brought me back to Hong Kong...

Your story told, you hunt the lizard from the bathroom, and take a shower. Even though the sun is high, you sleep again. Watching your sleeping face, I know that it is only latitude that binds you to me now.
Later, we meet the lecturer in Romance languages at The Red Pepper in Causeway Bay.

*I missed the ferry and got stranded on Lamma Island.*

She glances at me. Her lips part a little.

*A very silly thing to do. Shall we have coffee at the Park Lane?*

She speaks with me of China until I long to go there.

Later, when we are alone, you say a word and your language is a gesture pointing at something. You are speaking of *unpacking* language: a word you would use in a sentence about a suitcase, luggage, and travelling, but not about ideas.

I struggle to remember where I have heard the expression recently. I sense my own bags there in the corner. It is as though you are waiting for me to pick them up. To go.

*A Shanghai surprise.*

Odelia Lee’s nails are burnished sienna. On her computer she seeks me a room at The Peace Hotel on the Bund in Shanghai. She wears a brocade of kingfishers’ feathers. She hands me my passport with the visa for China, the air ticket, the voucher for the hotel. You have said you would prefer not to go back to China; too much work to do. I will listen to the jazz band in the lobby there and see the couples Shanghai-dancing. I will watch the women on bicycles with their white gloves and visit the museum off the Bund before catching the plane back to Hong Kong after a few days.

Before leaving Shanghai, I will go to the market early in the morning to buy a small wooden box for Dr Rose who has shown me the brochures on Shanghai,
and who sits beside me now telling me about the beauty of Shanghai, getting me such a good rate because Odelia Lee is a student of hers at the university.

It is Sunday. I open your office door. You and the lecturer in Romance languages are dancing. Is this Shanghai-dancing? There is no music but you are dancing an odd literary dance. Or jogging together. I stop suddenly and step backwards. Hit by the pane of glass between reality and fiction. I see that you are in the thrall of expert knowledge. I am an Outer Barbarian in the Celestial Empire. Overbalancing a little in my own awkward dance, I back away.

The lecturer in Romance languages steps delicately into the jacaranda shoes which lie near your desk, and walks past me out the door in her jacaranda dress. Under the hand that you have put to your mouth, you dampen your paper lips. Your eyes slide from mine then you look at me again. In the corner of my eye is the sofa. We leave the office. There is a pillar I stand beside, feeling that I should move away from your news for my own safety. I remain and sweat.

Your hands are in your pockets. An announcement.

I am falling in love.

Your words like bombs dropped from a plane passing overhead. The explosions in the territory of my heart will come later.

Falling of hopes, of my voice, of a shot bird, of leaves, of rain.

So I ask if you will go on. With me. You grin at me, or perhaps it is a grimace against the Chinese sun in your eyes, and say that you can't. You have found someone. You have to find out.
Your eyes move like dark birds across your face, and that moment is like walking out of the sun into a street steeped in shadow. The story has changed, you tell me. You have rewritten the future. It does not include me. There is exclusion in your voice. The husky note of betrayal. An old story after all.

Falling, falling.

There are four days after that. I walk about until there is blood in my shoe, go to the library and sit before an open book. There is something I have to do but I cannot remember what it is. I am like water forgetting to freeze.

The nights move slowly as you talk of what your new life will be like, gently telling me that you will travel the world with the lecturer in Romance languages. You contemplate the perfection of your coupling: like both sides of a beautifully shaped brain with which to take on the life you are designing together each evening.

While you are speaking, I see only the absence of grief.

When I am alone there is a sound coming from me. My eyes swell with hot fluid. It spews from me. I turn the air-conditioner up high. No-one can hear me.

One morning I see Madeleine's back in the crowd boarding the Star-ferry. She has come to me. I hurry after her, but of course, it is not her.

Grief is like the axe in the tree, you tell me patiently. As time passes the axe remains but the handle drops off. It gets better.

When I ring Cathay Pacific to change my flight I observe the relief in your face.
We take a car to Kai Tak for the late flight to Sydney. You drive. I leave my shoes behind. The cleaner waves them in the air after the car. Sweat drops between my breasts. There is no sound as the car swings past the high rise and I sit straight-backed on the seat looking out the window. My eyes are bright with the anticipation of loss, my fingertips pressed to my mouth. My departure and the inevitability of it, are two prongs of nausea. I bow forward in the seat and my head glances against the dashboard. You look uneasily at me, and press your foot on the brake gently. Turning off the engine, you reach your hand out to my forehead as you would to a child.

*Easy, easy.* As to an injured animal.

Soon I drag myself upright and hear the whistle of my breath, like the irritated scroop of a black cockatoo. You start the engine and wind the car back onto the road. I see a little blood on your hand, blood on the wheel.

*You've hurt yourself.*

*No.*

*There's blood on your hand.*

*Yours.*

You seem to be holding your breath.

My hand rests on the vinyl seat. You place your hand upon mine and let it remain there until we arrive at the airport terminal.

As we wait in the Goodbye Café, I study the departure of others, caught in this moment's mirror. *A Rainy Night in Georgia* plays somewhere close and the notes are blown backwards by the raining wind.

I pick up my bag.

*I guess this is it.*
This is what?

The end.
The Goodbye Café

Katoomba.

The Three Sisters at Echo Point rise like lions in the sea, their shape repeated in the Sorensen cypresses that stand in scattering blue light across the mountains. A lifting mist reveals a tracery of ridges and ravines, fissures in the earth. There are cliffs that can throw a human cry from rockface to rockface, until, unheard, it drops into darkness.

Everywhere there is a falling away: rocks inclined towards the east have uplifted, folded and fractured over millions of years. Heavy layers of yellow and brown sandstone are lined with red and grey shale. Volcanic necks lie on the north and the south side of the ridge, giving a coastline to this sea of air.

The grey eucalypts breathe out isoprene gas to cool their leaves and join with the cineole that repels insects. The two coagulate in the atmosphere forming particles that reflect light. Jacaranda blue, only deeper.

In the steaming valleys the rainforest canopies spread on the basalt caps, and mosses, liverworts, hornworts, lichens, fungi, orchids and ferns colonise deep
gorges. The dry sclerophyll forests, flecked with yellow wattle, lie along
tops, the upper valley slopes where houses have been built on thin, sandy

From the dark where Isobel is sitting, the house burns in lampligh
the white moonskins of the tangled scribbly gums on the other side of the
like smoke twisting through the bush. A distant train rattles as it pulls in
station in Main Street, like the shaking of teeth in an old dead head. She
listening to it for a month now. Alone.

She has told no-one that she has returned from Hong Kong.

Isobel turns her head from the bush and moves across the veranda
doors. Inside the room there is a piano, a desk under the window and arou
walls of books, their covers evenly stacked in tight lengths, their reflectic
reaching into the night. The ceiling undulates above blades of double book
a body of books rises in every space around her. There is a heap of shoes
floor, a tin trunk, boxes of books, enough for the winter ahead if she runs
wood. She pauses and listens as an animal coughs in the night. The high,

poplars rub against each other as she takes a book from the top shelf. In
Lowell’s Notebook, Philippe has numbered the names of the ex-wives in cr
script, each number like a hand grenade. Placing it in a box she reaches a
finds the book of poems he bought in the heat of the tents in Adelaide, and
offered to a towering Ted Hughes who wrote in the flyleaf, Hair by hair ye
pluck a life bald.

Working like this for several hours, Isobel is slowly clearing the fo
books. At night, in the heat, she has been packing the books for weeks, un
walls are scraped back to themselves. She started this task the evening she
returned, the night’s choreography giving her days their shape and meani
Somewhere there is the dark voice of a dog.

Tonight she starts on the novels and finds in them the photographs Philippe used as bookmarks. As she gazes at the photographs she knows it will never be over.

1976. Twenty-two years ago Isobel and Philippe were in Madeleine's room in the school in St Denis. They had been married for one month and were travelling through Europe. Madeleine picked them up in a cab from the Hotel Danube in the rue Jacob where they had spent three nights listening to the wall paper crumbling and had woken suddenly in the night when the American choir girls returned to the hotel. They were down on the street, at the door.

*Happy Noo Year, Happy Noo Year,* they called softly across the evening to each other, and for years afterwards on each New Year's Eve, Philippe would kiss her neck and whisper to her at midnight in a soft American accent, and she would smile. Philippe spoke to Madeleine in French, his mother’s tongue, while Isobel arranged him against the dark drop cloth she had fashioned from her black winter coat hung by the window.

His pipe sat on its side on the table. White salt lay in the ashes.

*For the cover of your first novel,* she laughed as he rolled his eyes at Madeleine.

*Keep still!*

He held his face to the darkness, and she took the picture.
Travelling to Fontainbleau with Madeleine and the Spaniard, they followed a road in a forest of straight-limbed trees brushed in narrow waves up to the low cloud. Rain waited to fall upon a tall grey stone house that looked like a tree or a nest on the edge of the forest. In the gardens of the chateau were some yawning soldiers, hands on hips, cloaks spread. Three donkeys screamed at the train running behind the chateau and in the jardin anglais, an old man sat on a seat deeply bent upon the sway of the swan on the pond. Or perhaps he was asleep.

Through the trees a horse kicked up leaves and warmed the air with its steaming dung. An officer was exercising his big bay, his eyes flickering over them without interest as the Spaniard took the photo.

On the way back, the Spaniard’s laugh in the back seat was like the twanging of a guitar. Philippe’s eyes met Isobel and Madeleine’s and the three of them smiled at each other in antipodean collusion.

After driving about for an hour trying to find the school, Madeleine finally stopped on an overpass in fog and the Spaniard, gathering his coat about him, climbed out of the car and stood on the road in the night lit by broad, searching sweeps of orange light.

Where are we? Isobel asked.

We’re lost, said Philippe


Madeleine must have taken this early picture, because he was young, his hair long. She must have held the camera into the breeze; Isobel could hear the click in the rush of open air. There were miles of brown water. After the picnic on
the shore, Isobel and Philippe had fallen in the warm water fully clothed and the boat flapped beside them like a pelican. The hills were brown behind the sails, the sky white with the last of the Australian summer heat. They rolled in the dam with each other, their faces stretched with laughter.

When they were in the boat again, the breeze picked up and Philippe span the heron until the wind was directly behind them. He loosened the sheets then let them all the way out, and the sails swung free. Isobel stretched out on her back and felt the warm water sliding along the edge of the boat, streaming over her arm. As he held the rudder steady they ran back towards the shore, goose-winging, with the sound of metal clinking on the mast.

*Blue eyes, he sang to her, baby's got blue eyes, on a blue, blue day.*

And they sailed back like that, happy with the expectation of being carried home on the sure evening wind.

1982. Philippe and the dog.

It was early morning and raining lightly. They descended into the blue gum forest that lay far beyond the house, and ran together with the dog over the sodden earth along the floor of the valley, past waratahs flaring suddenly before them like the red burst of king parrots flying through the green.

They ran for miles. There was no-one else, just the companionship of the breath and the dog between them, running sideways, her tongue falling with each step for miles, then the climb at the end to South Head where Isobel bent down and drank from the pool of water with the dog.

Built from golden cypress pine on the side of a valley it had a silvery green roof. They slept high up in the house below a pane of glass that gave an eye to the night. In the morning the house creaked in response to the warming air and they would wake to the gulping cry of a currawong in a swoop. Rising, they would step out onto a small deck so high above the tree line that the parrots flew beneath them, squeaking with the sound of two branches rubbing together in a breeze. On the deck was a table where they drank tea and leant over the bow of the house, set upon the grey swell of an ocean of eucalypts.

They moved into the house one June day many years ago, away at last from the heat of the city. At nights they walked through the cemetery with the dog, Philippe sniffing up the snowy air like cocaine. Once they sat in the darkness on the verandah listening to Borodin’s Nocturne at midnight under the bright, cold sky, the dog at their feet as she told him a story:

_A tall woman was caressing her husband’s feet, stroking him to death. They did not catch her. Caresses leave no trace. It was a slow death and he died with his foot in the air, and his lips folded in._

1955. Hong Kong.

In the dim photo of Philippe in the flat, the dog is bigger than he is. His wide, serious face is looking at his toy aeroplane in the corner of the picture, carefully lined up with the cars on the window sill. There is a lounge, a television.

Although she had carried that photo of him as a child with her for years, she wasn’t quite sure why it moved her so.

She took this photograph of Philippe not long after they first met.

There is the clean line of the cheek, the eyes averted. Her fingers touch his cheek. There is a hollow in the skin here, a small strawberry birthmark in the shape of a dog. His eyes are green, with hazel patches in some lights. She holds the photograph as if tempted to lower her face against it, to glean the scent of him. For Isobel, in this moment, there is nothing but his eyes of woven glass and the slow pulse of memory. He is telling her the story of his family. They are young and it is the first time she has heard this story. A bottle of Mateus sits between them on the table. His fingers are brushing at the label, finding the rift where it lifts a little from the cool bottle. She is listening to him and watching his hands, like birds in their shape, flashing between trees.

It was raining when they met, it was raining as the dark trees silently observed their path between the house and the car, and inside the warm enclosure the car made, there was Rachmaninov. First it was twilight, then much later when they returned, it was the falling darkness that he stopped with his upturned palms. He whispered to her, ‘I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams.’ And he took her head in one hand and drew it to that place between his shoulder and throat and she felt the warm, soft brushing of lips upon her eyelids, sealing them against a future she would not want to see. Did he know it even then?

Isobel weeps.
Isobel puts down the photograph and opens the lid of the piano carefully. She sits on the stool and runs her hands across the keys, tapping them with her long fingers, remembering when she was very young and her mother still played. But when the notes begin to form meaning their sounds grate upon her. She sharply closes the lid and the strings shudder, vibrate, and shiver in the air. She turns her back on the piano and stacks the photographs in a box. Then she picks up more books, cold stones in her hands, and climbs the stairs to the bed in the room that hangs like a kite over the eucalyptus forest.

Outside oil sizzles in the gum leaves. There are the blue backs of flies. She hears the sound of a hubcap from the wheel of a car on the highway, spinning off into the night.

Her bed is her grave. On it lies a heavy body of books, the revolver that had been handed down through the French side of Philippe's family to him, and Madeleine's letters. She lies against these things, her grave goods, and falls into sleep as into a dark pool below her, sleeping deeply, entombed with a copy of the book of the dead, fully clothed in a green dress and boots. Her mouth is open to her journey.

She is studying the map of it in her sleep. Informed by a boatload of memory, sweat leaks from her body as she sleeps like a creature that has had a net thrown around it in the sea. Her sleep is like drowning, a slow slipping away under water. Last night she woke in the dark, swung out of bed, hitting her bones on the cupboard. He was lost in the darkness below and she must reach down and grasp his hand and pull him up from the black water lapping at her feet.

The moon outside the window is an old one and she is the sad wife sleeping as though her pillow has been dipped in a bucket of ether. She doesn't move. She
will wake with her head still turned to the window, listening to the sound of the wind in the eucalypts, like the sound of waves reaching at the shore, falling back, failing.

She is a shipwreck, smashed on a reef of writing.

When she opens her eyes it is because she hears the house speaking to her in the hot morning light, the wood bending, stretching, groaning like a boat on waves of heat. Down below the house the grass lies down in the heat and the willows shake their heads of hair.

A bird’s line of flight crosses the stand of gums.

She lives day after day like this for months, schooling herself in solitude: a feather knocked from the body of the bird.

For company, there are only the phone calls to Madeleine, and the dog that sleeps under the house in a hollow of dirt listening to the footfall on the brushbox floor above as Isobel moves like a sick woman across the room.

Isobel thinks about telling people that Philippe has died in Hong Kong. It will be only Madeleine who she can bear to know the truth. She rehearses the story with Madeleine on the phone:

We ride this night on the Celestial Star. We sit at the rear on wooden seats polished by the passage of a million people. You can trace the brass star in the wood with your finger. The two middle-aged Americans who sit in front of us absorb me and I think he is kissing her foot. I lean forward to see him carefully clipping her toenails and turn back to Philippe to laugh. But he is gone. He is falling from the back of the ferry in a moment carved in the air.

His arms stretch out to me. His glasses are slipping on his nose. He is falling into the Fragrant Harbour. As he flies into the harbour, he parts the black water
and his body makes a dark hole. Other water fills the hole. (Did I look away to see the lights of Kowloon in the soft, soft dark, and turn back to find you gone?)

I hear five bells across the sea. A cleaving apart.

The next morning The South China Morning Post said:

At 7.30 PM last night a man fell from a Star Ferry into Victoria Harbour as it made its way from Central. An extensive search of the area was unable to locate him.

A body dipping into the sea.

As her voice fails, Madeleine says, I'll come.

From the verandah, the dog listens to her whispering to Madeleine. Isobel sneezes then the dog sneezes, allergic to her own falling hair. The dog waits for him still, but somehow Isobel knows better than to wait. She gazes at herself in the mirror, at the green dress hanging loosely, shocked to discover that her grief has manifested itself so clearly in her face.

To soothe her agitation with action, Isobel takes a pick down to the creek. She hooks into the earth and plants sentinel agapanthus under trees that stand like temples over her bent figure. She fills the holes with dirt and the heat dries her face. Like a Western red cedar, Isobel is rotting from the inside, narcosing; slowly the blood in her body dries to a rusted mark.

Once again, the night swings deeply across the valley, bringing more than just the absence of light. She dreams there are people at the door who are knocking on the wood. A rescue party hovers in a helicopter out here in the South China Sea as the house groans and rolls in the gale like a scuttled boat. The wind is sucking at the walls. The beams stretch and strain as it rolls for days; her mast is broken and trails in the sea. In the dark wind outside, she hears the sound of a murderous
typhoon, the call of the whale far beneath her. The house rubs its back against a bony reef, a skeleton in the sea.

She wakes when a crack of thunder parts the air, and rain falls in and she lies still, as if carved, drilled, sawn. She thinks of the leap from Honeymoon Lookout, the cliffs of fall.

Feeling a worm in her heart moving, she hears the scream of the black cockatoo in the pines, like the bellow of a horse gone mad and in need of a bullet. She thinks of her ovaries with their eggs, an aviary - and delicate birds’ eggs shriveling there.

She is like the bride who wakes on her wedding day with a beard. It is only the light coming through the stained glass window above the bed that gets her into the day.

The dog waits for Philippe’s return but Isobel is waiting for winter when her bones will poke at her.

She fills a vase with tears and it is night again. Every night she sleeps in the green dress and boots. Night after night there are Chinese colours in her brain and she forgets to breathe.

Very late one night, she walks out onto the top deck and listens to the night noises, the voice of the wind. Isobel climbs up on to the table and stands high above the trees, looking down to the hanging swamp. She draws herself up together, gathers herself from her centre, and prepares herself for flight from the torment of the last few months. She will dive, as if into the pool of night, the well of darkness below.

The telephone rings.
She freezes as though caught in the act of a crime. Impatiently she waits for the 'phone to fall silent. It rings and rings. It does not stop. The dog begins a frenzy of barking.

Defeated, Isobel climbs down from the table and walks slowly down the stairs to the telephone. She picks up the receiver and hears her sister's voice coming from far away. She murmurs across the seas to Madeleine in Paris. This barren crust of earth, these harsh trees and rocks of Katoomba have become embedded in her heart. She will seek an end in the beauty of some other place. As Madeleine speaks Isobel thinks of that strangely shaped faraway tree of their childhood, the carubba tree.

No, don't come, she says to Madeleine, I will go to Ravello. A good end point, she thinks, and as if led on by the luxurious rolling sound of her own words, she continues: First I will see you, and then I will go to Ravello.

Time is unmoving, like a stone, but one morning there is snow slipping on the roof. The world has shifted into winter while she has slept under the broken sky. Lace is stretched across the landscape. The cold edges in under her door. The grass and trees are starched and the ice makes eaves on the roof, stretches green in the bush, through the white snow. Her only meaning now is carved, shaped by snow; like the snowworm Isobel is learning to live in ice.

Lighting the fire for company, to hear it move, to feel its arms of heat, she scratches at her breast to get at the ache. She recognises the silence. It is the quiet despair of her mother, and she, somehow, has become her own mother.

She runs through the bush, the trees moving in the wind like disturbed spiders. Above her a kookaburra sits observing her from its perch on a dead
branch, a small fish hanging ungracefully from its beak. She wears Philippe's shirt, his boots. There is a rawness to her organs that finds a skin in his clothes. She runs through scribbly gums, encoded writing carved into their trunks, white like the trees of the brain, with arms of blanched bone. A graffiti of branches scratches at her as she passes. A flock of black cockatoos clouds the sky. Her wasting feet slide, the stones and leaves on the ground have faces.

The dog follows at a distance, accustomed to Philippe's shirt with his smell moving through the scrub. But not this cold keening in the wind.

As she runs, there is her dialogue with grief and she says aloud, I am in Katoomba. It is Friday. She speaks so that the past will not take her. Throw back its head, hold her upside down above its mouth, drop her in and swallow her whole.

Looking back up from the hanging swamp she sees the wooden house in the snow as it hangs over the eucalypt valley: a boat, a church, a violin. During the day it moves; expands and breathes, pressing soft cypress perfume into the air.

Night after night she dreams that her heart is sleeping in the hollow of dirt beneath the house. It waits, shivers. Some days she sees it sitting in the gutter, bent double, its hand over its mouth. She forgets to feed it and it grows thin and bony.

Like a sculptor, the kindly surgeon bends over Isobel on the operating table finding fragments of cardiac muscle caught in her teeth. The knife is poised above her like a pen, then without a word, he makes his incision and saws through the bone of breast which has the lightness of bird bone pushing out from inside her. He cuts her heart from strings of sinews, removes it, and sets it on the right stainless steel pan of a pair of scales on the floor. It burns red. The dog approaches and
sniffs the heart, licks at its edges and takes it carefully, delicately in her teeth. She curls her lips back and tosses it into her mouth, eating it before it can be placed in a jar. The dog licks the cavity in Isobel’s chest and she murmurs and wakes as the surgeon steps back to study his cardioectomy.

She hears a rat scratching in the room, but when she opens her eyes, sees that it was just the rain. She walks out into the rain and an aria of currawong song.

To clear her head of the dream she chops wood for hours, then sits inside and watches the mist coming into the house through the open window. With the cloud in her living room, the past rolls in. Isobel tries to light the fire without him. She struggles with sticks and wood. Three times it fails. She weeps as the light in his eyes dies and she knows that we don’t know what life takes us to. The events in Hong Kong were like a coal train in the night. No lights. Just the moon catching the side of the last truck. She was blind. She should have seen it coming. There was one detail, merely pointed at, that she missed, and so lost the whole.

Philippe could never settle with one meaning, so there was nothing for her to grasp, except the falling night as he surfed on the swell of language, reaching for happiness; writing in the red ink on polished paper, naming his gods with each thick downstroke, thin upstroke. She can see him holding his breath as he wrote onto the empty space of the page.

What is a wound, she thinks, if not a longing for language?

Philippe was a man who selected his dog according to how difficult it would be to bury; he placed his affections carefully, like a priest setting the bread and wine on the altar. Isobel learned restraint, silence, to never speak of an experience because then it couldn’t be written about, and that was the worst thing.
So nothing really existed or happened. His dialogue was with the page, he kept it for the page. Everything was for the page. He wrote, three books open in front of him on his desk, greedy for the seduction of words. He wrote in heavy woollen clothes, sometimes with a scarf about his throat and his breath a white banner because he had forgotten to stoke the fire and it had died down. When Isobel came into the house just a cough told her that he was there. She lit the fire, smelling the wood and ash on her frozen hands, and saw that his thoughts were elsewhere, and he was falling over some sort of edge, giving himself up to the jazz that played on the radio – dark, muddy music. He was a scriptore in his scriptorium, scooping up the cream of language as it came to the top, ideas as beautiful and fragile as inscriptions on the scapulae of deer. Philippe took their life, soaked it in lime, scrubbed away all trace of flesh and hair, dried it, and scraped again with a knife blade, then polished the surface to give parchment to write on.

He was afraid he would lose his voice if people came and talked about his work, so there was no one. Only Madeleine’s letters from Paris.

Isobel played endlessly on the Lipp piano she had inherited when her parents died. Sometimes she’d glance up to see Philippe listening with his eyes closed.

There was simply his sleeping early, in summer to escape the heat, in winter to escape the darkness, dreaming that writing would save him from a life that was a calligram: he was the shape of his texts. He did not notice her love for him, his gaze being upon the words.

Then one night, alone by the fire, she started writing as he slept in the room above her. Guiltily she put down her pen and fed the fire, watching the ink grow
dark and the words curling up into the chimney and floating out over the hanging swamp, the still stand of scribbly gums. After that Isobel would find herself surreptitiously writing letters to herself.

The film director’s visit was an intrusion. He rang to say he had read the synopsis of the spy novel Philippe was writing, and wanted to make it one of his next projects. He said he could meet up with them when they went to Hong Kong. He and Philippe could choose locations together. He thought Macau would be right for the love scenes. The decay. That lost city feel about it. There was a particular hotel, the Pousada de Sao Tiago. It was set like a bunker in the side of the hill. They could meet him there. He insisted on coming up to Katoomba on the train to pay a visit; accustomed to the eccentricities of genius, he wouldn’t take no for an answer.

So, they took him down through the hanging swamp and up the other side of the valley to the high heath, to show him the waratahs. Django Rheinhardt’s Daphne was on the radio. It was hot, building to a storm, and when it broke the rain came at them in great sweeps. It struck the sweat on the back of the film director’s neck. He struggled for breath as they hastened back to the house, the dog running ahead searching for lizards, snakes, anything she could hunt down. As he rubbed his hair dry with the towel Isobel had given him, he said to Philippe,

You know, your life is an observed one. Not a lived one. You need some passion in your life. You can’t write about what you haven’t known.

Isobel paused a moment over the coffee she was making and looked across at the film director, then at Philippe. She looked hopefully into his eyes of woven glass. His lips parted a little as if he were to turn to her and say something. Always
it seemed that he was about to say something. But he never did. He gave a stiff little smile and said nothing.

After that he took longer trips to the city. She realises now that he was researching the art of betrayal, writing his spy novel, telling himself stories of passion, assuming another of the multiplicities of self that he kept stored away like honey in a glass jar. She wanted to say to him, beware the stories you tell yourself, for you will surely be lived by them, but all this time he was intently writing about fragmentation and collapse. His grief bloomed like a black flower, and she could smell it in the mornings, when she woke beside him.

Once in winter she was ill. It snowed and she lay in bed and said, *Tell me a story.*

He gently told her about Russian forests and loss until she slept in his arms and woke to find the fever gone.

Sometimes he lay on the black couch in his black jumper in the long late afternoons. The worst times. His eyes were often closed and it was like a sentence. The unrelenting pressure of it pushed down upon him like a wool press, squeezing out life, love.

*Anhedonia,* he murmured.

She looked it up in his dictionary while he slept.

When she bent down to him lying there, she heard something else.

*Australia.*

The grief plagued him until his heart had become a walled city and Isobel wondered if she were, after all, the cause of it. Perhaps he had caught it from her, as she, the unwitting carrier, had caught it from her mother?
There was just the dog, as loyal as Feather was, always with him on his wild walks, the miles he ran to escape the plague, which came without warning. It was like the beating of rain across a valley: she could hear it coming, drumming its advance, long before she could see it, or feel it.

Once he opened his eyes for a second and said that he had to remain silent to write, but for Isobel, reading the silence was like trying to decipher hieroglyphics, a language stripped of vowels. It was incompatible with any alphabet Isobel knew.

_You don't attend to the thing, Isobel. Such drawing attention to love destroys it. You must not meet the gaze of love._

Such words became weapons at her throat. It was so clearly going wrong but she didn't know how or why. It was like wearing a dress inside out, so that the unravelling threads of her life were obvious to everyone else.

After Hong Kong Isobel was stripped of her narrative. She has been grasping at metaphors to make meaning and knows that by avoiding what she feared it was as though she caused it to happen. She also knows that there will come a time when she will stop being a woman who is running away.

_When the pipes freeze, something bursts in the toilet. She rings for help._

The plumber shuffles on the tiles in the bathroom, waves his hand in the water of the cistern.

_Australian made. Never last._

_What should I do? asks Isobel._

_Got a replacement in the van. American, and more expensive. But you know where you are._

_Ah, says Isobel with a smile, I want to know where I am._
So he moves about the house twisting, tapping pipes. There has not been another human being here for months. She is unused to movement about her, just the petal from a poppy falling from time to time, caught in the corner of her eye.

The plumber finishes his work.

_There was this bloke who lived just down from here. Do you know about him?_ Isobel shakes her head.

_His wife cleared out six months ago. Ran off with some other bloke. I did some work for him. Anyway, his aunt died and left him her five rottweilers. He carried photos of the dogs in his wallet. I saw him in Katoomba Street one day, a few months back. We had a chat, and after a while he said, Well I've got to get back to the ... dogs. I heard later that one night he rang a cab and ordered a case of beer. He drank it all at one go. When someone found his body a week later, the dogs had eaten bits of it._

Isobel remembers the rottweilers at the end of the road. She had been walking with the dog there one day when a rottweiler appeared at the open window of the third storey of the wooden house. Then another dark head at a different window. The house was peopled with rottweilers. They examined Isobel and her dog silently, without moving. Suddenly one of the dogs yelped and disappeared. Isobel quickened her pace, but they came out an open door and hurtled, with a third, a fourth, onto the road. Isobel froze and pulled the dog close to her as the rottweilers circled. She did not speak. Her blood stopped flowing and she remained paralysed for a few minutes, then raised her hand and swept it at the dogs. She cried out impatiently and moved off, pushing through them. And they stood looking at her as she and the dog continued down the road.
As Isobel counts out his money, the plumber leans on the wood of the house, which today is like a cello.

_Nice spot_, he says, looking to the fall of eucalypts hanging in the window, where tomorrow the fog will drift across her eyes like sleep, and a river of hyacinths will flood in spring.

_In early spring_, Isobel leaves her isle of the dead and ventures into the town past a bare tree flowering with cockatoos, beneath skeins of wild geese flying in a strange light, billowing out across the sky. Walking quickly past the Savoy where she is known, she makes her way to the darkness of the Paragon, where no one will notice her eating the edges of food amongst the tourists. She takes the booth at the back and thinks she hears the waitress say, _No humming birds. They are off the menu today._

A man across the room strokes a woman’s chin and holds it between his thumb and forefinger like a sparrow. When Isobel looks up again, the woman is taking a piece of food from his proffered fork into her mouth. Isobel gets up suddenly and leaves quickly without ordering.

Outside there is a woman waiting at the bus stop. She is old with a beautiful face. Chinese. Tall. She wears a black woollen beanie and a long dark coat that completely encloses her. It has a fluff of light brown fur at the collar. Her pale hand, holding a cigarette, emerges from the dark coat. She stares at Isobel in anger and the bright sunlight around them is swallowed suddenly in grainy cloud.

Isobel walks away, close to the shop windows. The wind catches her sideways as she crosses alleys. It is a wind that knows where ice and snow still lie. She passes by her favourite bookshop, having no use for books now that the
dyslexia of grief has struck her. Outside the shop, a young man, a shoplifter, screams like a rabbit as he is apprehended.

_Alas!_

Isobel is startled.

_Alas!_

The young man is agitated, growing insistent, very ugly. When the woman from the bookshop appears at the door, he grasps her arm.

_Alice._

She shakes his hand from her, turns and walks back into the shop.

Leaving them, Isobel walks back home past the rubbish tip with fresh supplies of yellow paper. In a stretch of scribbly gums, a passing bus gives her a window of cypresses, black strokes in the purple and blues of receding shadow. Reaching the house, she takes the mail stuffed in the postbox. A spider leaps away from her in fright. Her hands find a heavy, foreign letter from Madeleine. There is also one from Japan for Philippe. Inside it are the details of an Australian literary studies conference in Tokyo. A chèque for the airfare.

She will bank it.

That night she dreams that she is standing over Philippe's grave murmuring, _I am the sad wife._ As it starts to rain, Madeleine hands her an umbrella that she takes and swings over her head, showering the dark hole with confetti from some wedding long ago.

_Isobel sits in the dentist's chair._ His strong hands hold her jaw gently. As he waits for the anaesthetic to work, he moves into the next room and she can hear him
playing a clarinet. He returns, finishes his work and she sits up, blurred, sleepy in
the music and his care.

*Have a good winter.*

She blinks, appreciating both his gentleness and the way he thought in
seasons. As if he somehow knew that the frost waited, axe in hand behind the door,
to split her in two, drive her bones into the ground, and grind the pieces like glass
with the heel of its foot. He’s turned away now, and as she’s leaning over the
ceramic bowl spitting beads of blood, he says it again,

*Have a good rinse.*

*Over the months, she has given away or sold all her possessions. But one evening,
before the television goes, she sees Philippe on it.*

*Is he in Hong Kong? Is he in some other house, here in Australia?*

*He’s standing beside an empty fireplace, resting his arm along the
mantelpiece. He is wearing a white shirt, a tie. He looks prosperous. His hair has
been cut short. As the interviewer speaks to him of the publication of his new
novel, Isobel hears a doorbell ringing somewhere off the screen. Isobel knows what
he is thinking about all this. About the camera, the lights. There is a slight shine to
his forehead. He makes eye contact with the camera.*

*There is a camera here,* he says pointing at the truth, intent upon annoying
the woman, refusing to play by the rules.

*Writing,* he says to the camera, *you will abandon everything for that. You
will betray everyone. All that matters is the work.*

With the passing of time, Isobel has understood that in Philippe’s deception
of her, lay the truth.
Isobel sits at Philippe's desk under the window, a net of trees against the sky. She takes up his pen and, in a pale voice, writes to Madeleine, *There is a floor in me, and I am lying on it.*

She has been packing the last of his papers and pens which have lain there all this time, just where he left them. The pines groan. At her feet, the dog moves, folds her paws and tucks her head tightly into her tail to form a perfect circle. The cord of the blind hangs from the window in the precise way he had knotted it. In the months that she had been there alone, the tip of the pine tree outside has moved above the line of the window sill.

She takes a piece of yellow paper. The black ink-drops on the page are like the shadow of a man. With her hand upon her chin, she writes a letter to the dead from the dead:

Dear Philippe,

*In Dachau I am kept alive in your protective custody. I am something living, but very still.*

*My arms were raised on a corner in Wurzberg, as if to be taken in your arms to dance. My glasses are too big for my head. Your boots are too big for the bones of my feet. I have lost my concentration.*

*I place my shaven head upon the wooden bed. The wings of my shoulder blades, a swirl of bone down my back like folds in stone. A calligraphy of bone - skin over stone, cloth over bone. A skeleton after the first year, my cells are shrinking like my liver in its cage.*

*The organs inside my skin are playing my requiem.*
In the dusk of morning light I stand, still as a Chinese warrior.
Perhaps you have spun my hair for socks? Or are you on some South American street living on my golden teeth?
I long for the warmth of Baracke X with its quiet garden of snow...

Isobel

She gathers together all the yellow pages that she has written upon over the months - the yellow pieces of paper that have become her company, her Other - and adds them to the exercise book from Hong Kong. She slips them all in between the leaves of one of Philippe's unfinished manuscripts that lies, in his careful script, on his writing desk, just as he had left it when they went to Hong Kong. She places her pages amongst the bones of his story, the flesh of his language.

As she lifts the papers, it is the shape of the words The Concerto Inn that first attracts her eye, like a familiar piece of music catching in the brain. Before she can stop herself, she reads the story and hears Philippe's voice telling her a familiar tale:

I asked the boy at the bar where I could stay the night. When he'd finished washing the glasses, he took me down along a path to the Concerto Inn where he said he worked during the day. There was a bright lamp at the door. It looked a fragile construction of bamboo, one of those curly-roofed palaces of imperial dynasties. I could see several storeys and repeated roofs, steeply pitched with projecting, upturned eaves and ridges of coloured tiles. Inside, just opposite the entrance, there was a carved screen wall. There was no one about. He led me through passageways to a red chamber where he said I could stay the night. One whole wall was constructed
of a panel of windows and mirrors. There was a bed and a basin. I lay down and slept until the sun woke me. I couldn't find anyone around so I left some money for him on the table and made my way to the dock. I was the only passenger aboard the ferry that brought me back to Hong Kong...

Like a transparent structure superimposed over Philippe's story, Isobel imagines another voice, not Philippe's. As the weight and density of the words shift, parallel lines finally converge in Isobel's mind and she reads between the lines. She reaches her own vanishing point and apprehends a slippage in meaning, the resonance of another narrative. It is the lecturer in Romance languages whose voice she hears singing the o of The Concerto Inn. Philippe's words dematerialise and another story takes their place, as though a fragment of someone else's memory has drifted into Isobel's mind:

How I tried to ignore Philippe's attentions, the billets doux at the conference in Guangzhou quoting Yeats: 'I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams.' He brushed my hand one night over dinner at the White Swan. He wrote me another note and had it delivered to my room. He impersonated a visiting Indian professor, but I knew who it was. He wrote, "Since the written word is so much like an historical document, an hysterical formal amendment to ways and behaviour, it would pleasure me greatly to request the lascivious and lusty pursuits of my mind upon the joys of your body. The fruits of our love shall not pass unrewarded in the annals of time."

I laughed then because we spoke the same language. He was lost. He told me how he sat on the verandah in Katoomba and drank whisky, his father's revolver aimed at his sadness. There was the warm breath that his language was. It curled off his tongue. It wound around me and pulled me closer. He could tell stories in the
night, stories that were like jewels, stories that were strung upon ideas so rare. So he smuggled me in to him against my will. The intrigue of the affair! Back in Hong Kong, the hand upon my breast between book-signings. The secrecy was divine.

Then Isobel arrived in Hong Kong and it was even better; his desire more urgent, driven by the betrayal he was writing about. I was his reason now to chuck the lot. He'd been wanting to do it for a while. Had decided some time ago that his life in Katoomba, Isobel, had to go. Now that we had found each other he could do it in one job lot. The garage sale of his life. He quoted Lowell's "At the Altar" to me with a grin,

"I turn and whisper in her ear. You know
I want to leave my mother and my wife,
You wouldn't have me tied to them for life."

We went to the Mandarin Oriental and I drank calvados. There was a Portuguese band playing. He drank Mateus and told me about his childhood in Hong Kong, being raised by Chinese Amahs who spoke only Mandarin, his early years a tangle of different tongues. The awful betrayal of being taken away from his French mother to Australia by his father when he was eight and the only place he wanted to be was Paris. And I can see him standing on some country train platform, his tin trunk beside him, knowing that there would be nothing up the line, down the line. I don't think he ever recovered from the culture shock of that.

In my flat I would tell Flor to have the day off. I think she knew why. I would put on my Gloria Estefan songs. The ones in Spanish. He would whisper into the intercom, then in my bed the whispering would become more urgent. His lips upon my throat until I felt like a long-necked Botticelli. The stroke of the hand along my thigh and the accumulation of flesh that he gathered there. Afterwards he would go
out onto my little balcony and write. I would make him coffee. He said it was the best writing he had ever done. I found little white cards all over the flat with quotations on them, like Italo Calvino's “There is no language without deceit.”

But they were merely moments, odd hours grabbed here and there. Until one evening I was sitting beside him at Jo Jo's bar in the Grand Hyatt in Wanchai as he rang Isobel. I heard him tell her that he was stranded on Lamma Island.

He was hanging up the 'phone and smiling down at me on the stool beside him. My legs were crossed. I lifted my face slowly to his, our eyes were like lovers walking towards each other on a street. I shifted my legs slightly. My hand lay at the place where the skirt ended on my thigh. Philippe placed his perfectly shaped hand upon mine.

‘We have the night,’ he said...

Isobel is still. She does not breathe, but sits holding in her hands the evidence of Philippe as the architect of a carefully constructed deceit. Then she takes The Concerto Inn, thick now with her own dark story, and places it carefully in Philippe's trunk from Hong Kong. Gathering momentum she packs all the precious things he has given her over the last eighteen years: the love letters, the poems. Then all the things from his desk. She is sweating. The dog licks the sweat from her legs as she drags the trunk across the floor to the top of the staircase, levers it down one step at a time. It slips and its weight pushes down on her. She falls backwards down the stairs and the trunk presses her against the floor. Looking up she sees the perfect symmetry of her fall. The dog catches tears on her tongue and it is the combination, the mixture of fuel and fire that floods on the plains of her heart, and fills her with rage. It is as if she has woken to the unfamiliar roar of a striking match.
The rage steams off her back like white frost burning in sun, as she drags the trunk all the way under the house into the dark, where it lodges in the damp soil. The dog sniffs at it, picking up Philippe’s scent, reveling in the memory of him. Turning away to the light at the doorway, Isobel spills outside again. Slams the heavy door shut. Closes the tomb.

Through the following nights she hears the howl and cry of her own voice, like that of an animal caught in a trap. She sees rabbits grazing in the garden under the moon.

One morning, many days later, Isobel hears a peculiar low moan rising from under the house and drags open the heavy door to a frenzy of flies.

The dog lies on her side, her paws crossed. Isobel can see where she has worn a deep hollow in the dirt scattered with lizard bones and beetle wings. She kneels down beside her. The eyes of the dog are clouded with the terrible neglect, and there is blood on her claws. Thunder rolls in from the south. Rabbits dance on the grass as she lifts the dog and carries her up inside the house and places her on the rug before the hearth. She holds warm milk and raw egg to her mouth, feeds her gently, and warms her before the fire. When the dog begins to lift her head a little, Isobel’s weeping falls from her like a curtain.

She runs up the stairs to the bedroom and drags Philippe’s clothes from the drawer onto the floor, digging into jumpers, releasing the muffled smell of him into the air. She finds the revolver she had hidden from herself there. The heavy box of bullets.
She dials the number of Philippe’s agent and a smoky voice answers,

*Wordsmith Literary Agency.*

*It’s Isobel. I don’t have a lot of time. I’ve seen Philippe on television. Is he back in Australia?*

*Yes, he’s here for the launch of the new book at the Capricorn bookshop tomorrow evening.*

*What time?*

*Eight.*

The literary agent hesitates.

*You?*

But Isobel has already hung up.

*Isobel kneels down to light the fire. She struggles outside, only to find that the wood is wet. After all this, she is here still, in the dark. In the cold. The wind outside cuts short the moan of the pines. Shivering, she reaches for a book and places it in the grate carefully. She sets a match to it and the pages catch. She takes her photographs of Philippe and some of his novels and feeds them to the fire. She holds out her hands to the flame and his words warm her.*

*With the next match she strikes a deal.*

*She is sweating by the time she has collected her passport, the Italian lira, the air-ticket for Istanbul she bought today, and some clothes. She places them in a small suitcase, sets it by the door and heaps all his remaining books on the fire. It eats them and spills onto the wooden floor.*

*A bibliocaust.*

*Isobel steps into the dark with the dog.*
The windows blaze, the stars fly smoke-trails in the night. A flock of white cockatoos rises suddenly into the night sky. Words spark above the bonfire of the house which groans and twists like a body burning on a beach, and cries to the drift of ash settling upon the hanging swamp.

_I am the mad wife_, Isobel says to the house.

_I give you to the air._

In the dark, the lights from the car slide along telephone wires like a train on its tracks.

Isobel drives the long journey to the Capricorn bookshop from the high, moving purple cloud of the mountains, the dog panting softly beside her on the seat. The revolver is hidden in the glove box. She drives for an hour and passes trucks sleeping on the side of the road until, on the freeway, she pulls over and turns off the ignition. She takes out the revolver and slides in the bullets. She weeps and the dog nuzzles her and whines.

Isobel imagines the future, the moon writing on his tombstone, the script made Arabic by a century of weather. The wind from the passing traffic rocks her. The headlights of the cars sweep her face white. A train slides past in the rain. She thinks _the death of the Author in a shipwreck, smashed against a reef of writing, is eternally written here and now. In the multiplicity of writing she finds an antique map, places it on a table, unfurls it, furnishes it with a final signified, allows it to spring back. She is carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. The body writing lies in a hollow of dirt. The Author is absent. He is gone. The novel ends when writing at last becomes possible. She takes a piece of yellow paper, writes: the birth of the author..._
Day Leave from Dachau

Isobel is growing still and clear at the entrance to the bookshop, the dog by her side. It is night with a moon in the sky. Down here the rain has cleared. She stands on the edge of the busiest street in the city where the moon looks bigger than the traffic lights as it meets the eyes of those heading up the street.

There is the clatter of shoes on the wooden floors in the Capricorn bookshop. People stand behind bookshelves, allowing a space around the television cameras where the author stands. Waiters in black T-shirts and long white aprons lift silver trays laden with drinks to the eager crowd.

Isobel can hear the frothy buzz of conversation and flinches as champagne corks burst from bottles. Voices are rising to a crescendo above the loud din of the traffic coming in from the street. People have come straight from work to the book launch. Ties are loose. The moment waits.

She notices the famous critic, an editor, Philippe’s publisher, and senses the air of expectancy. The literary agent is at the back of the room loitering behind a bookshelf, smoking and agitated. She tries to catch Isobel’s eye, but Isobel’s eye is upon the piles of the new novel stacked on tables. The cover is repeated on the
shelves across the room, on the reviews tacked up on the walls with triumphant headlines.

Unused to the city, the dog is excited by the excess of stimuli, the abundance of odour. Her eyes are glinting in the lights, her mouth grinning. With a criminal calm, Isobel stands quite still at the door, the revolver in her pocket, the dog keeping close, still a little weak. There is something of the fox in the way she throws back her head to sniff the air, revealing the white underbelly of her throat.

Isobel watches Philippe put his hand to his mouth, clear his throat, hitch up his trousers. His hair is cut so differently, sharply. He has put on weight. The moustache is gone and his mouth is thin, vulnerable. He seems much shorter, more tentative. She watches him look anxiously about the room, then find what he is looking for. Isobel follows his line of sight to the lecturer in Romance languages, wearing cream linen and talking to the television crew. She catches the look he sends her, locks onto it as deftly as if it were a baseball that sinks into her waiting glove. She moves to his side. Her hand brushes his wrist, then moves to adjust the gold chain about her neck. Bending her head to one side, she touches an earring and leans close to him, murmuring. He relaxes a little, raises an eyebrow and smiles.

The cameras swing onto Philippe and the lecturer in Romance languages, and now they are two figures close together, illuminated, held in a pool of light. People move into a tight circle around them, jostling for a position where they can see. The publisher takes a gulp of champagne and runs her thumb over the piece of paper she grasps. There is a line of sweat forming now on Phillipe’s forehead.

As he holds a book in the air a loud, roaring cheer rises from the crowded room. He speaks. The dog leans against Isobel’s leg, lifts a paw, registering the
sound of Philippe’s voice for which she has waited so long. She struggles against
Isobel’s hand, tugs at her, glances up in surprise when she meets resistance.

Philippe holds up his glass, which catches, in its curve, the reflection of
movement from the back of the room. The dog is howling now, a high-pitched,
keening sound as she crashes through the legs of the literati, her ears straining
forward. Isobel sees the savageness of passion, of love and holds her breath as the
dog prepares to dive, embrace his face, eyes, the crooked nose. She sees the look of
fear upon Philippe’s face replaced by recognition. Philippe steps towards the dog.
Isobel lifts the revolver and alters his script, changes the direction of things. As she
empties the chambers of the gun into him, she feels the blood drain from her heart.

The author steps backwards. The book and the glass are jolted into the air
until they reach the point where they will arch no higher, and she sees them
falling, and hears his head striking the floor with a sound like a rolled up
newspaper thrown from a passing car.

The screaming dog at his head, the red swelling from the round hole in his
throat: this makes sense of the explosion of blood to those watching the terrible
disclosure his throat makes, the blood running on his neck like red ink bleeding on
paper struck by rain.

As she quickly leaves, Isobel hears the strings of Borodin’s Nocturne and
sees his coffin swirling on the surface of the sea, dancing, waltzing like a
rudderless boat before it goes under. Looking back she sees the agent reach him
first and draw the dog away, stroking her fur, soothing her yowling anguish. And
the two of them are there for a moment, like a boulder in a stream as the others
flood in upon the dying author.
The hysterical crowd had noticed neither Isobel's departure, nor the arrival of forgiveness.
**The Concerto Inn**

It is early morning in the valley of the scribbly gums. Some smoke is still sifting in prayer plumes through the white limbs of the trees as the lecturer in Romance languages stands before the smouldering house. Her crumpled linen shirt is flapping in the breeze. She is exhausted from the police, the hospital, and there are dark streaks of rage under her eyes. Dr Rose shivers in the Katoomba air, which is so much colder than in the city. She moves towards the foundations of the house which are still sheltered by the remains of a floor. Inside, beneath the blackened floorboards she smells the stench of rotting literature, glimpses the shocking neglect of Thomas Bernhardt, startled by mildew on his spine, sharing a box with Roland Barthes.

She enters and towards the back she notices a tin trunk decorated with pressed metal dragons lodged near a hollow of dirt, covered in dust and ash. Scattered around it are small skulls, tibias, fibulas, other osteal remnants embedded in the soil. On her knees in the bones, she opens the trunk. A sharp, foreign perfume strikes her. She finds it lined with soft blue silk and wooden compartments, oval boxes. One box covered in green cloth contains a smaller brass
box full of blue and turquoise glass marbles, a swatch of black hair, a silver ring, a dozen pencils sharpened to perfect points, erasers.

She picks out ash jars, blossom jars and an empty Mateus bottle from a neatly stacked pile. There is an inscription on the label in indecipherable, faded ink. Like a Chinese box there are smaller boxes within each other, one covered in black linen, another with little drawers of yellow painted wood. She touches a large casket of soft reddish-brown wood overlaid with slabs of ivory, carved in low relief and delicately stained. Inside it she notices wads of paper. There are diaries, files, manuscripts, cards, notes, newspaper clippings, old proofs, contracts, photographs, magazines, faxes, and letters: a whole literary life here! A photograph of two women, obviously sisters, slips from the pile. She examines it closely and realises that one of them is Isobel. As she slips the photograph into her pocket, she recognises Philippe's script on a protruding piece of paper, and draws out the manuscript of his unfinished story. The pages are a little ragged, eaten by mice. She runs her hand quickly over the title, *The Concerto Inn*. As she had hoped, the sacked tomb of the house has yielded to her all its secrets: the message from Philippe's past has safely reached her.

The lecturer in Romance languages emerges from the dimness as the cannibal biographer, dazed with the success of what she has seen, and what she holds in her hand. She lets go of the breath she has been holding and takes the papers back up to the car. Settling into the driver's seat, she begins to read Philippe's story.
Song to the Moon

Italy.

A port of entry to another territory.

Changing hemispheres has the allure of the fresh page and on the plane, Isobel sleeps as if on bales of Chinese silk. Over Istanbul she is woken in the night by voices or perhaps seagulls spinning trails across the Mamara Sea, and she hears a morning cry rise from the snowing dark. She imagines her flight over green hillsides with tiny roofs surrounded by dark cypress trees, and the side of a cliff falling down to the sea. There is a village with a small tower above the azure sea.

She journeys from the jade gate of Hong Kong to the stone tower of Italy, with the Escher etching her only map.

In Istanbul Isobel stands behind a man who was stopped by the airport security guards, and forced to tip knives and forks from his pockets. There she spends a day in light snow that falls upon the Blue Mosque near the Hotel Sokullapasa. She seeks shelter in the shining warmth of the Grand Bazaar, drinks apple tea and is dusted by green powder in the Spice Bazaar when she leans over to look at the Turkish Delight. A young man hurries from behind the counter and brushes down her coat with a small broom.
The next day finds Isobel walking from the Termini to the Hotel Positano, past black men whose shining faces are mirrors to Rome. Few people notice her. She is like a travelling hermit, encased within the envelope of her own plan.

The window in her hotel room opens onto a wall. The heating goes off in the night. There is a loud voice at the desk on the phone. She hears a voice outside her door.

*I need towels. The light doesn't work. I have just come from Spain, and it is much better, cheaper. Are you sure this is the price?*

In the morning the shower floods her room. She wipes the floor with a white towel and catches the train.

It is early spring now and the fields between Rome and Florence are a soft green with patches of yellow flowers.

In Florence the sky clears above Giotto's bell-tower and Isobel catches a bus from the station to the Albergho Christina on the via Condotta, a narrow street near the duomo. She climbs a long narrow staircase and is greeted by a man in a blue shirt and a grey vest. He hands her a large key on a piece of string, and she puts her things in the room.

She walks out onto the streets amidst the drone of mopeds and wanders past loggias, arcades, arches with teardrop keystones and rusticated facades. She sees a familiar face and it is Madeleine walking towards her. They laugh at their discovery of each other.

*I missed you*, says Madeleine.

*I missed you, too.*
No, no. I was at the station just now to meet you, but I missed you, Madeleine laughs again, leading Isobel to the Ufizzi to see Botticelli's *Primavera* with the orange trees.

When Isobel is woken early the next morning by the street-cleaning machine, she rises, leaves Madeleine sleeping and walks towards the sun rising on the Arno. She crosses the Ponte Vecchio past wood once soaked in pigs' blood, and now brushed with gold.

Later that day she finds Madeleine in the Piazza del Duomo by the statue of Brunelleschi. His gaze is upon the pointed profile opposite, the eight-sided dome he constructed from an inner and outer shell. A double story, the one inside supporting the other.

They enter the Duomo and together drink the air inside, Isobel believing that because it has enclosed the suffering of so many over such a long time, her own will surely be diminished there.

Drinking camomillo tea at the Caffè Concerto Paszkowski in the Piazza della Repubblica, they notice a man opposite them with a face like one of the Medicis, speaking to an invisible companion, in soft Italian without pausing. His hair curls darkly about his face and he wears a long, grey woollen overcoat and black leather shoes that have been highly polished. He moves his hands in circles, listens to the other, laughs appreciatively while drinking a large coca with a slice of lemon in it for breakfast. Nearby is a woman whose mouth and nose fill up her whole laughing face. She sits in the sun with a man in a blue shirt.

*That colour*, says Madeleine nodding at him, *is the blue of a Fra Lippi robe.* And it is this blue with which Isobel is carefully composing her final journey.
Each evening finds them in the Caffè Italiano in the via Condotti, Isobel bent over the notebook that has taken the place of the yellow pages, and Madeleine carefully reading the papers.

Isobel and Madeleine stay together in Florence long enough to learn the shape of the city. Fearing that they have stayed in one place too long, Isobel makes a plan to split up and break the pattern of their days a little in case there is a watcher somewhere. So late one afternoon, while Madeleine visits the Boboli gardens, Isobel walks up the hillside to Fiesole and strides along lane ways, knowing the necessity of keeping on moving, not breaking her stride. From time to time she glances behind her.

She secures a room for the night in an old convent. As she opens the door to room forty one, a breeze lifts the white netting, taps the window against its casement. She can see below the duomo lying in the pastel green haze that is Florence in the late afternoon. She is alone and immediately regrets Madeleine’s absence.

In the Museo Bandini she breathes her sorrow upon the wash of red paint laid upon the gold in Lotto’s Annunciation. Everywhere in Italy Isobel studies the faces in the annunciations, sees the message repeatedly delivered. Here Lotto’s Mary is turning away from an insistent angel. She does not wish to receive this news. Perhaps she already knew, but resents having it articulated so.

Isobel is startled by the loudspeaker that breaks her silence and, in four different languages, commands her to move away from the pictures. She jumps back and leaves too quickly.
That evening, in her room in the convent above Florence, the dusk turns blue. She watches the light leave the buildings along the Arno, then she lies below the crucifix on the narrow nun's bed until the grey dawn. Her bones feel old, like those caught as relics, surrounded by gold in the duomo. The perpetual catching after the mortal. Keeping it for as long as possible before it crumbles, cracks like honeycomb.

Each memory of Philippe's betrayal is like a piece of bone caught by threads, displayed in a glass case.

The next morning she sits in the courtyard of a cafe near the bus stop waiting for Madeleine. When she arrives, they walk together through wisteria-covered, walled lanes, back down to Florence. It is to the rhythm of their footsteps that Isobel speaks at last to Madeleine, of what she has done to Philippe, not ending her tale until they are back in the heart of Florence, sitting on the cane chairs in the duomo. When she has finished telling her story, Isobel says, Perhaps it was my fault, Madeleine? By fearing the loss of love, it was as though I had caused it to happen. When I asked him, in Hong Kong, if he would go on - with me, I meant - he grinned at me. Or perhaps it was a grimace against the Chinese sun in his eyes? And said that he couldn't. He had found someone.

Madeleine takes Isobel's head in her hands for a long time, holding it like a shell, wondering why it is that some kill the object of desire while others kill the one who desires another. As if reading her thoughts, Isobel says, Perhaps, it would have been smarter, Madeleine, to have been like Veronica Cibo? I read that centuries ago she gave her husband, Jacopo Salviati, the head of his mistress in a basket under an embroidered shirt on New Year's Eve.
The sun burns their knees as they sit in the Caffè Moka Efti in the Piazza di San Giovanni. The passing clouds are combed with colour. The tablecloth is held in place by a brass ring, framing it like a picture.

As they sit there, an excited flock of young men and women appear near the Baptistery. They kiss. They laugh. Then, all at once, fly off in different directions, their jackets and skirts like spreading wings. As they disappear past the statue of Brunelleschi, a white object falls from a coat to the ground. Wanting to capture some of their happiness, Isobel wanders over to see what it is, and picks up a packet of small cigars. She places the cigars in her pocket and walks with Madeleine to the Palazzo Medici-Ricardi with its kneeling windows.

In Italy, Isobel is seeking a balm of colour and light to draw out the poison within her, to be soothed by the voices of strangers in pensiones, the moving pictures outside the window of a train, the different texture of the food she ate. Craving the different and the unfamiliar, she will journey with these things easing her, and allow Italy to gently insist its shape upon her, complete her.

In the dark chapel, the painting is the light. The frescoes are green. There is the procession of the three kings: the Medicis are entering Florence, striding past the hills of Fiesole. They are blessed, these people in their red stockings: Cosimo, Lorenzo, and Guillaume. The robe of the emperor has red and gold for the sleeves; green and gold for the tunic. There is a leopard on a leash, a caravan of oriental and Italian merchants swaying through the Tuscan countryside. Gozzoli has mixed animal blood with alum for the Prussian blue, and glazed it with egg tempera. There is transparent verdigris, gilded tin, all obscured by years of candle smoke. He ground colours to a finer and finer grain to refract the light, perfect the tint. This colour enters Isobel's skin and penetrates her cells. It could not happen again,
this collection of proud human beings and animals entering Florence after the journey from Rome.

As she thinks of her own journey ahead, her lungs burst with the colour of the fresco and there is a sudden sharp departure from the ruminations of her own mind.

Noticing a lighter expression on her sister's face, Madeleine takes Isobel's hand and they go to a shop in the via Condotti, near their pensione.

*I want you to help me choose a tie,* she says mysteriously. They leave the shop with a blue tie with a faille weave, a conspicuous grain, and small satin rectangles with flecked weave borders. When Madeleine holds it to the light, the silver reflections turn pink at the slightest movement.

*A man in Paris,* she laughs at Isobel's raised eyebrows.

On the train to Venice, a woman with shingled hair, sitting opposite Isobel and Madeleine, falls asleep with her finger on a line in an open book. She takes with her into sleep the memory of this journey, and fragments of the two sisters, other passengers on the train, the villages she has rushed through, the houses along the track. Outside, through the blue, flat haze lights appear in the early evening. They pass a ploughed field, a roof of patched tiles, and cross a bridge. Isobel speaks softly the names of each of the places they pass through; like commas in a sentence, the painted cities of Italy.

Rain begins falling like hair combed down over the back of the sky. It spins across the window of the train, the reflection giving her a face cracked white from
winter. A man puts his coat over a little boy's head and shoulders as they cross a village street. These images are navigational aids on Isobel's journey.

On the train Isobel watches a Japanese couple. Her skin of colourless glass. As he cracks his knuckles and leans towards the woman to says things that make her laugh, Isobel turns away to look out the window at the dark cypresses, each set far apart upon the deep green of fields. As the train slides around them, they move towards and away from each other in a spatial concerto, like figures in a piazza.

Beside her, on the seat, is the small rectangular suitcase on wheels. Inside the case is a black alarm clock, some clothes. She wears Philippe's boots in case she should visit snow on her journey. In her lap there is a black cotton hat from Katoomba in which she has wrapped her bread, cheese, walnuts and wine from Florence. She feels like an angel on the back of a cart as a man in a field looks up at the passing train and absently attaches his face to hers.

Isobel keeps her ticket ready at all times and now she unwinds it as the conductor sways towards her. There are, by now, many stamps on the ticket, many different scripts because she and Madeleine have been moving like this for a few weeks. They drift across Italy as if in a balloon, free of direction. Crisscrossing the country, they never stay longer than a few days in any one place, never give anyone any information about themselves. With Madeleine to talk to on this part of her journey, she is shocked by the sound of her own voice, silent for so long.

They speed past birch trees in a field. A drift of dark birds settles on water and smoke rises in front of a villa surrounded by white prunus. A dog stands on the roof of a house in a village communicating its solitude to Isobel.
Upon their arrival in Venice, Isobel and Madeleine take the vaporetto from the station and rest upon the crest of water, the ebb and flow of their journey up the Grand Canal brimming with water craft. The sun comes out and warms them and the city discloses itself to them. Lustrous and iridescent, Venice absorbs, refracts, and reflects light like the crystalline nacre of the pearl: something precious to be carried into the next world. Lapis lazuli from the Orient. They do not speak, but hold their faces to the light and the air, the bacarolle of the gull from the sea, the smell of salt and fish. They hear the sound of the water lapping at wooden landing stages. Narrow facades are covered in coloured stones and red banners herald their arrival. Inside the mullioned windows of the palazzi they glimpse small putti and tapestries and brocades lit by Murano lamps, frescoed salons. A decayed boat lies tethered at a mooring pole. They pass a Venetian funeral boat laden with plumes and flowers and their companions pull off their caps in silence. At the end of this journey there is the golden orb of the Dogana da Mar floating in fine rain above them.

Isobel leads Madeleine along a canal, over small footbridges, looking for Giacomettis and the Cemetery of Ashes of Thought. Near the fish market near the Rialto they are overtaken by a group of animals. There are sheep, and lambs in the pockets of a donkey's saddle. Three kings dressed in satin lead the parade wearing witches' hats, black coats and long striped socks. They carry wine in baskets.

It's the procession of the magi, says Madeleine.

In the Campo San Margarita they have lunch, and when they come out onto the streets, the procession winds about them again and disappears into the labyrinth of the city along a narrow canal between high houses. Rain drives them into a church and Madeleine sees, in the dimness, a glass case on a high altar that
contains the remains of St Lucy who tore her own eyes out after an unwanted suitor kept complimenting her on their beauty. She turns to beckon Isobel who is standing as still as a lamppost, so pale that her face lights the darkness a little.

The room they have taken in the Al Gambero Pensione is dry and warm with smooth white sheets. That night Isobel hears the soft breathing of Madeleine in the bed under the window. She lies awake listening to the sound of company. In the morning when she wakes, the light has already come and she feels like one of Fra Angelica’s pastel angels.

At the train station Madeleine gives Isobel a copy of The Silk Sisters and some moleskin notebooks from Paris. For your writing, she says quietly, and reaches her hand to gently move a strand of hair that is floating towards Isobel’s eye. His gift to you is the blank page, but you don’t know that yet.

Isobel takes the poem and notebooks.

I will come again to be with you, says Madeleine, in Ravello, or wherever you are.

Isobel looks away suddenly, then kisses her sister. She says that she has enough money. She will write.

A moment later Madeleine has boarded the train to return to Paris.
Isobel journeys south again, alone, intent upon her purpose.

From the window of the train she greets the advancing warm colours, watches Naples, the fire city, sinking in sun, and writes in her new notebook, upon her knees.

She finds the Ostello Mergellina behind the dark station, away from the noise of motorbikes and cars. There is a room of her own for a night, possibly longer, so she leaves her things and takes a bus to Spaccanopoli. The bus passes a nun in falling folds of white cloth, watering geraniums in pots and travels through cramped, dark streets with palm trees here and there. At Spaccanopoli she walks down to via Bendetto Croce past tiny shops selling coral pendants, religious medallions and rosary beads, following the grid plan of the original Greek settlement. She wanders far into the narrow back streets where the washing hangs from windows, high up on poles, like flags, and curses fill the air from time to time. A woman with black hands sits and smokes in the evening.

Inside a hall of quiet statues in dusky light, the noise outside of the Naples traffic fades. There is a mummified heart, a picture of a woman tortured by her husband, looking like a mermaid with her skirt tied at the bottom of her feet. She is naked from the waist up. Her decapitated eyes meet Isobel’s. Detached.

Isobel sits in the courtyard and contemplates the next part of her journey. In the morning she will take the Circumvesuviana - past Versuvius which sent beings abruptly into their afterlives - to Sorrento. Then the bus to Amalfi.

For lunch she had eaten a sandwich on the train. This evening there is green pea soup at the ristorante Giglio in the via Toledo. The regulars come in and settle at their tables like birds. She takes the table of a man who finds himself obliged to
turn quickly in circles while putting his coat on to leave. At the door, an umbrella
is like a bunch of furled flowers in his hand.

Isobel watches all of this as though it were a painting on a wall.

From blue mountains to blue grotto.

Having seen Naples, Isobel walks along the white walled laneways of Capri
to the garden of Augustus. She sees the museum of birds, yellow frescoes, hens in
the monastery. From here the Faraglioni rise like stone sisters from the sea. She
stays one night at the Hotel Maresca carved deep in the side of the hill above the
Marina Grande. From its balcony she looks up from her notebook to see that the
light has almost left the Amalfi coast. Naples fades into the sea, which is
completely still except where a small boat, far off, curdles the water.

Now, she thinks, I am closer.

The next day finds her on a blue Sita bus. With poise and grace a seagull
glides above the bus as it swings over the edge of the Amalfi coast. The corniche
road is a line that disappears and returns on the southern side of the Sorrento
peninsula, where the cliffs fall straight into the sea. She sees white cockatoos in a
cage.

When she reaches Amalfi, set in a broad cleft in the cliffs, she sees white-
painted houses built into terraces. Isobel changes to the smaller yellow bus for the
climb up to the solid rock above the Valle del Dragone that is Ravello, where she
will be nearer to the sky.

Yellow wattle flowers appear through rough trellises made from tree-limbs
along the slopes. She holds tightly as the bus negotiates the switchbacks. The road
repeats itself and the bus announces its arrival at each corner with a sharp blast of
the horn, swaying in and out of the sunlight so that Isobel is almost lulled into sleep.

There is a blind girl on the bus, her head bent low. Suddenly she sets alight a piece of paper and, with a laugh, throws it out the window as the bus pauses at Scala and they are overtaken by a dark blue car with a white roof and a red stripe on the side. It is full of carabinieri. As Isobel moves away from the window, the bus crosses the gorge to Ravello from where she hears a dog's bark, reaching across from Scala. Isobel gets off and walks in the sharp air through a tunnel to the piazza Vescovado then along via Cimbrone, following the Ravello ridge where the Arabian-Sicilian buildings sit in silent, luxuriant gardens. She passes along stone walls with birds and violets emerging from cracks, until she comes to heavy wooden doors that she pushes open and finds herself in the garden of the Villa Cimbrone. A curving sandy path leads her through a lawn scattered with white flowers. There are the flax, date palms, plane trees, cedris atlantica glauca, early blossoming apple and cherry trees. She can hear the hooting cries of the bus as it makes its way back down to Amalfi.

When she comes to the end of the path, Isobel is blinded by blue light. The Terrazza dell'Infinito hangs out over the cliffs, high above the sea, edged by a line of stone heads, each concentrating its gaze out to sea. A short leap to the afterlife. She takes in the whole bay in one breath as a woolly, white cat rolls near her hand in the sunlight, warming itself against a wall. Isobel places herself carefully in Ravello, the way she would a piece on a chessboard, holding it with the tips of her fingers so as not to dislodge her other pieces.

Above the sea, she rings a bell at the gate of the white Villa Francescatti with its blue door. When she is admitted she takes a room for a night or two on the
piano nobile. It is like a monk’s cell with a narrow bed, a stone floor, a desk and
chair. The light looks in through a deep window that gives a view out to the blue
and white boats on the Gulf of Salerno. It allows the gaze out and in, partitions the
interior and exterior space. There are little steps up to the window and the wooden
shutters have its shape. On a round polished table sits a blue jug. The yellow tulips
in the jug shine upon the bare wood of the table. At the moment Isobel ends her
journey, she hears the voice of a bell, moving amidst the seagulls’ cries. Placing
her things on the bed, she takes her skin off with her boots, reads her own face in
the mirror, and sits there for a time smoking a cigar.

Down in Amalfi, along the sea, the heavy breast of water rests upon the shore.
Silver fish are lying in the shadows of the streets, ready for the market. Isobel
climbs the wide, steep flight of steps up into the duomo at the top of the piazza. She
takes a white candle and holds it close to a burning one. She tipped it into the other
until it flared a little and the flame grew more bright.

Outside, in the garden of the Chiostro del Paradiso, she looks up as bells
begin to ring, and sees them there, right above her, moving and singing in the
garden.

The museum holds an eighteenth century sedan chair from Macau and, as
she reaches out towards it, she feels a little faint and sits for a moment on the
steps, beside a terracotta pot of red geraniums.

She has not eaten. Perhaps the Stendahl syndrome she has read about is
affecting her and she is being overwhelmed by beauty: a common cause of
treatment at the Santa Maria Nuovo Hospital in Florence. The syndrome was
named because of the sensations Stendahl experienced after visiting the tombs of Michaelangelo, Galileo and Machiavelli in Santa Croce.

The workmen, who are restoring the duomo, clatter past Isobel, down the steps to a cafe below. She follows them into the Caffè Pompelii where she hears many voices, much movement. In the corner a fishpond is surrounded by pots of brightly coloured pelargoniums. Boxes, tins of cakes and chocolates are arranged on the shelves: mosaics of colour. A woman with thin legs is wiping all the boxes carefully with a damp cloth. She then takes up a vase and arranges olive leaves in a way that reveals their green faces, their silver backs. She places the vase on a black piano. A waiter is setting down spoons, taking up forks, removing white linen tablecloths and slipping them into dark wooden drawers at the foot of a cabinet packed with bottles of red wine, biscuits, blue and silver packages of chocolates. There are all different kinds of pastas in dusky earthy colours: tagliatelli, fisarmoniche, fusilli buco, legumata, cazzetti, bocche di lupo, and conchiglie. Isobel reads the labels of the packages as though they were the titles of books.

Isobel seats herself outside at a table set on large dark grey flagstones at the edge of the piazza. There are throngs of people around, their voices rising and rising like waves. A woman calls down from a window above the piazza. Everything is close. Isobel can hear the breathing, the smiling of people and within her is ringing her own response to the bell she’d heard a few moments before. The spring sun presses her against the white pillar at her back. A butterfly folds the air. She takes out a cigar to smoke.
Buon’ giorno. My name is Paolo, says a waiter with a thick grey moustache.

You have come from far? You can rest here. What would you like? I have pasta. I have vino.

A little bow.

Bia, he calls to a small girl who is sitting at a nearby table, coloured pencils spread before an open, blank page, bring bread for the lady.

Isobel is warmed by Paolo’s pasta, and the fresh bread. She sees a timid black dog on the steps of the duomo with its paw folded like a deer’s. There is sleep or infection in its eyes and small tracks of blood from an injured paw.

A man in a green shirt and olive trousers sits in the corner reading a newspaper. His hair is grey against smooth brown skin. He looks up over the top of his glasses and, noticing the dog, bends down to pat it. Isobel takes out the notebook that Madeleine had given her and writes, sideways, a hand over the page, alert to the possibility of an interruption. When she turns a page, she runs her hand over the fresh one like a blind woman, as though she is feeling for what there is to come,

She senses the man looking at her large, ill-fitting boots, the black coat hanging over the chair beside her. He seems to be studying her and turns his head to read the foreign label on her boots: 5 Percy St, Prospect, Sth. Australia. Isobel folds them under the chair and writes on with the afternoon sun making stained glass of her wine.

The little girl approaches the man.

Luca, do you want to see me pull my Band-Aid off?

No.

I’m going to pull my Band-Aid off.
No, Bia.

She pulls the bandaid off to reveal a woundless knee. Nothing. She laughs at Luca who reaches down and offers the dog some gnocchi. He takes out some pink paper and shows Bia how to do origami. An Englishman comes in and pats Bia on the head. His name is Kevin, but to Bia, who is unable to pronounce the k, he is Heaven.

Paolo smiles.

Isobel finds herself arranging to extend her stay at the Villa Francescatti. Each evening at six, she travels by bus down from Ravello to the Caffè Pompeii, just as the last light of the day is falling down the duomo steps. Paolo greets her. Luca is always there before her. He doesn’t look up until she is seated then nods and returns to his paper. Paolo brings him pasta.

One putannesca, sings Paolo to Luca to the tune of Guantanamera.

One putannesca, sings Luca to Paolo.

One puttan esca, they both sing.

Paolo sits down with Isobel when things are a little slower, and gesturing to the kitchen, says, Sorcha, she cooks like a dream. She is Irish. I met her on the island of Ischia, where we were on holidays when we were both young. We wrote letters to each other for years. We married in Naples.

He smooths the white tablecloth.

My father was injured in Bologna in 1941 and spent three weeks in hospital in Naples. They sent him to the Hotel Excelsior Vittoria in Sorrento for a week to recover and he went back for his honeymoon. So we did too. Sorcha said the choice was difficult: either a week in Blackpool wearing kiss-me-quick hats and eating
candy floss and fish and chips, or a week in Sorrento at the Excelsior Vittoria. He
draws back a moment, his hands in the air, palms upward. Then he smiles
suddenly, She thinks we made the right choice!

He winces a little, A car in Florence hit Sorcha but we went to Sorrento
anyway, after she got out of the hospital. There were many important guests. A
neurosurgeon from Osaka, an engraver from Sussex. And us. It was winter. We had
a double room that looked over the Bay of Naples. On the first night there was
thunder and lightning and much rain. We spent our days sitting looking out over the
sea, watching Vesuvius come and go in the mist. When Sorcha could walk a little we
wandered in the orange grove. You had to avoid the falling oranges. He shapes his
hands into a bowl. Then it cleared and we took the bus to Amalfi and it was then that
we decided to make it our home.

Bia interrupts her father to give Isobel a plaster hippopotamus painted
silver with a pink tongue, and a miniature cactus for her room in Ravello.

When she was young Sorcha was a teacher in a small village near Dublin. But
here the schoolchildren are uncontrollable so she gave it up after a year. She likes to
say, Calme! He picks up a fork and sets it down again. She believes all Italians get
too excited at the slightest excuse.

Isobel can see that Sorcha is faded now, and tired of having her belongings
snatched from her in the streets of Naples. She can see that Bia carries the light
her mother had as a girl.

Paolo shows Isobel the portrait on the wall of Bia that Luca has painted. Her
bearing is proud. He has caught in her face the chiaroscuro of renaissance
painting that rises from ochre, charcoal, and sinopia. She sits in Lucca silk
adorned with the Chinese patterns that came to Italy along the Silk Road. Behind
her, a luminous rendering of the landscape: the ultramarine sky of crushed lapis lazuli, hyacinths on yellow silk, elegant architectural settings. In the chromatic brilliance there is the stillness of Bia, the extreme beauty of her hands.

One evening Luca sits outside beside Isobel. He unfolds a large sheet of thick paper covered in intricate drawings, and smoothes it out across the table. He pours a glass of amber wine and they eat small wild strawberries and China oranges. His hand taps her arm as he tells her of the architect who is designing the plans for his house in Ravello. Then he smiles at her and carefully peels a ribbon of orange rind that comes to rest and lies across the plate. A flush of pigeons sweeps the piazza as Isobel listens to him. In the blue of his shirt, he is like a fish caught for a moment in Murano glass, but it is the way he treats Paolo, Bia and the dog that she notices as much as the colour of skin, eyes, touch. As an idea, a presence, he was forming within her gradually, almost imperceptibly, like a wave swelling in the sea.

Luca says, I’m so glad you’ve come. I’m exhausted here. Paolo talks until there are holes in your stomach.

Luca was exotic to Isobel. He came from a family of artists. When he spoke of them in the Caffè Pompeii, she thought that the name of his brother, his family, were like the names of medieval cities on an antique map, spread out upon the table in an ordinary room. She journeyed to them, learned a few words of the language, spun the currency in her palm, and then caught the train to the next place. This time it’s Luca. He is a small walled city, with a river running along the line of the sun. She knew the journey would continue through the country that was his family, and end in the house that was his heart. He speaks to her with the tongue of music, the wash of oratorio.
You are like a woman who has survived a war, or a terrible illness: a transparent construction. I have noticed that you have a particular knowledge and a particular vulnerability. A car crash? In any case, something violent and cruel.

Isobel stands before Luca at the door to her little room. Her eyes are glazed by light. She feels poised like a swimmer above the pool.

You remind me of one of Giacometti's tall figures, he says, the ones that he finally produced after obsessively creating and destroying tiny ones during the war years. They became, very gradually, larger, sparser. I remember there is a particular unapproachable, remote woman, standing with her hands at her side with something passive, but indestructible in the rough surface.

Isobel makes him tea, moving quietly like a monk about her task, concentrating on the pot, the cups. She places the tea things before him. The cups rattle a little. The tea spills. As she sets a cake upon his plate she feels his eyes upon her like columns of the clear blue smoke of burning ambergris. He tells her about his house that he is renovating: the sanded poplar, linden wood. The fresh, fast frescoes on the southern wall. She can hear the colours sing as he speaks of miniver brushes, gesso. Once begun, he says, the house, which sits in the most beautiful garden in Ravello, is growing like a living thing with muscles, bones.

She settles, sits quietly with him at the table and turns her head to the high window of her room. Placing her hand on the wooden chair frame, the raking light falling across her fingers, she strokes the wood as though it is a piece of silk floating in the window. Her eyes must be edged with red where a winter has crept in. Her face tilts up and her fingers move to her lips as she imagines herself
standing in Luca's garden. She feels like a stream of light from head to shoulder: a
fall, a fold, a wavy line.

Now her hands lie folded in her lap, fingers curled, the silk of skin passive,
and he seems to wait for her to raise her hand, to lean forward and set it gently on
the back of his neck, between hair and collar. The touch of the bow upon the cello.

He places a small gift in her hand without a word, a silk sack as blue as
Chagall's air, like the ones in the gold cabinet in Naples that contained the remains
of nuns, each labeled with her name. Inside is a little intaglio he has carved out of
a peach-stone - a brooch. She sees that it is an eye, the centre of which has been
hollowed out and filled with minute clear stones. He pins it on her black coat.

*I need to keep an eye on you*, laughs Luca.

Luca takes Isobel to his house on via San Francesco.

Halfway down the walled lane, a lavender and orange numbered tile
announces the entrance, concealed by foliage. Through it, a frescoed loggia
receives them and behind that there is a dark, ancient building. Isobel lifts her
eyes to the new curved roof and its veil of glass floating above the stone.

*There are yolks in the mortar to make it strong*, he tells her.

Below the villa, a hanging garden falls down the side of the valley. The
garden unveils the view gradually as he leads her through the pleached alleys of
the cedrario - the orange grove - to the pond, full of koi carp. Some of the fish have
dark, rich red fins and cheeks, while others are golden yellow, floating amidst
water hyacinth. Small *beccafico* fly up as they approach the birdbath, the water
shivering and dimpling as they plunge their small bodies into the water. The air is
filled with the buzzing of their wings as they hover above the water, drying their feathers. Butterflies feed on nectar. Here, he tells her, the rosaflora camellia flowers will fall, already upturned, land like cats, and float like boats.

They pause a moment in the garden, by its gate, and he turns to her. Suddenly his telephone calls him from the garden like the voice of Istanbul in the dark, and he laughs and excuses himself. Isobel stands quite still, resting in the dreamscape of the garden floating in blue air until he returns, a minute later. He takes her inside the villa where there is more glass, a gathering of light and coloured plaster walls, bare wooden floors covered with rugs. Like a good story, it seems that nothing might be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse. Above them a small stone tower looks to Capri and Naples and at the front of the villa, over a cleft in the tufa, is a glass room with four chimney pots on the roof. He leads her to a room of egg-yolk yellow where his paintbrushes hang in a row, each a different thickness. The room is full of the watery transparency of Venetian cristallo, an engraved potash lime glass, wooden sculptures, spiral shells in bottles, lemons, photographs, cushions, jugs of flowers with petals the shape of Byzantine windows, round stones, fine pots, a bowl that lifts off the table, blue plates, dried gardenia flowers in vases of opaque white glass, a pear in a bottle.

On a ledge at the window, two doves that were sitting together like votive hands, rise into the air as they approach. Isobel leans out the window and looks down to the portico, the arch of which has the line of a long neck. From above, the carp and the flowers in the garden look like a Japanese wedding party gathering on the lawn.

Life is growing in Isobel’s breast again, like a red tulip.
Luca uses language to touch her. He says, *Come out on the Gulf of Salerno. I'll bring the boat. You bring the tea.*

That evening when he walks towards her through a door, a wave of warmth enters before him, like the swell of sea before the bow of a boat. It is as though they are walking through the laneways of Capri and suddenly glimpse, in the eyes of the other, the turquoise sea, the Faraglioni.

The wood of the boat speaks of the time of night to the gentle water sliding there as they glide, in deep dark, to the shore of sea from the shore of land, and settle in the crevice of a wave.

They wait for the moon. When it comes, in the phosphorescent sheen of its light, Isobel becomes visible to herself as she extends her hand to the white teapot and makes rose tea. She passes aromatic almond biscuits as he sips his tea. There is no other place now - just this boat on this sea. In the mirrored night there is only the sound of oars dipping into the luminous sea. The lights from Positano flash like foxes' eyes and guide them back to shore.

A week later in the house in Ravello, Luca is sitting on a stool with a wooden figure resting against his body. The bloom is still visible on the wood. Isobel sits nearby writing in her notebook. He raises his hand to his forehead and taps his fingers there. As he carves his wood, he is painting light in a burning space.

Smelling the soft perfume of camphor laurel, Isobel looks up from her book and watches him work. His ideas seem to her to grow from the wood as he whittles away until there's almost nothing remaining. The wood appears weightless against the blue plaster walls, possessing great lightness in form. He takes his pfeil fishtail
chisel and curves it into the hollow, deepening, lessening with each movement, swaying as he strokes its sharp edges away, the surfaces swelling and subsiding like flesh. The thing with wood, he tells her, is that you have to cut across the grain, not down it, otherwise it splits.

Beside the window, which at once gives a view and is a view of itself, the folds in his standing sculpture repeat the grain in the Costiera Amalfitana as it catches the late afternoon light. In the centre of the sculpture there is a space, the absence there having as much meaning as a solid presence. In its upward movement there is the camphor laurel tree from the dark forests of China and, as he works, Isobel tells him about the pieces of sandal wood dropping in the forest like rain, as men long ago, went into the hills to gather camphor in clothes made from tree bark, They took sago to eat, and gathered camphor, which formed crystals and was called plum flower camphor. They collected broken bits, which they named rice camphor.

He lifts his head and listens to her tale as, in the evening, his sculptures die with the light.

He feeds her white Italian chocolate.

One piece for every month you are in Italy, he tells her.

Isobel laughs, But there are hundreds of pieces here!

His lips carve a smile.

One evening Paolo plays Night and Day, puts the ashtray to his ear and dances across the floor. Excitedly, Bia's fingers fold back her hair. She claps her hands, takes the paws of the dancing dog, and whirls about the room. Paolo places Isobel
and Luca back to back and each sees the other reflected a thousand times in the polished mirrors of the Caffè Pompeii.

A woman in a black dress begins to dance. Another, older woman in a long green silk jacket, becomes her partner and dances with a face as still as stone, her eyes downcast.

Luca leans over to Isobel, *Her name is Rose. But she cannot pronounce her own name. It is the ‘r’ that trips her up. So when she answers her phone she says, “Guess who this is.”*

A woman called Francesca comes in and greets them. A student of Luca’s, she is sixty, very large, a little deaf, and spent many years in prison in Naples. She visits him in Ravello for her drawing lesson each week. Once she made his name out of fallen typewriter keys attached to a silver pin. He says she has artist’s hands, as deft as a blind harpist’s.

For her ink paintings, Luca has taught Francesca to use handmade paper that was hung out to dry like laundry. This gave it a fine grain so that it would absorb the ink without bleeding. He said to her, *The paper must be in love with the ink. They have to marry.*

Her old face has the same grain as her hair. She wears dirty sneakers with coloured wool for shoelaces and carries a plastic shopping bag. She sits at her usual table, exhausted for a moment, like a coat thrown absently across the back of a chair. She takes out a diet book called *Whipped Cream and Martinis* and reads it like a novel. As she smokes and drinks coffee, she draws in an exercise book in black ink, oblivious to the music, the dancing. A man who has been drinking beer through a straw, and has heard from others that she is an artist, comes up to her. He curtsies and shakes her hand, which is impatient and longs for the pen.
An oak and silk chair, blue in the evening, stands with its rectangles and squares and the polished curves of wood in between, the bars of its back leaning into the shadows of the room. The round glasses illuminate Luca’s face.

They move about in the dusk like two moths blinking their wings, drifting toward the light that each is. The air is sodden with the scent of gardenias. His heavy body is a wave upon hers, his breath the soughing and sighing of sea. Isobel falls deeper and deeper, smells the clean warm salt smell of his limbs enfolding her, feels the long line of his body displacing her in space. She murmurs, *It is only the moment we hold,* and the gardenia’s heavy cloak of perfume is loosened in the night. As she diminishes, her voice grows stronger. She finds the sweet dip into shadow of his throat. Her head presses into his arms, the curve of spine delicately cupped.

Form reflecting form.

They breathe each other out and in.

In the second before she closes her eyes, Isobel hears the song of Luca’s voice, and the slow earthquake of desire moves the past aside to let the present in.

They sleep.

In the night she wakes thinking there are voices, but they are seabirds calling in the dark. She sighs, *I dreamt I had long hair. I was dying of thirst in the desert. I drank my hair.*

His breath is upon her, breaking in the lung of the sea.

They sleep.

And Isobel is lost somewhere in the geography of his arms, folded in upon herself like a swan.
In the morning there is the soft bumping of wood upon wood in the breeze. Luca wakes alone, drawn into consciousness by the pure song of a bird. The window is imbued with light. He opens the glass, then the shutters, and looks down to see Isobel standing in the garden. A bird, carrying the light of dawn upon its breast, passes above her. He calls to her and they go to swim down in the sea, the stones like eyes beneath the green filmy water. In the lilac air above them, a curtain waves at a window and the dog tries to fly after the seagulls near the shore. As they walk bare-footed to the water the heat makes Isobel think of the hot smell rising from dry gum leaves in the bush, struck by sun. She remembers how cold the sea was always in Tarwin, no matter what the season. She remembers being at the Prom with her parents and that French teacher of whom they had all become so fond. There was some turning point that occurred for which Isobel was present but the significance of which she never understood. There was some disquiet in Madeleine that had its origins in that day, and which isolated her from everyone. Isobel recalled the French teacher's cry of pleasure as she picked up what turned out to be a little sea horse encrusted with sand. And then Madeleine rushed in a rage into the icy sea.

Now Isobel's skin gleams as she draws herself into the sun from the sea. The air receives her like a breath.

An auburn-haired woman, suddenly alarmed for some reason, cries out urgently to her child, Vittorio. Vittorio, you come away from the sea.

With the passage of time, Isobel finds herself more and more often at the house in Ravello. The neighbours, full of noise, also come with their children. They bring Luca herbs and ask for flowers from his garden. There is always music and a radio
blares if there is a soccer match on in Siena. He throws his hands in the air, hugs Isobel when they score, swears when his team loses and drops into the chair near the window. In the middle of the game he runs down the stone steps to ring a little bell to summon the koi in the pond for feeding, or to scatter pellets for the two one-eared rabbits he calls the Van Gogh Sisters. Isobel thinks that Luca is like Albert Tucker who said that he sought the golden thread in the day. There is an innate sense of loyalty about him, and generosity when she tells him about Madeleine.

_Tell Madeleine to come. I'll make her bucatini alla pineta_, and there is the incantation of the recipe.

Bia asks him for his pencils as she sits at the kitchen table. She is making a small illuminated manuscript about the life of the dog and has written the narrative in horizontal bands, the figure of the dog set against a dark strip of blue. Each page is decorated with scenes from the dog's new life, beginning with the day it appeared on the duomo steps outside the Caffè Pompeii. She has designed intricate borders out of her initials. Near her elbow is the Venus Flytrap that she gave Luca for his birthday. For weeks she had collected flies for it until he told her that it was becoming obese. Days later, while searching for his favourite pencil, he had found a little forgotten pile of dead flies in Bia's pencil case.

She tells Luca about her art teacher at school.

_Oh him, he says, I know him. He's about as interesting as a colourless koi._

_And ugly! Too ugly for fishfood._

Bia and Isobel giggle.

Luca breaks salt with a hammer. He feeds them ginger, garlic, broccoli, chicken, fruit, coconut gelato, blueberries, orange leopard marmalade. Though he loathes roses, he knows of her fondness for them and presents Isobel with a rose
bush to plant in a part of the garden he now calls the *rosario*. He gives Isobel
fragile, yellow-toned paper which smells like honey, and teaches Isobel and Bia to
play Pass the Pig.

As if she is outside herself, Isobel hears her own voice laughing like the
tongues of bells throwing out music, until it's falling, falling like leaves about her.

*One* evening Isobel walks through the translucent azaleas in Luca's garden.

Leaving the island of her day, she pulls her sleeve down over her wrist and wades
through poppies waving like seaweed on the floor of the sea. It has rained and the
wet blooms sweep her past the looking-glass carp in the pond and on to his door
with the soft, easy strokes of Amalfi blue. The door is sheltered by a tree with soft
timber and deeply divided leaves, its trunk as smooth as the face of a mirror. She
pauses a moment under the roof the lamplight gives her, and notices the scent of
cut box. She hears Bach's cello suites in the air and the anticipation of his presence
is like the knowledge of the next note.

Does she sleep or wake?

Luca is the head on the Terrazza dell'Infinito, thrown back in the silver
gelatin of night, high in the Ravello cold. She reaches for his Christo-wrap of skin
and finds tangled waves of hair, as grey as scribbly gums in the curled moon. The
shadow of his head falls upon her face as he leans over her.

*I have never lived in the house of love*, she tells Luca. *In Katoomba, I wasn't
really there. I was like a woman waiting for the last days of Pompeii.*
Some mornings, after waking in her room in Ravello, Isobel walks through the lanes, catches the bus down to Amalfi to the Caffè Pompeii, and takes the table by the window. She places a small white packet of sugar under one leg of the table to settle it. Paolo brings her tea at eight. She writes to Madeleine in the blue light.

*Come to Ravello.*

She can hear the sea, the movement of the duomo bell. In the evenings here she sometimes plays *Song to the Moon* on the piano. She finds that she no longer dreams of falling, has relaxed, and holds herself in a different way. She enters into the stream of things, discovering that the world is no longer unsafe.

Looking into the fishpond by her table she sees reflections like thoughts, ideas, words swimming in the water. Some are muted in colour, some golden and waving slowly, or occasionally darting to the surface. When there’s a ripple on the surface, one word becomes another, or one part of a word or idea is enlarged, whilst another is diminished.

The talk rises as the morning goes on. Occasionally a couple of tourists come in. Isobel realises that she no longer applies that word to herself. Luca, the blue air, the sweep of cobalt sea and sky are all working inside her with their needle and thread.

Francesca rushes into the cafe and sits beside Isobel. She prods Isobel’s bag with her foot. *Oh, I thought it was the dog you had under there.*

She screams at Paolo to bring her coffee. She removes her false teeth and sands them with a nail file. She comes here to draw while Isobel writes. Somehow Francesca knows that Isobel’s dreams are full of foreign places, a scattering of tongues, the sound of worms eating soil. Like her own.
Francesca tells Isobel that in the prison in Naples, she had drawn to the sounds of muffled crying coming from other cells, a quiet slicing of flesh. Drawing is her language of resistance.

*Why were you in prison Francesca?*

*I murdered my father. I stabbed him with a Staysharp knife.*

Luca asks, *What are you writing, Bella?* and she offers him the pages.

*It is a story called “Song to the Moon.”*  
He takes the pages and wanders away to read them, eating burnt toast. Later there is the smile that she knows from the blue light of dawn in his house. Her eyes meet his, and she lifts her head to receive his smile.

Bia reads it and scolds, *It was a silver rhinoceros I gave you, not a hippopotamus!* Then adds, *I don’t mind though, if you just change it.*

These are her first readers.

Isobel cuts Luca’s hair in the garden, and as it falls to the grass he plucks the winter hair from the dog at his feet. She is talking to him about the concert they had listened to the evening before in the Rufolo gardens, planning a trip to Naples. They will take Bia with them. She is laughing now as Luca emerges newly shorn from her scissors. She notices there is some new part of her own voice that she has never heard before. It is odd to discover such a thing about myself, she thinks. That the person that I am, the voice that I have in the presence of one particular person, is so different from the voice that I had, the person that I was.
On her birthday in July, Luca sets the round table out in the giardino segreto for pranzo while Isobel strings red Japanese lanterns across the garden, each with a candle inside for Bia to light at dusk.

The sky is the colour of blue ink; there is a deep pink rose in the garden near the table. The petals fall onto the glass that the pond makes. Through the dark hollow of a corridor of old trees is a doorway of light, a window to the path of rhododendron petals. The low branches of the tree lift in the gentle breeze, swaying like a heavy skirt crossing a street.

Isobel wears a dress that Sorcha has made for her from soft rust and mauve silk. Luca gives Isobel a brooch of dull, beaten gold, with a dash of cinnabar in the centre, and a wooden box to keep the small sculptures, the brooches he gives her.

Isobel covers the table with a white cloth and smoothes it with her hands. She sets places for Sorcha, Paolo, Bia and Francesca while Luca makes passato di patate for them. He melts yellow butter in a deep pot. He sautés the potatoes and leeks and stirs in vegetable broth, moving quickly, surely about the kitchen, his arm about Isobel as she cuts the bread. He ladles the soup into six blue bowls. He places chives and toasted bread on the swimming surface, then prepares another plate.

In Australia, what do you call this sparrow-grass?

Asparagus, she smiles as he pours vermentino di sardegna in a glass with thin walls. She shaves the straw gold scaled parmigiano which has been made from cows' milk in an enormous copper cauldron shaped like an upside-down bell. Now it lies in slivers on the plate.

After the main meal, they taste the sweet marsala, mascarpone and eggs of tiramisu as the old trees wave about them. Bia slips off into the shadows by the
Irish strawberry tree, slowly revealing today the smooth mahogany trunk beneath its jagged bark. The dog comes to lie under Luca’s chair and the talk dies down in the warmth of the afternoon. He pours them a golden liqueur he has distilled in glass vessels from teardrop cumquats. Isobel watches his hand falling again and again upon the dog’s sleeping head.

With coffee, he gives them amaretti, cats’ tongues, and Isobel thinks of the curl of the words from her pen.

Walking between them through the backstreets of Naples, past fish hanging gutted on strings in the sun, Bia takes Isobel’s hand, and Luca’s. In the Piazza Dante, Isobel buys an instant camera for her, and Bia takes a photograph of them together.

In the evening, as the sun fades over the Bay of Naples, Bia races ahead of them to look at red ballet shoes in a window. They walk through the narrow streets after her, leaning forward, their arms about each other lightly, looking in at each other’s faces as if looking into a lighted window or a doorway.

In a cafe in the Piazza Bellini, they drink coffee and eat balls of hard bread. A boy walks on the glass roof above them to retrieve a soccer ball. They watch a man across the street go into a shop with a tulip in his hand. He emerges a second or two later with a bottle in a paper bag. Isobel thinks that she will bring Madeleine to such places when she comes. She draws out a piece of Japanese mulberry paper and an envelope she has bought. On the front she writes Madeleine’s address in Paris. On the piece of paper that she slips inside, she writes: 2 via San Francesco, Ravello.
As they sit there, Bia shows Isobel the photograph. She and Luca are standing in the doorway of a rosy building. Luca is laughing at her. And Isobel is standing beside him, as though gathering her body to joyfully launch herself into the air like a bird ready to launch itself above the curving coast of the bay. It is an image of herself that Isobel has never seen before. She looks at the photo as if it were of a stranger.

After Isobel posts her letter they drive home from Naples, past Vesuvius looming in the dark. The moon hangs in the rear window and Isobel sees Luca's cheekbones in the headlights. Bia sleeps, humped like a bony bird between the dark shapes of Isobel and Luca, lashes like dark feathers on her face, fingers in the curl of sleep.

_The dog can't come_, Bia had said when they planned the trip.

_It has flews._

Isobel thinks of the Black Death. Of fleeing.

_Flews._

On the car radio they hear _Staircase to the Stars_, and drive on home in the night to where the little dog is tapping her nails.

_Waiting._

_In his garden, leaves swim like carp at the bottom of the pond, or drop like tiny hands upon his step._

_It is the end-of-summer soup that I am cooking today_, he says as he heats olive oil in a deep pot and chops onions, celery, and the last of the season's tomatoes. He pours cups and cups of boiling water over the vegetables and stirs in rosemary, and salt. Isobel carries the two blue bowls to the kitchen and slices the
olive bread. She places a piece of bread in each bowl while Luca beats the eggs and then pours them over the bread. He ladles the soup over the bread and grinds pepper. With it they eat potatoes like warm eggs.

At the end of this russet day, he will spend the evening carving a new piece of wood, releasing the fragrance of camphor laurel into the air. Isobel will write the end of her story. In the soft dusk he will walk about the wood on the floor, and dream of the raw silk of her forehead, and the wild silk of her brow.
Madeleine
A Foreign Country

I remember that my father was fond of quoting The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there. And it was to both the past and my father that my thoughts immediately turned in that first moment of shock.

I caught sight of the photographs in a copy of Le Monde that had been discarded on the table in Le Fumoir, the café where I was drinking my coffee and gazing at the Louvre and the gardens of L'Église St-Germain through the great windows. There was something about the shape of the background in the first photograph that caught my eye, that spoke to me of the vestiges of the past. I flattened the newspaper on the table and examined the photographs more closely, my heart beating quickly, careful not to betray my agitation to those around me.

So, it's finally happened I thought. The reckoning of time. For both of us perhaps. Why else would there be Isobel's face in the picture? They could have cropped her out. It seemed the game was up. After all these years of waiting for it. If it weren't for Xavier I could almost be relieved. There must surely be something akin to relief in being found out after such a long time?
In the photograph I am embalmed in the moment by the camera. I am at Isobel’s wedding to Philippe. We are standing in the house at Tarwin in front of Mr Garbini’s painting of the carubba tree. There is a dark smudge at the edge of the photograph and I remember my mother suddenly removing herself from it at the last minute, my father’s disappointment, and her careful insistence. She didn’t wait to see Isobel and me hold ourselves to the camera, motionless for a moment, then dissolve into a movement towards our father, standing on the other side of the room, lowering the camera. At that time he was still intent on documenting our lives and took photographs often, and moving pictures too. So in the photograph in Le Monde I am looking directly at him, and now across the years I have become the object of my own gaze. The photograph reveals something of the structure of our fate, unknown to Isobel at the time – as clear to me as the way bones are formed and hold themselves as a frame for a face.

As children Isobel and I looked the same, and in the six months or so before I overtook her in height, people mistook us for twins. We each knew what the other was thinking without asking, and still do. I had never existed without her. We would sit together cross-legged, our backs against the wall, reading and eating honey from a jar on the floor, or watch fireballs roll across the paddock, sharing these things, like the times we spent with our father, the animals we kept. But she was much quieter than I, and had none of the affectations that I developed at that time. I admired everything about Isobel. Sometimes I believed that our thoughts were so much alike that we were one person. I could be speaking and become aware that I had Isobel’s voice and think, that’s what Isobel would say, that’s the rise and fall of her voice, the exact tone of her expressions. I wanted to be her so
much and set about copying her handwriting carefully and making it my own style even though it sloped backwards because she was left-handed.

As an adult I carried the thought that she blamed me. She left school and worked in an office in the city. Then she met Philippe and went to live in the Blue Mountains. At her wedding, our eyes met and we laughed at the irony of that: she married the Frenchman who was the brilliant young writer, and I, who was obsessed with all things French, and French words in particular, I was left behind in our Australian paddock with its vocabulary of rural forms and shapes. On the day of her wedding, after the photograph had been taken, I stood beside Isobel watching Philippe talking to the guests, and said,

_They say we do that._

_Do what?_

_Marry our fathers._

Far beyond us, out of the range of the photograph, are the grey granite cliffs of the Prom, the quartz, pink and white feldspar and black mica sparkling out over Bass Strait that separates South Gippsland from Tasmania. Across the sky, slashes of dark cloud would appear. Further west, along the coast, was Cape Liptrap and upon the dark sea, the white lighthouse that flashed three times every fifteen seconds to warn ships of the treachery that lay below the surface of the sea there. Some nights, across the paddocks, I could hear the surf screaming in Venus Bay.

Our place was called Tarwin, an aboriginal word meaning _thirsty_. It lay three miles inland; three thousand acres of lush green pastures sprang from the rich peat soil; a river on two sides seeking the sea, and a man-made channel with
silver eels in it running around the rest of the land, draining the swamp and leaving rich grazing land flush with strawberry clover for cattle.

The house had been built in the middle of this infinite, silent landscape, on the one slight rise in the land for miles around. It was arrived at by travelling along a clay road and passing through our gate and over an old rattling white bridge, and was protected from the west by old oak trees, graceful in shape and proportion. My mother grew white irises in the black dirt. She told me that in ancient times the iris was believed to have meant: I have a message for you.

Inside the house were the perfumes of wood and roses, the aroma of cakes and biscuits lingering in the warmth in winter. Every week the smell of polish was pervasive. There was a fireplace in every room, huge double-hung windows and double-beaded walls. Outside the windows were swathes of deep green. The stone at the hearth in the kitchen was sunken and worn smooth with a century of kneeling at the stove to fill it with wood from the old box which had Confiserie Surfine printed on the hinged lid. A jig-saw puzzle would sit on a low table in the kitchen near the stove for weeks on end, waiting for its last pieces to be matched up and clicked into place.

On the wall of the dining room, catching a little light from a casement window, hung a portrait of my family, painted by Mr. Garbini, an Italian migrant who share-farmed a neighbouring property. My father gave Mr. Garbini a photograph taken of the four of us together outside the church in Fish Creek and he set to work immediately in a shed behind his farmhouse. I sometimes sat with him there while he painted. I watched him take a loaf of gesso and use his thick fingers and his palms to smooth it out over the canvas. He kept liquid colours in jars that he called vaselli and stored them in a little chest. On top of the chest was a
long box with a seal that contained leather sacks of ultramarine blue sent from Italy by a merchant who sold only blue. He said that the more you ground the colours, the more perfect the tint became. His charcoal was made from slowly roasting twigs he collected from the paddocks. They became slender coals for drawing the first sketch. He wouldn’t allow me to watch him complete the painting and it wasn’t until he hung it on our wall that I could see why.

The figure of my father seemed to provide the support for the rest of us. His features were ascetic, his face hollow and intense. Mr. Garbini had caught my mother’s melancholy in strong, sculptural contours. He had given Isobel and I hands and features that carried some grace but did not dispute the fact that we had not been blessed with the beauty of our parents. Our clothes were depicted in a soft, deeply folded drapery style, in colours that were pure and clear in their intensity. In all our figures, a clarity of pose, expression, gesture.

The colour scheme of the interior of the house was restrained, muted, giving prominence to the four figures in the foreground in a calm dusk, with the light from one side and behind. A vase of bright fleshy flowers stood on a table. The odd aspect to the portrait was the background. Through a wide window and an opening curtain, was a clear, faraway landscape of azurite sky, sea, and a coastline remarkable for its fluency of line. He had positioned our figures and rendered our characters against this precisely observed, foreign landscape.

This is certainly an improvement Garbini, my father laughed, indicating the brightly lit background, the odd shaped tree.

That is the carubba tree of Ravello, said Mr. Garbini. When you have been everywhere else, you go to Ravello.
When I was born, four years after Isobel, it was our father who named me, as he had named Isobel before me. Perhaps my mother was still grieving for our older sister, Christina, who was born odd. She was lost to scarlet fever when she was four. We knew the stories of how she was very beautiful with golden curls and long eyelashes. She would embrace our mother, arcing her fingers like the moon, then suddenly beat her skull against our mother’s nose so that it bled. She lived on peanut butter, slept for hours in our mother’s arms or arranged fruit pastilles in patterns on the floor. She stood, rocking on top of the black Lipp piano. She dived fully clothed into the white bath and breast-stroked to the other end. Outside, in the paddocks, her eyes were caught only by the light in the waving trees and running water. When she disappeared once, she was found curled up in the dog kennel. Sometimes in the night I would wake suddenly thinking I’d heard the wail of a child, caught in a white room, but it was simply the admonishing cry of a bird.

I grieve now for my dead mother, in her awkward beauty, her dark hair, her skin like a petal to touch. She was a warm presence in our daily lives. Mute with sadness, she often held me close as though I were precious. Sometimes she gathered Isobel and me to her and held us both, each one against a cheek, and I smelled damp powder and lipstick. One parent survives the death of a child. One doesn’t. My mother’s face was so often glazed with loss. But not just Christina. Later there was something else. Some other grievance. And when the darkness of it descended upon her, as it often did, she withdrew into silence, a silence swollen with what I now recognise as a rage that was present but never given expression in words. I have had time to think upon it, and now see that there was something in our mother’s life that would replicate itself in the lives of her daughters, and without
our knowing, it became the destiny of Isobel and I to give our mother's suffering the articulation of action.

When death came for Christina, my mother called for poetry as another might a priest. She stopped playing the piano when Christina died. My father said that she had been so brilliant as a young woman that she could have made a fine career out of being a concert pianist. She taught Isobel and me to play but I lacked interest so she concentrated on Isobel who became passionate about the piano. When she reached a certain stage our mother took Isobel each Thursday afternoon to a neighbour who taught advanced piano. She thought it better that Isobel learn from someone other than herself. Isobel said she had only a vague memory of our mother playing, plucking a sudden sadness from the music, her eyes closed, or if they were open, fixed on a point far out the window.

When Isobel screamed to her that I had fallen from the Appaloosa behind the house, she found me hurt in the grass where I had been thrown. Dearest, she murmured and lacing my arms about her neck, she stood me straight again.

I wonder if there is a particular moment when one becomes a bitter person. Or is it a slow accommodation to grief? Each day our mother enacted some private meaning, completely unknown to me at first.

Our mother started to tell me once, Isobel said in Venice as we were walking along the Grand Canal, before we left Tarwin, when she was hurt and crying about something else. But I didn't want to know, so I stopped her somehow, changed the subject, turned her away. She never tried to talk about it after that. Neither did I.

I said, I thought you knew.

Knew what? I knew there was something about that French teacher, but not really what it was.
And I almost told her then. I nearly sat her down and told her, but didn't of course, because at that time it was as though she were recovering from a terrible illness. I decided then though that I would tell her. Later.

"Photograph of the wanted woman, believed to be living in Paris." These words printed in Le Monde, and then my name.

My name.

My father had grown up with his father's stories of the war on the Somme. There was a photograph of him on the wall in the kitchen entering Paris on horseback. He was billeted with a family in the Place de la Madeleine. My father's favourite book was Remembrance of Things Past.

So I was Madeleine.

My father. My father was a tall, handsome man, with a loose ranginess about him. In the photograph I have of him in my apartment, he is standing by his motorbike, one hand on his hip, and his kelpie is leaning against his leg. His eyes are directly addressing the camera. When I look at him I hear the heavy movement of cattle on the peat, the smell of dogs, men, oilskins, grass; the shifting pitch and timbre of the sounds of the land, building to a crystalline stillness. I see the wind, the bleak sun, and the glutinous white rolls of cloud.

He smoked a pipe and when I first learned to walk I would follow the line, the trail of smoke, collecting his discarded matches. Here's another one, I would shout, gleefully locating a sign of him. Feather, just a pup then, wagged her tail so furiously that the whole of her haunches moved sideways. I smelled the tobacco on his sports coat, and in the tins and the neat, coloured pouches the tobacco came in.
I studied the way he tamped it down into the bowl, the way his lips moved around the stem of the pipe.

Some evenings he read his Proust to us by the fire and these fragments were to remain always with Isobel and I, and become our siren voices, calling us to longed for places.

*And when I thought of Florence it was of a town miraculously scented and flower-like, since it was called the City of Lilies, and its cathedral, Our Lady of the Flowers...*

He taught Isobel and I to swim in the brown river. We could feel the ebb and flow of him as he swam beside us in the water. He took his camera to the river and filmed us. I can remember seeing myself on film as a slight brown figure with long light hair, poised on the riverbank, then Isobel’s arms flashing in and out of the water.

In the evenings my mother read to me from *The Red Balloon*. I knew all the words, but I wanted to hear her voice and see her fingers brush along the line of words, and across the black and white streets as they traced Pascal’s journey through Paris. Another evening she described the way the light lived in the land. You have the honeythirst, she told me. What is the honeythirst, I asked her settling deeper under the blankets. She told me it it was what her cousin John Shaw Nielson wrote of.

John Shaw Nielson was a poet. When my mother was a very young woman and it was time for her to leave home and go to school, she boarded with the poet’s family. He was old and blind then, struggling with the loss of vision and lack of work when he told the child my mother was that he had seen a print of Botticelli’s
Primavera. There was also something which I tried to drag in, some enchantment or other. I cannot well describe it.

My mother said that Venus stood in the centre of a grove of moving orange trees. She recited:

*Listen! the young girl said. There calls
No voice, no music beats on me;
But it is almost sound: it falls
This evening on the Orange Tree.*

And she closed the blankets around my shoulders and I felt the fleeting brush of her skin upon my cheek. I breathed the scent of gardenias and it remained for a second around me as she walked to the door and turned out the light.

Sometimes my father woke Isobel and me as the light first showed through the trees and we dressed hastily in corduroy trousers, woollen jumpers and riding boots. We caught the Appaloosa and rode across the land together with him before we were properly awake and I leaned my head on Isobel's shoulder and circled my arms about her waist, still at some point in my dream that I was reluctant to leave. He showed us where the maidenhair grew in certain places. The country had been cleared for grazing but there were swathes of wilderness here and there. On our Appaloosa, we rode with him to the far corners of the property to find this special fern. Together we saw rosellas, robber birds, brilliant blue wrens, flocks of lorikeets; flurries of birds that burst upon us like a cloud or fell in a flock, like leaves from a tree. The cattle were often caught too early to be difficult and we guided their sleek backs until they were ambling in a group in front of Feather and the kelpies, along the channel on the slow journey to the yards where they were to
be drenched or tagged. Their soft protests rose in the moist air, and they paused anxiously for calves to catch up and rub at their sides again. If a calf lingered the whites of the cows' eyes rolled back in shiny black faces. I smelled the close odour of cattle and churned grass, and fell into the comfortable rhythm of the rolling walk of the cows, dignified in their movement balanced between resistance and aquiescence.

Along one part of the river there was a stretch of ti-tree where wild cattle lived, sharpening their curling horns on each other and leading their own lives. Towards the west was a wilderness of another sort with no evidence of human direction, all impenetrable vines and tall trees with just a little light stippling the treetops. Deer and foxes lived there, and lyrebirds scratched in the dirt, their tail feathers shivering, falling down over them like a curtain, an end to something.

At midday we stopped in a scrubby clearing and my father squatted down to build a fire. He settled the billy on a nest of sticks and Isobel threw in some black tea from our saddlebags once the water had boiled. I let it float on the surface a second before tapping the side of the billy. My father used a stick to lever the billy from the fire and, touching it quickly, shifted the blackened lid a little to pour the tea into the tin cups we held out. We added sugar from a tin and knelt, drinking up the sweet black tea while the fire died away. As we drank, my father told us about the shipwrecks on the coast, and some of the local history like the great flood of November 1934 when the Fitzgerald sisters awoke in our old house to find spiders covering the counterpanes on their beds. Swamp snakes, quail and ducks sought refuge inside. That year the water didn't stop until it was half way up the windows.

He told us that the house was built of clay bricks from the river by Chinese from the goldfields: Tarwin rose out of the swamp as the massive channels were
built, and rich black soil was revealed when the blackwood, gum and musk trees were cleared. Before long mushroom pink strawberry clover buds grew where there were once only marshes, and the cattle were made fat, slow and sleepy from chewing it. From time to time the sky would become flat lead grey, then the colour of aubergine, and floods isolated the house and drowned the stock.

My father lit his pipe and through teeth clamped on the stem, he told us that Margaret Fitzgerald had lived with her sister Jeannie on Tarwin when it was a mansion. I could easily imagine the horse with the sulky stamping at the front door. In May 1952 she disappeared in an icy gale that came in from Anderson’s Inlet. Despite wide and frequent searches, she had never been found. Our neighbours all said she had been murdered by a nephew, hungry for land. He lived on a neighbouring place called Madman’s Territory. The name came from the family who used to live there and drank the leech-infested dam water that had been sullied with the mercury used to separate ore and gold. The mercury sent them mad and it was said that at night you could hear laughing leeches skimming across the water.

We dashed the dregs of our tea on the remaining embers and climbed up onto the smooth back of the bony Appaloosa to continue our work.

Isobel and I took on the task of finding the lady of the swamp. We hunted for her bones with the persistence that others used for their search for the thylacine across Bass Strait. We had great familiarity with bones because they lay about in paddocks quite innocently, blanching in summer. They were the glass-edged skulls, the bones of animals which had perished somehow, and been eaten by foxes. There were craniums, jawbones, snouts and eye-sockets. Their beauty lay in their detachment from flesh: bones held little fear for us.
We came to know the sound of the cattle truck rumbling up our long road before dawn, rocking across the old white bridge over the channel near the house. And we were there, waiting with our father in his oilskins and his felt hat with the ducks' feathers tucked in the brim. On his leggy piebald horse he mustered the slow aberdeen angus for the markets in the city, prodded their shiny black backs. He called to the kelpies in the strangely encoded language of dogs, *Get away back*, and they crouched, surged forward, and paused, all to the rhythm of his voice, the tone of his command. They accompanied him everywhere as he tore out thistles from his well-tended paddocks, sewed a summer crop of green peas, drenched heifers, and dragged calves with chains from the wombs of cows.

Once, as Isobel and I were walking along our road we were passed by a truck groaning with cattle. A breeze started up from the south and in sudden gusts of scent I smelled the mixture of black cattle, fear and diesel, and for the first time thought of that French word, *abattoir*.

When Sister Paulinus led the new teacher into our classroom we became perfectly still and silent.

Mademoiselle Fleury was French. She did not smile at first. Perhaps she was afraid. We could tell she had not been in Australia very long. No-one seemed to know how she had come to be teaching French in a small town in South Gippsland in Victoria. There was something so completely foreign about her that it was compelling. People stopped and stared after her in the street. She was extremely beautiful but it wasn’t just that. It was everything about her; her clothes, the way she wore the fabric as a skin, the way she moved.

Sister Paulinus entered the classroom and we all stood up.
Girls, this is Mademoiselle Fleury. She will be taking you for French, and the scholarship girls for private tuition.

Ariane smiled at us.

We are very lucky to have a native speaker, girls.

She looked away for a moment then, embarrassed.

I discovered that I had an ear for French and picked it up quickly. On Sunday evenings I polished my black school shoes, and rubbed a cloth over the smooth brown skin of my school case that smelled of books and ink. Stacking my books and pens inside, I set it at the foot of my bed with the shoes resting on top. It was like the Mass, but an intensely private ritual somehow, celebrating words and beauty. For me it was as though Ariane has travelled all the way from Paris, bringing with her presents of language, literature and art with the sole purpose of changing my life forever.

Once I stood before my parents in the lounge room fully dressed in my convent school uniform: the burgundy tunic, blue shirt, black stockings. I was ready for school. It was midnight and my mother looked up from her cup of tea. In my sleep, I had risen from my bed, dressed and taken up my schoolcase.

Woken, I saw the expression on their faces and realised the transparency of my ardor.

Ariane lived, boarded in the yellow house with Mrs Teasdale, a severe woman who had a reputation as a careful seamstress. She had two rooms and her meals provided. Each day she walked to the convent school on the other side of the town and I sometimes saw her from the bus, walking in a leisurely way through the town to the school, as if she had all the time in the world.
In the distance, beyond her pliant, soft silhouette, a lilac hill rose above the green. The flatness of the area around this hill gave it the demeanour of a mountain. It was just as I imagined Mont-St-Michel to be, and every day, at this point in the journey, I lifted my head from my French books and studied the hill noting any subtle changes in the light, the tones. Sometimes it was a deep aubergine, while on other days it was mottled lavender.

As the bus swung into the town and the yellow house came into sight, I felt a tightening in my throat and was certain that one day I would go to France and visit such places.

The convent school was set right back off the street in the heart of Tidal River behind a hedge of photinias that were glazed with red in spring. It was built from sandstone, and next to it stood the church. There were netball courts and green ovals flanked by the Bald Hills far off in the distance. Above the entrance was the school's motto: *Faber quisque fortunae*, and underneath, in smaller print, the translation: *Each is the architect of his own destiny.*

Isobel and I lived further away than any of the others, so we got on the bus first and I sat in the middle on the left hand side, beside the window next to Isobel. As the others arrived I looked up from my book, but not always. We had taken care to leave the back seat for the boys who liked to sit there and swear and smoke. They would have beaten us if we had taken their seats. Because of our books. Because we went to the convent school.

Youse are all up yerseives, they would say.

From time to time they would beat someone and the bus driver yelled at them in impotent rage.
I sat by the window throughout the journey, with my books upon my lap. I studied French. One of my books contained a map of the Métro, and it was this that I studied most closely, like a monk at a manuscript, as though it was an abstract painting that I was compelled to learn by heart: a poetic map. I memorised each line, the numbers and the corresponding colours that were spun like a web across the Seine, mapping my future.

As the school bus made each stop along the dairy farms, one of the younger children ran to the road-mail-box and placed inside a loaf of bread or a newspaper. And I whispered the names of each of the stops on my favourite line: number four, the pink one that ran from Porte de Clignancourt through Simplon, Marcadet Poissoniers, Château Rouge, Barbès Rochechouart to the Gare du Nord, then Gare de l'Est, Château d'Eau, and Strasbourg St-Denis. It twisted from St-Sulpice around to Montparnasse Bienvenue to Vavin, Alésia and ended at Porte d'Orléons. Each little round stop on the line was like a word in a prayer that I chanted to myself on my journey.

My obsession with books was enough reason for the boys on the bus to beat me. But there was one of their group, a boy who smoked Benson and Hedges, who stood up for Isobel and I once in a cool, dismissive way and they didn't bother with us after that.

That was my first lesson in the importance of appearances. He was different from the others. He got on the bus when it is already half way through its journey, and was crowded with bodies and school cases, cloudy with cigarette smoke. He was always dressed in full blue uniform which he wore in a way that made you think that he wasn't bothered with his appearance. Yet I studied him closely and
noticed that every inch of him was groomed. He was very fine looking, his teeth white, his nails trimmed, his sun-bleached hair curling at the ends on his collar.

When he got on the bus the others automatically moved aside, made way for him to find his way down to the back seat. The back-seat boys greeted him enthusiastically and offered him a seat, a light. But he always refused them and slowly pulled out a silver cigarette lighter from his pocket, then the golden packet of Benson and Hedges.

When he smoked it was as if he was enjoying the taste, concentrating on the smoke streaming through his lungs. He took his time and didn’t speak to anyone. He never sat down but stood with one foot wedged against the bottom of a seat so that he didn’t fall like the others, when the bus swung around a corner; the movement of the bus didn’t affect him at all.

_Leave them alone_, he said, indicating Isobel and I, not even bothering to look at them. And they did.

I didn’t know his name, or anything about his family, or the farm where he lived. I didn’t ask anyone or ever speak to him and knew only that there was something about him that cooled the ire of the back-seat boys, and that somehow Isobel and I lived under the protection of his beauty.
By The Time You Read This ...

It's time to go.

With a start my eyes open in the darkness. I know that it’s too early, but cannot wait any longer. I wake in my single bed, which, years ago, I moved over to the French doors so that I could see out at night, and be woken by the moving morning light in spring and summer when the trees have hair. I have hardly slept. On my bedside table is a dictionary, placed there ready for the many nuits blanches, or in case I was woken suddenly by a nightmare. Reading dictionaries calms me. There is also the copy of Le Monde that I found yesterday.

Rising quickly, I walk into my sitting room and turn on the light which cannot be seen from the street. It reveals a small room furnished only with a red sofa and the credenza. On the credenza rests a purple teapot with a painted wide-eyed face, and a pair of dark Chinese silk slippers - a gift from Isobel when she was in Hong Kong with Philippe at the university. There is also Xavier’s postcard from his most recent trip to Australia.
There is wrestling in the middle of the day in this pub I am staying in. I love those two strange guys, especially Butterbean. He is so mean; everyone is cheering the other guy. But I'm cheering Butterbean.

Fumbling a little in my haste, I take up the postcard and photographs and look around for anything else I need to pack. Outside the window the Marais still sleeps silently in darkness. I moved here before it became fashionable and filled with little boutiques of designer clothes like the one just down the rue de Sévigné with a python living in a glass box set in the floor. When I first saw my apartment, I knew immediately that I would live here. The iron gate was decorated with chimera and foliage, the staircase of dressed stone with winding volute steps, rose in a perfect spiral. The white landing tiles were interspersed with seventeenth century black cabochons. It was as though I already knew that the apartment was to become a part of my personal landscape.

From here there was the whole of Paris to choose from in the evenings after work. First a swim, then dinner and coffee before returning home to work on a new translation with the precision and the care for which I became well-known. Sometimes I sewed my sampler. Armand thinks that I make dolls, and he gives my cuttings from his salon. I sew strands of hair, arrange them into forms that suggest letters curling like the script of an ancient manuscript; composing poetry of hair. It amuses me.

Because I was a teacher, an assistant, I was given a carte de séjour when I first arrived in Paris. After a year, and then standing in a queue in an office for hours, I was granted a carte de résidence, valid for ten years, and then another.

I am deeply aware of the pleasures of living alone and savor them each day, guard them rigorously. Not one of my colleagues has ever been inside my
apartment. This was one of the reasons I hesitated to visit Xavier's apartment that first time. For I knew that a return invitation would be usual.

I scoop up the small gifts that Xavier has given me from the drawer in the credenza where I work on my translations for Éditions du Bois.

After the car crash in which both my parents were killed and I had returned from the funeral in Australia, Isobel had the credenza sent out to me because she knew how much I loved it. Our mother had died of grief long before the car accident ended her life. She'd really stopped living a long time before her death became official. And since I had left Australia I had had very little contact with my father.

Towards the end of the long flight to the funeral, I was sitting at the front of the plane in the silence, wondering how I would feel seeing him again. Most of the other passengers were asleep. A young man slid into the empty place beside me.

Are you awake?

He explained that he felt a great need to talk to someone, anyone, but everyone seemed to be asleep. He had spent all of the previous night, his last in Paris, sleeping on the grave of Jim Morrison in Père Lachaise cemetery.

I smiled at him. He reminded me of one of my students.

It was the most fantastic night of my life. Listen.

He handed me a pair of earphones, and I heard the sound of rain the colour of smooth slate, breaking over me, then the soft sound of someone riding through the wet. Long after he had returned, satisfied, to his seat, I could hear the storm and the music, the beating rain, as I rode on the air through the night, towards Australia.
Some time after I had related this incident to Xavier, we were driving through snow after lunch in the Compiègne forest and he surprised me with the long version of *Riders on the Storm* on his sound system, which was actually more powerful than his car.

*Riders on the storm, riders on the storm,*

*There's a killer on the run....*

As the music boomed around me I had to ask him to stop because I was ill. He thought I had drunk too much champagne and he was driving too fast, and it became a joke after that.

*No champagne for Madeleine. It goes straight to her stomach.*

*Inside my apartment I quietly close and lock the window that looks out onto the small garden in the square courtyard facing north where I grow flowers around the old, cracked paving under the trees. In the spring I catch up the stray strands of the Japanese box and trim them with scissors.*

The telephone lies silent. A few months ago it rang in the middle of the night and I knew it would be Isobel because it was daylight in Australia. We were like two prisoners tapping between cells, and her whispers echoed from Katoomba. I recalled Ariane reading aloud in French the Jacques Prévert poem, *Déjeuner du Matin,* and the simplicity of the language making more poignant and cruel the lover's departure.

*The abandonment, said Isobel. That is the worst thing.*

The French word, *abandoné,* is a beautiful word when uttered: sensual and full of slow desire. But when Isobel said it, when she uttered it, I felt the cold space where she sat in her wooden house in Katoomba, alone, with just her voice
connected to me by invisible waves. I knew then that Isobel would break her silence. She would do it. I could feel it coming. There was nothing else for her to do. Then she stopped ringing and when I rang her, there was a mechanical voice that said the ‘phone had been disconnected. Had she left Katoomba?

It wasn’t until I met up with her in Florence that I found out what she had done.

_Are you afraid, there alone?_ I had asked her.

_No. Not afraid of anything except my thoughts._

_I will come, then._

_No. Perhaps I’ll come to you._

Now a letter has arrived with just a bare fragment of information.

Just enough for me to go on.

_Fear is looting my memory as I collect the things already set out, and put them in the small suitcase I draw from under the bed. Placing the photographs on the top, I snap the latch shut and leave, softly closing and locking the door behind me. A line of light appears under the concierge’s door. The concierge is the same woman who showed me the apartment twenty years ago. Short and square, she always wears exactly the same sort of clothes: a black skirt that comes to just below her knees, a black polo skivvie, black stockings and boots. In winter she adds a cardigan. She keeps candles in a hanging box on the wall in case of electrical emergencies, and is extremely diligent about her duties, sometimes sleeping in the hallway._

_She is awake, but safely inside her apartment. I look up and down the street before slipping unseen out into the rue de Sévigné, leaving the apartment where_
have lived for all those years with the sights, smells and sounds of Paris as my
salves and poultices.

I turn left and walk to the corner opposite the Musée Carnavalet where
Madame Sévigné lived, and from where she wrote those letters on the Chinese-
lacquered drop-leaf writing desk. My passage through these streets, the caryatids,
entablatures, mascarons, medallions and cartouches on the facades of the houses,
is the only farewell I can allow myself. In the autumn dark, I turn left again and
walk along rue de Francs – Bourgeois, passing a window full of dismembered
manikins, to the Place des Vosges.

There is a grey wind this morning. Sometimes in summer here, there is a
warm wind and the lights are brighter at such times. Because it is so early and
dark it is as if I am walking in my sleep, in a dream. It is as though what I do in the
dark is forgotten somehow.

Suddenly a tree appears before me, exposing the paleness of its skin in the
dark morning, like the white of an eye. I am shocked by its naked form revealing
itself in the dark, and my breath quickens for a moment, until I realise that it is
simply a tree.

At number six, rue du-Pas-de-la-Mule, just out of the Place des Vosges, is the
boucherie which sells musical instruments now, not meat. There in the doorway is
the metal gutter that was used to drain away the fleshy debris of the day. One day
the butcher began hanging violins and saxophones next to his side of lamb and
before long the cold storage room became a library of books on music, and the
slaughter rooms were workshops for restoring instruments such as a silver etched
guitar, a porcelain trumpet.
I enter the Place des Vosges where my feet crunch loudly on the white sand. There are two triangular conifers at each entrance to the Place, and a grille around the grass. Setting down my suitcase, I sit on a green wooden bench waiting for something but don't know what it is until flushes of rose appear in the morning sky: when the sun rises I know I have been waiting for the light. Perhaps it is also the symmetry of this Italian garden I have waited for. The Place des Vosges repeats itself, but looking deeper and deeper into the pattern of things, I notice that each of the corners has its fountain, the black lamppost curling down from the top where the lamp hangs; even the grates for the drains are evenly placed. In summer here the window boxes are full of flowers and in the evenings there is a chamber orchestra or an acapella choir. Through the archway is the garden behind the Hôtel de Sully, surrounded by high walls covered in ivy. Along the walls are box hedges, viburnum, lilac and abelia, and stone carvings representing the elements and the seasons. There is little in Paris that is unmanicured.

So early in the morning there is no one else here save the sleeping birds in the tangle of the linden trees, pruned into stubby arc shapes. Fragments of the facades of buildings begin to appear through the lattice of bare branches. I have studied the round oeil-de-boeuf, bull's eye windows, and noticed that each of the mansard roofs is slightly different. From my reading about Madame de Sévigné all those years ago, I know that she lived there also, behind the façade made to look like dusky red brick. There is the scent of the smoke of burning leaves.

*I am concerned only with that sensitive joy of seeing you, of having you as my guest,* my father had said to Ariane on the night of their first meeting, surprising her, as he well knew he would, with his knowledge of Madame de Sévigné’s letters. My mother averted her eyes from a truth that perhaps she already knew.
Something moves behind me. Quickly I turn around to see a man approaching. After a moment he whistles and a dog appears and scampers towards him. Watching everything, I rise and make my way through the Hôtel de Sully out into the tiny rue de Birague then left along rue Antoine up to the Bastille.

Paris is a temple to my habits. The familiar architecture has become the backdrop of my days. I am not a fool. I know that such symmetry, routine and order leaves me vulnerable to detection, but by ordering and structuring my life in this way, and rigidly adhering to habits, I avoid the trap of memory. I walk often, usually along the quai des Célestins. Sometimes I go to the bibliothèque a few streets away to work on a new translation for the publishers, Éditions du Bois, who along with the lycée, have employed me for twenty years.

In the reading room, surrounded by words in books, journals, manuscripts and cuttings, my muscles become relaxed, smooth and loose. Sometimes it’s so peaceful in the reading room that I sleep in my chair and wake up to find myself staring at the painted ceiling above.

There are some evenings when my work gives me great pleasure. It is a soothing drink from the cool pool of poetry, and I wonder if a poem can be like a breath to the blue lips of the drowning.

At work, I am like an archeologist, kneeling in the sand, sifting through my dictionaries for minuscule traces of meaning, tiny precious shards of bones. Taking precise notes, I stop frequently and examine my work slowly, meticulously, alert for signs of a nuance here, an emphatic pause there. I am also like a painter, calculating the fall of light, describing volume and space through the relationships of hue. Each translation of a poem is like a picture, a combination of feather and
wing of the palest, pastel green. Some words make an alcove at the top of a flight of
stairs.

I have been translating an anthology of poems by John Shaw Nielson whose
words are like lamps in the darkness. They have made me uncomfortable, and
there is relief in its completion. There is also a poem by an American called Angela
Jackson whose poem, The Silk Sisters I have translated and learned by heart. I will
give it to Isobel:

One mother emptied us from her body like teardrops
She laid us on a sheet of silk
And spread warm semen over us.
Till the ones who would live chose living.
She rolled us together in a sac
And carried us on her back
Or hung us from a cave roof
In an elegant bell.

We breathed each other’s silence
For a good time.

Each breath an echo bent back
And sent out again.

Each body a sister planet
In a cozy swaying galaxy.

Wandering far
We have never been lost.

There is no betrayal of the original bell.

We have never been lost.
I pause at the post office and think of Isobel and me, both wandering far. I press some stamps illustrated with Picasso paintings onto a brown paper package. I push the completed manuscripts in the envelope addressed to Éditions du Bois, through the slot and hear it fall heavily inside.

The Hôtel Salé is not far from my apartment. On my first visit there I came face to face with the Madeleine that Picasso drew in pastel and gouache on cardboard in Paris in 1904. When I first came to Paris, still so young, I must have looked like this: the pink cheeks, the brown smudge of the eyes looking low, the hair tied in a knot at the nape of my neck, the nose a little raw from the approaching winter.

When I moved into my apartment in the Marais, I was aware of the irony: I had returned to the swamp. I added this to my library of ironies, the most recent of which being the discovery that in the eighteenth century, Mont Saint-Michel had been a prison.

I can smell freshly baked pastry as I slip into a warm, bright pâtisserie on the Boulevard Beaumarchais. A woman draws large trays from the oven. The cakes are put into little paper shells and placed in the glass counter.

Un café, Madame? she calls as I take a copy of Le Monde and sit in a straight-backed chair at a clean wooden table in the dimmest part of the room. My coffee comes in an ivory bowl and I eat a tiny rye and raisin roll. I am remembering an evening near here at La Zygotossoire with Xavier a few days ago. We went to the restaurant on rue de Charonne, just the two of us, and we ate sea bass, wild morels in cream, and drank Ladoix from the Côte de Beaune. This was before I had seen
the photograph, before my contract with fear had expired. Xavier had looked over
the top of his glasses at me. His foot tapped the floor and he told me of his immense
happiness.

A man looks in through the condensation on the glass window of the
pâtisserie, then comes in. He glances around and for a moment I think it is the man
with the dog. I study my newspaper more closely as he walks towards me. He puts
a cigarette face down in an ashtray on the table in front of me and turns back to
the counter. He takes a warm package smelling of pastry back out into the soft
early morning rain. As he continues down the boulevard, I watch him until he is
out of sight.

I think I am going mad with the repetition, the old fears, and the horror of
that. I am appalled to notice these feelings again: the fear of betrayal, of things
being out of control, that I will do something simply to end the fear, to keep things
as they are forever. More than anyone, I know that thoughts are actions.

The reason is perhaps because I have been free of love for so many years.
There was never any attachment after the first few sexual liaisons of my youth.
Just the soft kiss of a young German tourist when I was inadvertently caught on
the métro at midnight one New Year’s Eve. With Xavier, it is different. When I am
with him, the fear of betrayal, the sense of exclusion, that hidden current under
everything I do, vanishes. But it must end or I will go mad. I must leave before
anything happens.

The journey will bring me peace. I will give myself up to the comfort of
motion. A journey will be a scaffold for my thoughts to hang upon.

I will be safe then.
The Orange Tree

When I was twelve, my favourite room in the convent school was the languages room on the first floor, tucked away in the middle of the main building. There was a gas heater that warmed us in winter and on the walls were pictures of Paris. French novels and art books filled bookcases and a record player sat in a corner.

There were times, when working on our proses, that Ariane allowed us to play a Jaques Brel song, Ne me quitte pas, while we wrote. If I lifted my head for a moment to the breeze that arose in the afternoons in summer, I sighed because there in that room was the whisper of another language, the promise of another world.

Ariane read a French tale aloud to us, about a woman who dreamed she was a cat and took her tail to the opera, up the flight of stairs. She held it up over her arm so no-one would tread on her tail. It lay against her white arm, and the black velvet gown swirled back down the steps behind her.

As Ariane read, I studied her movements: all her gestures were in harmony with the air. Her oval face was wide and clean, slightly scented with a strange soap. She stood before us through the seasons in clothes that must have come from
Paris with her. Their fabrics suggested flesh or skin. In summer she wore the loosely woven linen dresses and silks that seem to have been cut particularly for her. In winter her dresses cleaved to her body, with the silk scarf falling from her shoulders in moiré patterns, as fine as the delicate skin of fish.

Unlike Isobel, I did not have many friends at high school. They knew, somehow, to leave me alone. It was unspoken. I did not have the time to do the things that were needed to cultivate friends, and it was always a little dangerous doing the things I did; taking things too far, too quickly, not wanting to let things evolve in their own way. When I was tired of my own company I sought out Isobel whose friends tolerated me.

Ariane too, was a little aloof from the other teachers in the school and the nuns. There was a cool irony, an austere and elegant melancholy about her. She taught us with the same diffidence, but subtly acknowledged our various abilities, those things which could be developed and those which could not. She loved her native language and gradually we associated with our studies, her sense of humour, the richness of her voice, the elegant cut of her clothes.

Sometimes she sat with her back to the sun coming in the window of the classroom, so that the light glittered through her earrings and we blinked up at her. Her fingers and palm were sunlit too, limestone white against the dark slate of the blackboard. I looked at the faces of the other girls, turned up towards her as she stood indicating the board. We were part of a warm, dusky tapestry, some exotic fabric in that afternoon light, a panoply of creamy peach faces, long necks, the flaming burnt orange of one girl's hair, the mustards and burgundies of the uniforms, our eyes fixed upon her hand. She held her tongue between her teeth.
when she laughed and the bones in her face became visible beneath the skin. Her neck curved gracefully down to her collarbone. Watching her I was slowly seduced.

I was as thorough in my study of her beauty as in my study of her language, and I began to research the particular ways in which beauty was constructed. I believed that it was something that could be learnt, and that if my face was held to the light in a certain way, I might attain this beauty myself. The appearance of other women also fascinated me, but it was Ariane whom I examined most closely: the fine texture of her skin, the shape of her lips, her hands, the cuticles like perfect shells, the line of her brow, her eyelids. I built up a picture of her out of layers of glazed moments.

Later, when things had changed, I realised that I had made her beauty the standard by which I judged myself. That was the lesson learned in that first year of high school: I believed that a woman's power was dependent on her ability to attract men, an ability that depended upon beauty.

Her face tilted up from the desk to look at me standing beside her with my exercise book, and I saw myself reflected back in the delicate veins of her cornea. Her black hair was often caught behind her ears. It was so black it was blue like the sleek plumage of the sea raven, the cormorant. It was brushed back from her wide, clean forehead or it swung about her face and hung down across her eyes of peacock blue. It was cut all the same length. I noticed that the crown of her head was perfectly placed to create this curtain effect. There was a gap between the bottom edge of her hair and the top of her shoulders, and this was where her hair swung most luxuriously when she bent over a book, a beautiful gesture.
In class, she told us, in French, of the lady who, waiting in her castle for her lord to return from Ronceveaux, occupied her time by embroidering strands of her fine hair into a silken rope.

On the following day at the hairdresser's I saw Ariane's reflection in the mirror as she came in smiling and greeting me as the hairdresser fussed about her. She didn't particularly glance at her own face in the mirror. I knew this because I was watching her, and after she left, stooped and collected a small, smooth swatch of her black hair from the floor. I put it in my pocket, and when I got home tied a piece of blue silk ribbon around it to draw it together to make a bookmark. I placed it carefully in the copy of Madame de Sévigné's letters that Ariane had lent me.

In our science class we were instructed to cut a small piece of hair from our heads, to examine it under a microscope, drawing what we observed. So one evening found me sitting up late at night in a circle of light in my room, my books out before me, my notes at one side, and a dark swatch of hair under the microscope.

My research taught me that each hair on Ariane's head grew out of a single depression below the surface of her scalp. These hollows were called *follicles*. At the bottom of each one lay a garden of cells, the *papilla* which nourished the fully grown hair using its blood vessels. When they were forming a hair, the cells of the papilla multiplied and rearranged themselves to form a bulb. As the bulb grew the cells changed, stretching themselves to become the hair strand, like the iris that grew from the bulbs in my mother's garden and looked like white birds from a distance. Each strand was composed of three layers: the outer cuticle consisted of
hundreds of tiny, overlapping shingles and it was because they were lying flat that 
light was reflected and Ariane's hair shone in the way that it did. Just underneath 
lay the cortex, the backbone of the hair, which contained the pigment granules that 
gave her hair its indigo colour. Down further, beneath the cortex, in the centre of 
the hair shaft was the soft spongy core, the madalia.

I learned that each hair on her head grew twelve centimetres during the 
year that I knew her. In its anagen phase her hair grew faster, while the catagen 
period meant slower growth, and the telogen was the resting phase when the hair 
developed a heavy tip and parted from the root. The hair was then shed and a new 
cycle began.

Outside, in the night, a white bird perched on a fence post. My desk was 
near the window. It was really a table. My father said it was a credenza; a word 
that came from the Latin credere, to trust. In ancient times, a credenza was a table 
where food was placed to be tasted for poison before it was served. It had come 
from my father's family home along with a little chest of drawers where I kept all 
my precious things. It was made of rosewood and someone had added several 
sections for holding letters. On the credenza was a glass jar which held the Giotto 
coloured pencils that Mr. Garbini had given me. Above it there was a board where 
I pinned notes about my homework, photographs, leaves and feathers. My chair 
was made from the same wood and the seat was covered in bright red cloth.

Opening my heavy dictionary, old and smelling of foreign words, I took out 
my fountain pen from the tin that contained my pens and India rubber, and 
translated each sentence of my French prose passage with precision, with attention 
to detail. These words became so precious to me that I wanted to sew them into the 
lining of a garment. I cracked them open like the shells of almonds or walnuts,
seeking the soft, satisfying kernel of an idea inside. I worked on into the night, hungrily hunting the dictionary while Isobel and my parents slumbered up the other end of the long passage. A murmuring of birds was cut by the crake's impatient cry as it made its way down to the drenching purple and brown shadows of the channel, and the black cattle moaned outside my window in the night.

That night now seems a moment as transitory as the brush of a bird's wing upon my head: there was a simplicity about it that I have never experienced again. It had something to do with solitude, with love, and with words and if these things occur together, then you have something very powerful. If you then rip that away, the loss is the thing; the memory becomes as clear as a fossil kept in amber. You can hold it up to the light and see the past swelling in the richness of the light, the nectar of loss.

_In the late spring of that year there was only one day when the air was still. My father and I paused in the late afternoon and as we sat on a log near the back of the house looking at the dam far off to the west, I told him fervently of the new French teacher and what I was learning in my lessons. The air was infused with the perfume of cow dung and the smoke from my father's pipe. The scene was a pastoral idyll: the metallic disc of the dam was like a silver brooch in the landscape, and there was light on the edges of the herefords, quiet at the rim of the water. We could see our dog, Feather, running, following a trail through the grass, each blade stroked by the shadow of the low sun. We watched until the dog ran off the edge of the landscape. I picked up my father's discarded matches, put them into my pocket and leaned against him as we watched the movement of birds, clouds, water. There were so few days like that with its chalky luminosity. Usually the_
wind was there to be leaned into and struggled with, so I was not accustomed to the
gentleness of that moment on the log with my father. We watched as a tide of
colour came in and the evening sky was stippled with purples, blues and sepia
tones. He put a hand upon my shoulder as he leant down to pick a tuft of
strawberry clover and held it up to my face so that I could inhale its sweet
perfume. From the house came the sound of chords floating from the piano. Isobel
was playing the same piece over and over, trying to get it right. Again and again
she struck the wrong note at the same place and went back to the beginning.

It was prize night. The French prize was a new Larousse dictionary and Harrap’s
Guide Bleu de Paris. I couldn’t hold them both in my hands because they were so
thick and heavy with the things that I wanted to know. For a while I was the centre
of attention and bathed in the warm glow of praise. The nuns glided across to my
parents in the school hall at the end of the evening, offering an ice blue plate of
scones laden with blackberry jam and clotted cream like paint in a pot. We stood
there, a family as flawed as any other.

My father and mother were a beautiful couple together. I had not realised
this until the ball the previous year when in the evening my mother kissed my
cheek, and brushed her soft, warm face against me, her motherskin smooth with
powder, the luminous glass lying on her neck. She went off to the ball with a rare
sideways smile at the self she saw in the mirror. I had never before seen her happy.
They were both dressed in black, leaning as one to the arabesque of music, my
mother’s jewels flashing upon her neck.

When Sister Paulinus and Sister Maria introduced my parents and Isobel to
Ariane I did not breathe. She appeared before my parents in black silk and spilled
her warmth over me, and them, laughing into the circle that we all made. I was unable to speak as they were thanking Ariane for what she had done for me, asking her to dinner. My father touched Ariane’s arm and said,

*I am concerned only with the sensitive joy of seeing you, of having you as my guest.*

I was alarmed by the desire that arose between them, eclipsing me and everyone else.

*Nothing was ever the same again.*

*That night I was too restless to sleep. After midnight, I rose and continued a translation, using my new dictionary with the ribbon to mark my place. With my forefinger, I traced my name on the blue card attached inside the cover. I wrote the word *ambrette* which Ariane had used that day in class. It was the name of an ambergris-scented pear. I tried out the sound of the word upon my tongue, swilling it about a little like a wine taster. Then I tried *absinthe*, a liqueur made by macerating and distilling the leaves of wormwood. And *couscousou*, a word that sounded to me like ‘kiss, kiss’, but which, Ariane told us, meant *becquetié*, or ‘pecked at’, from the food which a bird takes in its beak and rolls into small bits to feed its young.

It seemed that I could create beauty with the words I selected from the thousands there in the dictionary. Sometimes the right word eluded me, at others I captured it easily. Having another language meant an abundance of meaning, the potential for beauty was multiplied. The words were like the silken shells of eggs, and I gathered them in an exercise book carried everywhere with me. I picked words up from my lessons with Ariane in the same way that I picked up stones*
from the river, and rubbed my thumb over their surfaces, dwelling on the smooth skin of stones.

The shape of words, the way they fell upon the page became important to me, as did the indentations my pen made on the paper. As each book was filled, I touched, with deep satisfaction, the backs of pages and their ridges of words. I was like a pearl fisher coming to the surface, bringing from the deep a pearl so perfectly round it would roll about all day on a plate. Soon I had a secret cache of exercise books tied up with string and crammed with words, waiting it seemed, for sentences to string them on.

One Saturday that summer, my father and I rode to the furthermost part of the property to round up some aberdeen angus and move them into a fresh paddock. It was a long way from the house, past the maidenhair valley, on the southern side of the decaying wilderness, and we set out before light. After working with cattle and dogs all day we got off our horses and led them to Spring Creek where there was a lull in the terrain, a hollow where bees’ cries reverberated and insects were borne aloft in the rising currents of warm air. Sheets of cirrus clouds were appearing.

The horses stood loose, their long throats swooping down, manes hanging like brushed feathers, their velvet noses dipping into the water where the river ran shallow and clear, over rocks covered in river-moss, the sharpening breeze running across it like Isobel’s fingers across the notes on the Lipp piano.

Lightning flashed now and then beyond the Bald Hills, and the end of the day was pressing into the shadows behind us. The air was swallowing the light, and the stream began throwing up leaping trout, emerging from plumed fans of water, gasping at the wild sheets of lightning, the violet rolls of cloud. The air grew turgid
and seemed about to burst upon their backs, gleaming and flashing in the settling dusk.

My father walked to his saddlebag where he kept the fishing tackle that had belonged to his father. In old tobacco tins were fly scissors, tweezers, line winders, pliers, spring hooks, gaff hooks, a knife and a whole pocketbook of fly hooks with their hair snoods, twisted gut traces. He took out a gleaming artificial lure, untied his zephyr spinning reel, set it up and handed it to me. I threw the fishing line out onto the water and reeled it back, the lure spinning across the surface.

Between us we hauled out of the river enough fish for dinner that evening. Then we sat side by side without speaking, and watched the fish flying into the dusk. We hooked the trout, drowned now in oxygen, to our saddlebags and let the horses take us home before the storm broke, the kelpies and Feather at our heels.

Ariane came with the approaching night. She came to dinner on the bus at six, making her way through Feather's welcome on the verandah, bringing a green box of raspberries and exotic white blooms in her arms. Isobel, who had been practising the piece on the piano that ran all through that summer like a melody line, stopped suddenly when Ariane knocked on the door and when it opened the pages of music, decorated with inscriptions, floated from the piano to the floor. For a moment we all looked at the shape of her cheek against the dusk as she was framed by the doorway, pausing on the threshold a moment, appearing to wait for the room to give itself to her. The evening was made strangely luminous by her presence.

Ariane, Isobel and I sat at the kitchen table while my mother prepared to cook trout in butter in a pan on the Aga stove. The fish lay dusted in chalky white
flour on a plate with a blue rim. My father chose, from the collection of cook books kept in the kitchen, a small book with a red cover called *Recipes from Scotland*.

*To fry sillocks*, he began reading.

Ariane leaned over to me.

*What are sillocks, Madeleine?*

*We think they’re like white bait*, I explained, having heard the recipe before.

My father coughed in a stagy way and we paid attention to him again. *The perfect dish of sillocks must be caught and cooked by the consumers.* His voice grew warm and he looked over the top of the book at us.

I could not see his mouth, but I knew he was smiling, *When the moon rises on a late summer’s night, you must fish far out on a sea moved only by the slow, broad Atlantic swell. And the little mountain of sillocks, the reward of cold but exciting hours, must be ‘dite’ in a moonlit rock pool. Then home at cockcrow. Around the kitchen fire, while the rest of the household sleep, come the happy rites of cooking and eating. Each tiny, headless fish, wrapped in a stout jacket of salted oatmeal, is popped into a pan of hot butter. There they bounce and spit while the fishers, ringed around pan and fire, exquisitely thaw. At last, richly brown and curled into fantastic shapes, and so tender they almost fall to pieces, they are dished.*

*You lift a sillock gently between thumb and forefinger, snip off the tail, press the plump sides- and the backbone shoots forth! The delicious morsel left - hot, crisp oatmeal and sweet melting fish - you eat on buttered ‘bere’ bread, a darkly brown, flatly sour scone.*

I had already recognised, from my French lessons, the pull of language, the excitement that shifted in me when I felt the gentle tug of a new word swimming below the surface of my thoughts. We ate the entrée of fish at the dining table.
draped that evening in pristine Irish linen. There followed the dark meat of a wild black duck and fresh mushrooms, picked from the broad open paddock that was furtherest from the sea. Then green-gold pears that were poached in sweet white wine.

After dinner, my father led us into the sitting room to see the newly arrived film. He dimmed the lights, set up the projector and arranged us on the lounge chairs facing the wall. Before the images appeared, the wall glowed in jumping light then the film jerked, threading its way through the spools. It began, as it always did, with a series of fleeting, elusive, disjointed images of Isobel and I swimming. And there was the pleasure of seeing myself through the eyes of others: a slight brown figure, swimming in the river. My long blond hair was darkened by the water or by the dimness that flashed in and out of the film; a staccato performance.

When I remember this now, I do not recognise myself as that child. I do not remember the comfort of being in that body, yet I can tell the comfort was there, and the grace, by the way I stood tall beside Isobel, and presented myself fully to my father’s camera.

My father was speaking, telling Ariane about the film in his precise way. He located it in time, in place, in our history.

The last film was a newly developed one. Some neighbours’ children were throwing a ball about in the driveway that led up to their old farmhouse. There was a seductive burst of lush pastoral imagery and the shadows of giant pine trees sprawling across the hard-packed road. A figure reached into the picture from ragged edges to retrieve a ball that had rolled into the rose garden. She threw the ball to Isobel.
It took a few seconds for me to realise who it was. It was the clothes that I knew first. I saw a girl of twelve. She was too tall and bony, her hair cut short in a rough, dark bob, high back on her forehead. She was awkward in her movements as she ran for the ball, so lacking in grace that she grimaced when she saw the camera and she was freeze-framed, distorted before being dismantled by the searing light of burning celluloid as the film snagged.

I looked away from the screen in shock, my face flushing. I had not seen myself so. Within the space of a couple of minutes I had realised two things: as a young child I had possessed a simple grace and beauty; at twelve it was lost to me.
At the Café Charbon last night Xavier ordered the ortolan, a small songbird from the south of France where he was born, a delicacy which tasted, he told me, of a mixture of truffles and foie gras. Purists ate it whole and still aflame - beak, feathers, bones and all. Although he was completely engaged in eating this creature, perhaps he noticed my discomfort, the way I looked away from him after Sophie, the publisher of Éditions du Bois, came and spoke to me.

She was extremely elegant in the way she walked and the way she removed her coat; entirely self contained with a stillness that reminded me of a pool of water under the moon. I liked Sophie, but because of her appearance, had always remained detached. Our relationship was completely formal.

At first I thought I had misheard what Sophie was saying to me as Xavier poured her a glass of red wine. But no. Someone, possibly an Australian, had come into Édition du Bois and asked about me. Just today. She could not be sure if she had done the right thing but he hadn't seemed like a friend, so she had not given him any information. She hoped there wasn't a problem? I was able to quickly
speak to her of other things. My translation was almost ready and I would deliver it soon. This pleased her.

I was afraid I would give myself away to Xavier. If his hand had been resting on my wrist, as it so often was, he would have felt my pulse quicken a little as Sophie spoke to me, a little sweat starting, a trembling in my clenched hand as he bent politely toward me. It was, at first, just a small electrical spark of memory. One would have to know my very well to realise that there was something wrong. I avoided Xavier a little then, in an effort to privately gather myself, to soothe the blood roaring through my head, the shaking of my limbs.

It breaks my heart to leave Xavier. I must leave him before he discovers that I am like the belladonna honey, and he is not safe. Already he must suspect that there is something that Sophie has said that has upset me.

He could never understand why I declined to go back to Australia with him, although perhaps he suspected that there were things I had left behind and would be happy to never see again. He said, in his quirky German English.

We could go on a holiday there, Madeleine. I don't like Spain very much. The weather and the sea is wonderful but the rest is thick and strange. When George Sand was there with Chopin she wrote a true thing: they hate us.

He told me tales of his Australian journeys. There were photographs of a coastline somewhere, of a group of his colleagues standing for a camera under a wider sky than you ever see in Paris. I refused bitterly. Australia? No. I put the photographs down on the table and suggested that perhaps we would go dancing that evening at the jazz club.
Ah well, it must be the Côte d’Azur then. We’ll find a Dufy window for you in Nice and sit at it. Then when you get bored we’ll leave behind the faded grand hotels along the Promenade des Anglais with their odalisques on the walls. We will invent paradise.

Already I could see a balcony tiled in mauve, orange, violet and yellow ceramics, a tangle of greenery like Bonnard’s Atelier au Mimosa, and the soft prisms of the roofs. I longed for sun so hot it made my shiver.

I hate the beach, so I will sit and watch you swim, continued Xavier. I’ll carry your surfboard perhaps. You won’t like the stones by the sea though. I know about that. You will stub your toe.

He didn’t press me about going to Australia after that. He accepted it as gracefully and completely, as he accepted many things about me. As if just loving me was enough for him, as extraordinary as that might seem. He wasn’t to know that I had built my life on a flood plain.

This is the way it is, the way it has always been. I have struggled with this, been vigilant about my vigilance. Nothing in my behaviour has escaped my scrutiny, particularly when I am with Xavier.

At first I had believed that, with Xavier, I was free of fear at last, such was the intense passion I felt for him. And he for me. Something found its centre, its balance in each of us when we were together.

Xavier often says, Absolument. He is so sure of everything about us, so confident and when I found myself at such peace in his arms, I was moved because it seemed that I was free from threat after all. Feeling such peace in the presence of another human being was a something not experienced since I was twelve, when I

143
had spent an early morning riding with my father and Isobel. Just the three of us with the horses and dogs. Before it all came undone.

It breaks my heart to leave Xavier, to forgo him. But I must leave him before I am discovered, before I am hunted down. For if he discovers the truth he will leave me.

I am sure of that.
The Memory Bell

In the twilight of that first time Ariane came for dinner, it was agreed that she would come and ride the palomino, Queenie, who needed exercising. Queenie was the most beautiful of our horses with her flowing mane, large eyes, and slender legs so quick to take flight. This arrangement happened without my having to orchestrate it. My mother suggested it, some wound she was tearing at in herself making her potent in her collusion with my father, and she quietly disappeared to her room after dinner, not to return.

Late that evening when my father drove Ariane back to her yellow house, I sat between them in the car under a spray of stars forming, aligning as we jolted over the corrugations in the dirt road. We passed wires strung silver between poles like strands of hair. Their conversation swam about me like the light of the head lamps searching ahead of us in the darkness. Something about the way they spoke to each other alarmed me: it didn't include me. I was there between them, but not there at all. I had not read the books they spoke of, each tossing titles over my head to the other.
C'est incroyable! Ariane laughed, I have not spoken to anyone in this way.

You are the only person I have met in Australia who knows these books!

My father was at his most charming and when he said her name, it sounded different from any other word I had ever heard him utter. As the journey continued deeper into the night I felt myself subside quietly, like the side of a mountain slipping from itself in flooding rain. I was transparent, like an X-ray; there was no substance to me, just bones blocking the light a little.

My father was quiet on the way home and eventually I slept on the broad bouncing seat, hypnotised by the red eyes that shone on the white guideposts along the road.

The clothes that Ariane wore for her first riding lesson were completely unsatisfactory my father said, laughing at her as she arrived on the six o'clock bus from town. He took command. Before she took Isobel for her music lesson, my mother shyly offered Ariane the use of some jodpurrs and a riding shirt and boots that she no longer used. So when I came out of the house and swung on the verandah post eating a biscuit, my father was holding Queenie still while Ariane climbed up upon her back. She turned a moment to smile at me and laugh at herself. She hunched her shoulders to indicate her ineptness, and I caught my breath, thinking for a moment that it was my mother there, leaning against Queenie’s warm flank.
Ariane gave me extra tuition in order to prepare for the scholarship examination. During those private lessons after school on Thursdays, before her riding lesson with my father, we studied books that weren’t being studied by the others. I waited all week for the hour when I would sit at her table holding my breath beside her, with the books set out in front of us. They were special books, because they belonged to her, not the school, and her name was written on the flyleaf of each one. She allowed me to take them home and in my room, late at night, I examined them carefully for clues to her life.

She had written a date and the name of a place inside each book. These words and numbers were like a tiny, intricate pattern, woven or etched, small, repetitive like some mysterious code I wanted to understand. The date she had purchased it? Or read it? And the place. Most of the places, I knew, were in Paris, but some must have been when she was holidaying. There was the book of Madame de Sévigné’s letters with Nice written on it in a larger, more relaxed script, and I learned a new way of pronouncing the name of the sugar biscuits Isobel and I ate with milky tea after school. This new way sounded of the sea.

She also lent me a book of photographs of Paris. In the diffuse light of the city, I set Ariane’s form against the background of these photographs: in the Tuileries she rested upon a stone seat; at Les Deux Magots I could see the wicker weaving of her chair, the metal table behind the glass of the window, sunglasses on and a scarf. The little white cup and saucer. Always alone. She even read her novel with her sunglasses on. Without moving.
In class we were studying Raymond Radiguet's *Devil in the Flesh*. I was, by this time, enthralled. Ariane folded her arms and cradled her elbows in her palms as she spoke of the story. She walked to the window and looked out. It was simply the sound that the word made when she said it. Ariane said *l'amour*, and it was as if she'd opened her mouth and spoken under water.
The Lover

I check the street outside the pâtisserie, board the bus that pulls in, and take a seat as it makes its way through the Bastille and on to the Gare de Lyon.

It will be hard to leave, to start again in Ravello.

This morning journey is giving me the time to sort things out in my mind, to think about the unthought, to seek constraint and containment. For looking at my life just now, I am not sure what is in front, what’s behind. The edges change, as happens at the line of meeting of one colour with another – a third appears. I want to consider the situation carefully until it’s straight like the raked pebbles in a Japanese garden. Perfect.

Under a green car, a black cat with yellow eyes jumps back in fright, blinking in the fumes of the bus. The man beside me absently chews the aerial of his mobile phone.

I know my references will help my get some sort of job in Italy. I am a good translator and teacher, reliable, hardworking, dedicated to my students, and have a flair for French. My accent is good and I can create a certain shrug of the shoulders. I practised these motions as a child - the hand sweeping back the hair,
the shoulder swinging around as I walked along the street. Sometimes I would look down, then up, suddenly, so that there was a dramatic quality to the way I moved, a half smile on my face.

Isobel said that French had gone to my head. She said this when she came upon me cultivating the gestures of Jean Seburg in front of our mother's mirror. It is precisely what an older sister would say to a younger one. Now I long to hear Isobel's voice saying such things to me.

I wake after dozing a little as the bus moves through the morning. A woman is getting on and as she takes the seat in front of me, her dark hair laced with blue ribbon swings out from her pale neck over the back of the seat.

I notice a person's hair before anything else about them. And if there is something fine about their hair, either the colour, the shine or the shape, then I am anxious to observe this for a while, rather like the man who loved ponytails. He would haunt the hairdressing salons of Paris and offer women money for their ponytails. He would do the same to women he met in bars, offer them a thousand francs for their ponytails, and if they agreed, he would produce a pair of scissors, snip off the ponytail, put it in his pocket and leave. Later he took to sitting behind ponytails in the train and doing it illicitly. He used a new pair of scissors each time, so that you got the feeling that the preparation was the important thing to him, the purchase of the scissors and the planning.

The bus stops again and others board. I scan their faces, but find nothing to fear. The journey provides a place for my thoughts to rest. For often my thoughts are like flocks of tired birds that have moved together across continents, and need
a settling place: my thoughts have strained against the winds, turned in tight
circles above the sea.

The light is coming through the bus window more strongly now, so I take
out the copy of *L'Amant* I always carry with me, wherever I go, so that if there is
an unoccupied moment I will not dwell on thoughts of the past. I can draw it out
and open it at any point and read. One morning in July 1984 I caught sight of its
white face reflected in the shining wood of the dark shelves at Galignani's
bookshop on the rue de Rivoli. When I took it up, my hand swept across the
textured white cover and my thumb felt for the thickness of it.

Standing there, I began to read and grew breathless with the beauty of its
language. I was anxious as the woman took it away from me to place it in a bag,
and walked from the bookshop directly to a cafe by the river where I continued to
read. The waiters kept coming and I ordered coffees. Then they stopped coming.
They realised that I could not leave until it was finished.

Reading that book was like being in the sunlight. When I paused to order
coffee, it was as if the shadow of a cloud passed above me. The water sparkled on
the other side of the river where the sun still shone, and I knew that I had to wait,
that the cloud would pass, and it would be warm again, the words like heat flowing
once more in my body.

The light crosshatched a net of shallow lines across my hands as I smoothed
the clean, white pages. A busker played a violin amid the din of lunch being
prepared, ordered, and served as I sat, not looking up, reading on, page after page,
oblvious to the river, the avenues, the thickening crowd. By the time the waiters
had changed shifts the words had pressed their shape into me forever.
That autumn I saw Marguerite Duras on a television program, waving her rings and bracelets in the air and I wanted to kill her because of the way she revealed the ruthless intent of a child's heart.

As the bus pulls in at the Gare de Lyon, I put my book in my coat pocket and gather my things about me. Leaving it I walk across the road, past the boucherie with its bodies of white, naked flesh hanging from hooks.

Inside the gare, I purchase a ticket for Rome, then Naples. The man tells me that I will have to buy my ticket for the Circumvesuviana when I arrive in Naples. He is speaking loudly and I glance behind me, quickly take my ticket and place my suitcase in a locker. My belongings have always been few, and are light, easy to catch up and run for a train at a moment's notice. They are safe for the moment and I am able to attend to my next task free of their load.

I sit at a table in the station café, draw out the writing paper and envelope I have brought, and take up my pen. I hesitate a little. It is thirty years since I last contemplated this action. It has taken a long time for me to repeat it, but now I am taking the narrative curve back to its beginning in a quiet script. This letter is more difficult to write than the first. Perhaps this love is so deep because it is prefigured by loss. It is underscored by loss - the shadow in my brain somewhere, like a phantom limb. This is one of those times when there is a detachment working within me: snipping, snipping at the threads that sew me to the day, snipping from underneath the cloth. Then I notice that the cloth itself is slipping, unravelling.

But there is this journey I must make. It is what I know, this leaving in the night. It is how I have lived my life. It's too late now to change. A terrible sadness
lowers itself upon me. It happens sometimes. It can begin with something as simple
as the touch upon my hand, of a hair falling from my head. It is unreasonable and
swells inside me like an organ gathering water into itself after the body has been
attacked by a cancer. It fills my chest and my face and makes it difficult to breathe.
But there is little use in telling Xavier about it because it would lead to that other
telling.

Apart from Isobel, there is nobody else.

Sometimes I tell it to the grey river as I walk along the quai d'Orsay in the
evenings and watch the barges from the bridge. I have wandered away into the
dark wood. And returned alone. Despite all the love it was not enough. It could
never be enough.

Suddenly I am weeping. I put my sunglasses on and write the letter. I do not
pause and it flows from my pen. I remember every word as though it were
yesterday.

I catch the train to St Denis. I am early so I go into the Stella Artois Brasserie
where I am not known. I nod to the man behind the bar.

*M'sieur dame.*

He gives a little bow, screams to the air, *Un café. Un.*

Unbuttoning my black coat, I make my way to the back room past the local
workmen in their blue overalls and sit at the table in the corner, facing the door.

The only other person there - a man sitting at the table opposite me, twists
into his chair like a corkscrew into a cork. He throws his food from one side of his
mouth to the other and sniffs loudly.
The walls are blackened by cigar smoke, the air heavy with the odour of Gauloises and garlic. When the coffee comes in a small blue cup, I hold my hands around it and lean over it a little, so that the steam warms me.

The brasserie begins to fill with people who are also on their way to work. None of them takes a seat. They throw back their coffees, grab a bite to eat and dash back onto the street. Amid the backslapping and jocularity I shiver a little, always cold. Winter is approaching. There is a gravelly American voice on the radio singing about cashing his chips in Rome.

I leave some francs on the table and walk across the road to the school. An old couple on the other side of the road is in trouble. The woman is about sixty, thin, and wearing a long-sleeved grey sweatshirt with blue terry towelling track pants. It is clear from her bone structure, that she was once extremely beautiful, but now the skin at her elbows hangs like a shawl from the bone. Her hair is wispy, patchy. She is slumping over the fence, slowly disintegrating. Her husband holds her with one arm, a trolley crammed full of groceries with the other. As I reach her, the woman comes to rest on the footpath. Her head rolls down to her chest and I kneel down to her. There is the strong odour of the urine that flows from her, pools around her. She slowly becomes aware again of her surroundings. The man says,

*She's just finished chemo. She's just come out of hospital. I told them it was too soon.*

*He weeps, She is losing hair from her soul.*

Afraid of someone stealing the food, he takes the trolley to their car and leaves his wife with the strangers who are collecting about her now.
Her fingers curl, clutching at my hand like a baby’s. Her gaze turns in shame away from the ugly mess she is lying in. Someone from the Stella Artois brasserie says that they have called an ambulance.

_Is there anything you want?_ they ask.

_A tissue?_

I draw a handkerchief from the pocket of my black coat, and give it to her, but she looks at it and sobs, _Elle est belle._ She will not use it.

The mist coats the air, muffling the scream of the ambulance.

As the ambulance people arrive I notice that she has still not used the handkerchief despite the wet mess on her face, that she holds it – a fold of serene, soft blue – delicately in her left hand. It is the handkerchief with the rolled edges that Xavier gave me. Her husband returns with a gendarme, and I quietly slip away. I almost go back to ask her if I can have the handkerchief back.

I am ashamed of this.

_No one else has arrived at the school yet. I hear the faded bark of a dog and the other sounds that are caught up with it as it travels along the backs of buildings by the cemetery behind the school. I will have a little time to make some preparations. It must not be anything too noticeable. There is not a lot to do. Even after twenty years in the same place, I have not let down my guard as far as work goes. My classroom is neat and orderly, my record books and files are up to date. I have not lost the habits of a person who is aware that she might suddenly have to leave._

_My departure will not result in the chaos that one might expect. There are many unemployed teachers and translators in Paris. I am sure they will find a_
replacement quite easily. Someone will be grateful for the work. In fact, my actions may change for the better, the fortunes of a whole family. With this in mind, I make my last preparations.

My students are technical students. They spend a great deal of their time down in the metal rooms, the engine rooms and the woodwork rooms. They come to me for English conversation and ‘culture’. This week I have been looking at Australian poetry and they are learning some of the Nielson’s poems in English. Last week we were reading English technical manuals for washing machines. They are mostly young men in their late teens and early twenties who will be employed all over France, perhaps in the nuclear power stations that rise suddenly out of blank fields in the country. Although my students enjoy their English lessons, their attention is really upon the grinding and clashing machines on the ground floor. I realise that I will not see them again.

Twenty two years ago when I came to Paris I stood like a tree, bare in winter. The sky was oyster-grey. I had packed the dictionaries and Harrap’s Guide Bleu in a suitcase which was not much bigger than my old school case, and left Australia, flying over the pale patches that were salt lakes. From above, I watched the land wash away.

I had saved all my money carefully while studying, and later while teaching French in a girls’ school near the harbour in Sydney. The knowledge that I planned to leave for France forever as soon as possible, and make that city of a thousand bookshops my home, was like a secret in a silk sack that I wore between my breasts. After two years of teaching in Sydney, I obtained an exchange in a school in Paris for one year with a small salary and a room in the school. I would arrive
in September and return home to Australia the following September. By this time 
Isobel had married Philippe, and eager to visit his childhood home, they promised 
to come.

It was simple to alter my surname in Australia before I left, so that all my 
documents showed a hyphenated name, the first of which I quickly discarded once 
I arrived in France.

Paris was the light at a paper window, and I knew I would never come back.

Paris first appeared to me as if in the flashing scenes of an old movie. The 
shadows of the trees made the sunlight dip in and out as the cab delivered me far 
from the mansard roofs, to the lycée technique in St Denis. My room was on the 
third floor of the school at the end of what were once students' dormitories.

I was the only person living on that floor. My footsteps echoed as I moved 
about. Below me was the Spanish assistant, above me, the German. On the ground 
floor were the concierge and his wife. Outside the window of my room the 
fractured view showed the backs of buildings and a cemetery with fragile black 
angels slipping out of frame. Another cemetery lay to the north.

Double death, I wrote to Isobel and Philippe in Katoomba.

On my first day there I stood looking out the window. A fly lodged in a web 
on the shutter; a dog leapt about a man as he stood urinating by a grave.

A dome of grey cloud pressed down upon St Denis for months at a time and 
as I walked the pavements quilted with leaves, I saw the feet of a hen or rooster 
lying by a tree, indicating the sky; the broken necks of a bottles. St Denis was the 
grimmest part of Paris, especially the Sarcelles, a place reeking of urban misery. 
The monarchs lay in the basilica, in the midst of this disarray. It was only Isobel
and Philippe’s visit that made that first year bearable for me. I knew they were puzzled about my change of surname but I convinced them that it was a case of intense Francophilia.

In the evenings I left my room at the lycée, and went into the centre of Paris to visit brasseries, cafes, the busier the better, for then I could watch people living their lives and the ways in which they did it. I explored the subterranean Paris. The tunnels of the Métro and the catacombs were an unseen world, like a dark, nocturnal unconscious - a mirror image of the city that lay above.

All along the Left Bank were posters of the Belgian artist Folon, and his pale images floated past me during my first months, like moths caught in a light that was too bright; the world was abstract, distilled to just shape, form and colour. I was an exile there.

I wore dark clothes, dyed my hair jet black and bought a pair of heavy dark-framed spectacles. People would sometimes turn and look at me on the street. They were usually tourists who would want to take my photograph because I was so tall and looked so French. I told them I was born in a tiny village near Versailles and that I mentioned Versailles because no one had ever heard of my village. A management school operated there, little else, so when I found a hundred franc note one day, lying in the dirt in the grounds of the palace, I bought a train ticket and came to Paris searching for la vie parisienne.

I told them such things in English with a distinct French accent.

In summer I wore sleeveless linen dresses and read the Herald Tribune in cafes. I cultivated a taste for jazz and Gauloises. It was all windows, mirrors and the river. I moved on from the cafe if people started to try and get to know me too closely. I tried out Patricia’s words from Breathless and because of all the practice,
knew the exact rise and fall of these words, the way to move my mouth and head. There were endless opportunities to shrug and say, *Je ne sais pas*. In those days, not having yet learned the security of routine and solitude, I welcomed disguise and practised carefully the delivery of complicated statements, seeking the correct translation, construction, pronunciation.

When the job at the school began, it all changed and I quickly gained confidence and spoke the language freely and energetically though many of my original habits remained. Perhaps they were the habits of a stranger in Paris, but they had become such a part of my life that it was simpler to continue.

Now, instead of making my way to the dining room for lunch with the other staff, I leave the school, go across the place to the Banque Nationale de Paris and draw out all my savings kept in this account under a false name. The clerk screws up his eyes and looks closely at me, surprised by the amount of the withdrawal, the fact that I am closing my account and changing my money into Italian lira. Perhaps he suspects a hidden purpose.

_A problem?_

_But no, certainly not_, I tell him, _I'm having a little Italian holiday._

Anxious about having so much cash with me, for I won't be able to use credit cards, I tell myself that although I will be carrying a good amount of money, I now pass unnoticed quite easily in crowds, and that because of this, it will be fine. The money will last a long time and then there will be a job. I tell myself that I must not be afraid. I have known what it is like to be really afraid, and I know that I will never feel that way again.
Entering a café of glass and polished mirrors, I draw out a small, square table and sit on the banquette, my back against the wall. I harvest a field of thoughts, conjugating a future; a truce with myself forged by Isobel. Taking out the envelope that arrived two weeks ago, I read just the words,

*Come to Ravello:*

*2 via San Francesco.*

I order a *tartine* and a glass of wine and see the headlines of a newspaper lying on a nearby table. There has been a dreadful train accident in Germany. Much suffering. I remember sitting in the dining room of the school twenty years ago when they told me that the news of the morning had been full of a train accident in Australia. I couldn’t understand then the name of the place, but bought a paper later and read about it. Sydney. A suburban station. A train had derailed; hit a bridge and many people were killed or trapped in the wreckage.

The staff at the school were clearly surprised at my lack of reaction. Australia so rarely featured on French news bulletins that they had been quite excited by it. They wanted to show that they were identifying with me. A shocking thing. I nodded, but didn’t want to know any details. After that I never watched television and sold the one in my apartment. I rarely listened to the radio and carefully avoided reading newspapers, trained myself in this way for many, many years so that it is completely natural for me now.

I draw out the letter that Isobel wrote to me when I asked her what had happened between she and Philippe.

The letter ends, *O, Madeleine, where was my crime? Why did he forsake me?*

As I replace it in its envelope a car rolls in front of the café. The driver, a very beautiful woman, tries to pull into the empty space there. She has run out of
petrol and the car will not go any further. Another car approaches and appears to be about to take the parking place. The woman leaps out of her car and abuses the driver through his window, then she rushes to the front of her own car and vainly tries to drag it into the space. A group of young men, who are passing, assists her. Laughing, they lift the car in the air and position it into the space, and the other car roars off. The woman thanks the young men and they go to buy petrol for her, not wanting to detach themselves from her beauty. I take advantage of the noise and movement to leave the brasserie.

As I make my way back to the lycée, I feel some shame that I have avoided Xavier. Today he had wanted to plan an outing like the one when he took me to a quarry to find agaric, a family of fungi that grows on tree trunks and in caves and on decayed wood. Later he would sauté them in butter in a shallow pan, and dress them with herbs.

Then we went to the Jardin des Senteurs off the rue des Morillons. We made our way through the wisteria, lilac, lily of the valley, the honeysuckle, the plots of chamomile, vervain, tarragon, thyme, laurel and sage. He took my hand and ran it over the labels in Braille. The Beehive School was nearby and the vines of the pinot noir vineyard, and peach trees. Towards the lake there were heaps of stones.

*Used to be there was an old slaughterhouse there,* he said, pointing.

He aimed the camera at me.

He said, *Stand still and look at the photo-machine!*

And then he shot me.
I sit in my office writing a short note to leave for the principal explaining about a sudden death on the other side of the world that requires, regrettably, my immediate and ongoing attendance. My mark book is open in front of me and I will make the final entries so that it will be completely in order for my replacement.

There is a sound and I start, my pen jerking ink onto the page.

As the door swings open Xavier’s figure appears in the glass. He comes in, stands before me and says, Oh hello, it’s you.

He has been hurrying and there is a smudge of light on his forehead. The lenses of his glasses are fogged with disappointment. Removing them he rubs them with his sleeve. His tie has flown over his shoulder and his hair is unsettled. Today, he is wearing a rich blue shirt and the tie I bought for him in Florence. He looks at me with a strange smile floating about his lips. They tremble a little with desire I see. Looking up at him, my thoughts are of spine, skin, muscle, my consenting mouth; his hand drawing a line along my belly up between my breasts then spreading out there and stroking me languorously; then the fusion of beings for a moment.

What’s happening with you this evening? Do you perhaps want to come to the rue de Médicis? I thought a roast would be the thing.

I smile. He knows that I will eat only the vegetables and he will salt and oil them with extra care. He doesn’t know that it will be my last meal with him.

Of course, I will come after my swim. How can I refuse such an offer?

Good. Some special coffee I have found for you. It’s flavoured with roast figs. I think you’ll love it. I’ll see you then? About seven?

Before leaving he kisses me, straightens my collar and glances at my mark book, his voice gentle now.
You work too hard Madeleine. You shouldn't miss lunch like that.

When he has gone back to his classroom, I am quite alone again and left thinking that I cannot leave him. But I have read in Le Monde the report of the discovery of a body in South Gippsland, Australia, believed to be the missing lady of the swamp who had disappeared from Tarwin forty years ago. But perhaps they were not her remains at all. Another disappearance many years later involving a woman, a French national. Dental records had identified her. The photograph of Ariane was set beside the one of Isobel and me. The older sister, it said, was wanted for the murder of her husband, a writer. There was a description of the younger sister who was the last person seen by the landlady in the company of the French teacher. My Name.

Everything changed when, early this spring, I met Xavier. They say that falling in love is the only form of madness we enjoy. I fell in love with Xavier against my will. For many years everything had been just so – in order. Xavier disrupted all that and, at first, I almost resented him for it. It was as though he had snatched my map away and I had become lost, disoriented, forced to rely on his sense of direction.

I heard his voice before setting my eyes upon him. Feeling someone studying me across the lunch table at the lycée, I was tempted to say, as Patricia had to Michel in Breathless,

I'm going to look at you until you stop looking at me.

I was reading the catalogue of an exhibition I had seen. Under the glass of a large tabletop vitrine were sixty-five tiny dead birds delicately laid out in rows on folded white linen. Each was dressed in knitted garments such as were usually
made for newborn infants, their feet and beaks protruding. I had experienced a grisly fascination with it and had to force myself to move away to the next exhibit.

Now Madame Grangier was placing white sugar onto a small mound of yoghurt. Madame Arné was opening a bottle of beer with her strong fingers for Monsieur Jules, the workman who sat with his colleagues in blue overalls at the other end of the table.

I knew only that there was a new professor of French.

It was the fine patina of his voice that first attracted me, and the strange twist his German mother had given to his English. He kept his eyes fixed upon me.

Do you know how it is to eat a pomegranate? he asked me.

I was irritated by his attention. The others knew and respected my preference for remaining silent and reading while dining. They rarely interrupted me. I considered him over the top of the catalogue, frowning. He was a large man. There was a deep crease in his chin, a half-smile on his face. I looked down. He held in his hand a piece of fruit so beautiful in its design that I thought that it should be drawn, rather than eaten. It resembled a magnification of human skin. The roughly sketched lines of orange and red curved into gullies, crosshatched at the point where it rested in his hand. I could imagine the way it would bleed when sliced, when the scarlet beads of tear-shaped flesh were broken. The beauty of it moved me but he wasn’t going to know that.

Very carefully? I replied, raising one eyebrow.

He smiled at that and introduced himself. When I took my hand from the pocket of my overcoat and gave it to Xavier, he placed his other hand over it, held it a moment as though it were a gift. Un petit cadeau.
After that I was aware of Xavier's presence in the school and, with annoyance, noticed myself listening for his voice along a corridor, through an open window. The odd thing was that Xavier was often out in the foyer when I arrived at school. Perhaps he had looked for me at the window.

I am not a beautiful woman. There is a plainness about me that makes me invisible to both men and women a lot of the time now that I have discarded the affectations of my youth. If things had worked out differently in my life, I may have found this a great sadness.

Xavier's attention to me was unusual, a threat to my solitude, my safety. He unnerved me further by correctly identifying my accent immediately. Most Parisians believed me to be English or American. I didn't disabuse them. It was of no consequence to them.

_Tu es Australienne_, he said, smiling, familiar. It wasn't a question, he knew Australia too well for that. But a surprise. As though he had come across some small and rare marsupial that had never before been sighted in these parts.

For Xavier, it seemed, I was an object of cultural fascination. My Australianness was the thing. I knew I should have been more careful, but he insisted on deepening our acquaintance. He had made many trips and knew my country very well. When he was younger, he stayed in Sydney for a year, lived and studied at the university, and became an expert in Australian culture, even acquiring an Australian accent. He laughed when I confessed how hard I had worked to lose mine. And I laughed at him when we occasionally spoke English together. He was the only Frenchman with a German accent mixed with a strange Australian influence I had ever met. Every word seemed to end with the murderous _eye_ of the crow calling across a wide, empty paddock.
Xavier had grown up in the south of France in a hotel where he passed a lot of his time at the top of a spiral staircase in a little tower known as Maximilian's Tower after his maternal grandfather. He would say things like, *Let's sit and watch this storm.*

He lived in the rue de Médicis near the Jardins du Luxembourg, across the Seine from my apartment in the Marais and worked at both the school and the Sorbonne, specialising in Australian history and literature. Xavier had planted a eucalyptus tree in his garden. Because it was a snow gum, he thought it might survive.

That was how I first came to visit Xavier's apartment.

*Would you like to come over and visit my gum tree?* he asked.

That is the thing that is so unusual about Xavier. He makes me laugh. In fact I have noticed that, in his presence, there is an aspect of my voice, my laughing voice, that I had never heard before, a rich depth that is without bitterness.

Once we were having lunch under a spreading pin oak in the Café Bon Ton near the Panthéon when we heard the woman at the next table say to the one-armed man with her,

*You know, I hadn't realised before now that you're left-handed.*

As we leaned towards each other in silent amusement, the waiter approached and pointed first to the gathering clouds overhead and then to a table behind the glass of the café.

*That's for you both, should you require it.*

Deep in conversation we were the last to notice the rain coming quickly in large drops. We hurried across the shining flagstones, through the cloudburst and
indoors. From our table there, through the glass, we watched the storm break. Everything was green, lush and dark. The rain railed down upon the deserted metal tables.

Outside, through the drumming rain, a sharp, brittle breaking sound came and a white plate, falling from a waiter's hand, smashed to pieces as he took flight, a collection of glasses and crockery balanced on his arm. As the storm increased in intensity, a second waiter ran to help him, a drink tray held over his head.

Suddenly, urgently, I turned from the window and touched Xavier's elbow. He turned his head towards me, his face animated, his eyes demanding mine.

*There's something I should tell you,* I started to say, but at the moment I spoke, thunder cracked directly above our heads, and the building shook.

*What did you say?* he asked, leaning forward. I shook my head, regretting my words immediately, and a drop of rain flew from my hair onto his lips. Before I had realised what I was doing, I had raised my hand and reached forward to brush it off. He caught my hand in his, held it by the fingertips, and kissed them, his eyes still upon mine.

After this, with great trepidation, I went with Xavier to his apartment in rue de Médicis.

He was at a sort of resting point in his life: he lived alone and had done so for long enough not to feel the need to explain why he lived alone. Outside his building was parked an old red deux chevaux. At the entrance a priest passed by us, his neck stretched ahead of him. I saw Xavier make a movement to mimic him then control himself in mock horror at his own unruly behaviour. We rose to the third floor in a very small dark metal cage. I was acutely aware of his proximity and touch when his arm brushed against mine as he held the door back for me. We
entered his apartment and the light streamed into the room like water. I could see only light and wood for a moment, until my eyes became accustomed to the brightness. Out of the corner of my eye was an odd, furtive movement. A large red-feathered parrot was hanging, like a diver ready to fall, from its perch in the cage which hung near the window. It was watching me closely.

*Qui est là? Qui est là?* it screamed suspiciously.

*This is my companion, Bluey,* he said and I smiled at his adoption of the Australian habit of calling any red-headed person or thing, blue.

We sat at a round table and drank a Coonawarra merlot together while he told me about his love of the wines that came from the *terra rossa* there. When he was preoccupied he rubbed his thumb against his forefinger as though feeling the texture of his thought. He waited for me to speak, assuming that I had something to say. He was transparent in his actions, articulate in the way in which he poured the wine, easy to be with. There was in Xavier, a sure balance between insouciance and tenderness. He ambled about in fine-grained leather shoes from Cordoba in Spain, disappearing to fetch something that he thought might amuse me. He had a vast collection of dog ornaments some of which he drew from their shelves to show me. He described the different dogs he had kept over the years, the last being a Borzoi.

*When she died, I buried her there.* He pointed across to the Jardins du Luxembourg, *I had to sneak in the night, but means she is in the family still.* He suddenly leaned close to me and I held my breath as he reached out to touch me. Instead, he pulled a long white hair off my coat.

*A little reminder remains there and here.*
While he was out of the room a moment, I was able to study it closely. It was much larger than looked possible from the outside. Perhaps two rooms had been made into one. It appeared to have been recently renovated. The floors were oiled wood. Large folded-back French doors looked down to the Médici fountain in the gardens. Two walls were lined with books and I rose and walked over to look at the collection of fiction, history, art. All Australian. As I shivered a little, he walked back in.

*Are you cold? Would you like the doors closed? This spring in Paris is a very good joke; it could be a winter; only the flowers give some signs. It’s horrible! This is the second spring in line who was not a spring. We had some minus degrees in the night.*

Down below, people were walking about in the Sunday sun, over the white sand and down into the sunken garden. Toy sailboats were moving across the octagonal pond. The scene was like a Seurat painting, with points of light and colour that individually merely pleased my eye, but when constructed by the brain as a whole, took on shape and order and meaning. I found myself disaffected by this, preferring the meaningless scatter of light not defined too rigidly. Seurat regarded each of his paintings as a temple and the figures and shapes in those paintings, as columns in the temple. He had a mistress called Madeleine who, after his death, disappeared from Paris without a trace.

Someone glanced up at me from the gardens. Instinctively I moved back from the window, turned from the light and joined Xavier at the table again.

He offered me a little cake, a friand.
I should have got some petites madeleines of course, he laughed, Bluey loves them too. He said later that he thought of the expression, esquisser un sourire - to give the ghost of a smile. That's all he got from me on that day.

It was then that I went away to travel with Isobel in Italy and Xavier went on a trip to Australia. During those weeks in Italy a sense of imminence settled upon me like a bird on a nest nurturing a beautiful secret. Upon my return, he asked me, as I knew he would, to have coffee.

Often, during those first few meetings he was engaged in a monologue. Then it was as if he opened an aperture in the sequence of spaces in my silence and, after a time, I joined him in the dance of conversation until there were times when I forgot myself completely.

There had been so few times in my life when that had occurred. I remembered those early days with Isobel and my parents, or having a picnic in Australia with Isobel and Philippe years ago when I was lost in the pleasure of the moment and being with them. They were happy, lying together in the shade of a tree by the dam, and their happiness embraced me. Then they took the sailboat out in the thickening summer breeze, and just after I took a photograph of them, I smelled rain and there arose a wind that took up the little boat and sent it rushing across the water. The boom swung at Philippe and plunged him off the back of the boat into the water. I watched in horror as Isobel reached down to drag him up. He drifted away safely in his life-jacket while the wind took her in the boat and smashed her up against the bank far away on the other side of the dam.

From the beginning Xavier was straightforward in his courtship of me. It was as though he knew immediately that he loved me; as though he was quite
accepting of this fact, not afraid of it at all. He said that when he found me he was able to suspend his disbelief.

_Something about you Madeleine, has been lost in the translation. I see it is my task to find it._

He has been the unravelling of me, and I had hoped for an exorcism. My initial suspicions persisted for a while though - perhaps Xavier was writing a book on Australia and would want to be with me for the information I could provide. I am ashamed of such thoughts when I remember them now. His love has complicated things greatly though. It has brought back the fear.

Once Xavier took me shopping. As we swam upstream with the river of people, he held my elbow. When someone cut in front of us, he said, _Damn you and the horse you rode in on!_

He led me suddenly, into a florist shop named _Vivid_ where we were engulfed by music so loud and beautiful, and such an array of perfumes and flowers that the colours became moving sound. In Avenue Montaigne Xavier held a blue woollen skirt against me, fitted shining boots onto my feet. I glanced at myself in these clothes, unlike any I had ever worn before. Behind me, in the mirror, he was looking at me, a soft curl at each end of his mouth. _You look terrible good_, he said and I grew a new skin. I could hear the splitting of my old one, feel my body shifting purposefully out of it. I emerged in that moment, hung upon the silken thread of his gaze, drying my new wings.

That evening as we lay together he cupped my head in one hand, smoothed my hair with the other and there was the rising, infinite comfort that came with the steady, sure dance of hand upon hair.
I remembered that earlier in the evening, on the way back on the métro I sat with Xavier in the pushdown seats at the door. There were the suede faces, the soporific trance that enfolded everyone on the métro. As the alarm sounded at the next stop, the door flew open and a man leapt into the carriage, landing on his knees at my feet. He made the sign of the cross and begged for money. After I gave him some coins he handed me a piece of paper which uncurled in my hand and read: *The souls of the dead come back as birds.*
The Letter

On an early morning ride with our father, the wind drove the button grass like white caps on the sea. Passing by a hump of black trees on a deep green rise, I guided the Appaloosa into the dark patch of ti-tree where tall mangroves blocked the cold light.

This was the place where the swamp still remained, and everything was older than anywhere else. A bleak space. Brittle folds of paper bark peeled from the ti-tree and fell into the dark water which gave back the forms of dead trees. The swamp birds feasted on the insects and the crakes lived and bred here. The trees were black up to where the dark water had risen and remained, trapped until it had become dank.

Isobel called out, Listen! and we heard a muttering of birds, a moan along the ground, the grunt of a waterlogged black cow, stricken, prostrate, lying broken in a circle of mud where she had tried for a week to gain her feet.

My father slid from his horse, slapping the leather, a flash of knife in his hand, the muscles tightening in his face. I saw the white of the brain where he cut, before the blood. The silence in that dark wet place was cold and, eager to leave it
we guided the horses back out into the light. As we rode close beside my father, Feather at our heels, he explained that sometimes, decisions to end a life had to be made quickly, unexpectedly; that sometimes it was the only thing to do.

The horses paused on the edge of the pink wood of maiden's blush in a clearing in the middle of the bush. We heard the language of birds that seemed to call a name, the sharp 'kirrik-kirrik' of the spotted crake as it flew low over the clearing and settled nearby. The light played on the combination of feather and wing, illuminating a bill of olive-green, a face dotted with red eyes, and black flanks, barred white.

My father leaned over and put his hand gently on the bridle at the mouth of our horse. In the wilderness we were three figures: one in light, two in shadow. He stilled our pony and pointed, a finger to his lips. A fox was standing motionless amongst red and yellow grasses, a beautiful apparition created by the smoking sunlight. We saw him before he saw us. He started sniffing about and when he caught our scent he shivered but did not look our way immediately. As if he did not want to acknowledge our knowledge of him. When the impatient Appaloosa jerked away from my father's grip and executed a capriole, the fox shot into the darkness of the scrub.

Every Thursday afternoon, Ariane caught the bus with me after my lesson with her in the yellow house. When we reached Tarwin my father would be waiting for us with Queenie and the Appaloosa already saddled and we rode out together. He was teaching Ariane to ride, much as he had done with Isobel and me. He was firm but gentle and careful to make sure that she enjoyed herself. Sometimes she tossed
her head in frustration and my father laughed at her impatience. She was a quick learner and soon she was even able to ride bare-back.

One warm Thursday afternoon, the three of us rode to the wide, brown river under an undulating canopy of white silken cloud, the sun gilding the horses’ eyes, the paddocks hazy with summer heat. My father was leading Ariane and me to the swimming hole through country that had a lushness then. We were shining in our swimming costumes, our bodies slipping on the backs of the horses. I sat balanced on the broad back of the Appaloosa, its legs, knee-high in grass, kicking up honey that remained about us in a haze.

We heard the sound before we saw anything. It sounded like breathing. It drew closer like a dragon exhaling. From behind us, there appeared a giant red balloon carried aloft by the air, drifting like a feather in from the open country to the north, accompanied by a few fair-weather cumulus and looking for a place to land. Small figures waved from the swinging gondola. The horses shied and my father struck up a faster pace so that he was just ahead of us. Our horses pricked their ears and started to trot after him. I imagined how we appeared from the balloon: three figures on horseback in an open paddock.

Out in the middle of the empty paddock, as the balloon disappeared, my father started to canter, and we tightened our legs and sat back into the rhythm. I glanced behind at Ariane. I saw that the strap of her swimming costume had slipped down from her shoulder and her breast was floating free. It was creamy, opulent and moved apart from her body. I looked away. I did not tell her that this was happening and turned away until, from the flush on her face, I could tell she had noticed and adjusted her strap. Then my father started to gallop and we followed him to the river, in flight for a split second during each stride.
Once at the river the horses stood in the shade grooming each other’s manes. My father sat on the bank of the river under the wild apple tree, leaning against the trunk, his shirt sleeves rolled up to a place just above his elbows which rested on his drawn up knees. Between his lips he rolled a long piece of dry grass. His brown felt hat was pulled low down over his brow so I couldn’t really tell if he was dozing or watching me swim in shafts of sunlight in the brown swell of water as warm as milk. Ariane dived in to join me, her limbs moving in one fluid, continuous motion through the liquid gloss of the river, making longer and deeper strokes, pausing then swelling forward, gliding on the faint swell she had created. Her luminous hair floated on the dappled surface, shaded for a second as birds passed over the river.

Afterwards we rested on the sand surrounded by the cloying perfume of the honeysuckle. Ariane looked like a shell on the beach, so smooth were the contours of her body, so still did she lie.

I showed my French teacher the photographs from The Age of Margaret Fitzgerald that I had found in a box in the pantry: a tall woman in a long gown, an abundance of hair around her face. There was a photo too of the three sisters, with Margaret sitting on the left, Anna leaning towards her, and Jeannie off to the right of them. Behind them stood Flora and a cousin. Another photograph showed Margaret as an old woman wading through the swamp in gum boots, one hand holding up her skirt and coat. Hopping through the water beside her on slightly higher ground was her dog, Warrigul.
One day when I arrived for my lesson at the yellow house a little early, Ariane was not there, so to pass the time I looked at the books on her shelf. There was a collection of photographs by Man Ray. It was not amongst the books that she had offered me. It was a slim volume with a black cover. As I turned the pages quickly, pieces of women's bodies flashed at me, a pastiche of erotica dislocated from bodies, isolated on the page by the camera. There was manipulation and a submitting to the photographer. I saw breasts lying upon an opened blouse, shocking me with their shape, their diffuse eroticism. Then canna lilies, their petals like folded flesh. And a face. Nothing between the eyes and lips, just a clean expanse of pure white skin against saturated black. I closed the book guiltily as Ariane arrived.

Ariane wore a turquoise silk dress with a sea-wave pattern on the evening she took the scholarship students to see A bout de souffle at the cinema with the tin roof. I heard the rustle of her dress as we sat down. It was just a small group of girls and a couple of parents. She said it was important that we saw the film as it was part of a movement called nouvelle vague. I was a little drunk with the pleasure of sitting between my father and Ariane, excited by the novelty of the jazz score, the quick cutting in and out, close-ups, the wide angle of the camera, and the jerky, compulsive images on the screen. Disjointed images showed Jean Paul Belmondo standing in the middle of rue Compagne Première in Montparnasse near the Acadamia d'Architecture.

Patricia quoted from Faulkner: Between grief and nothing I will take grief.

Michel, on the other hand chose death because he said grief was a compromise.
When Jean Seberg turned Jean Paul Belmondo in to the police at the end, I thought I could hear the sharp, splintering sound of shattering glass.

My father sat up very late alone that night, smoking on the verandah. He had Remembrance of Things Past on his lap, but there was no light to read by. I could see the embers flaring in the dark when he drew on his pipe, smell his tobacco in the air.

Towards the end of that summer, my mother arranged to take Isobel and I on a visit to Mr Garbini who had been unwell. At the last minute I decided to stay behind to finish some homework. My father had left early that morning and was working stock far off, near the river. Alone in the house, I went to a drawer in my mother’s dressing table and drew out her hair. It lay in the box from France that my grandfather brought back to my grandmother after the war. The long black braids were tied with blue silk ribbons. Taking two hair pins from the crystal tray under the mirror, I clipped a braid to each side of my head, behind the ear. I moved my head back and forth so that the plaits slid heavily across my back, my shoulders. I folded the hair across the front of my face so that I could smell its dark, earthy scent. Carefully, I tucked my own short hair behind my ears so that the braids looked as though they belonged to me. This was a ritual that I usually completed at night as a young child, if I woke suddenly and went to my mother and father because the moon was full, and the white sheets were shaking themselves on the clothesline outside, making me afraid. My mother would distract me, soothe me, by saying,

You may take out my hair.
This day though, I went further than I had gone before: I untied the ribbons and loosened the tight braiding until my mother’s hair fell freely about me. And in the mirror I could see my mother’s cheek. Disturbed by a slight noise, I quickly tidied the hair, replaced it in its box and slid it back into the drawer before leaving the room.

Outside, Feather rolled onto her back on the verandah and I threw sticks for her to fetch, then climbed the walnut tree and sat in its branches and smelled walnuts and leaves that were dying. Seeking with my teeth the little wrinkled brains of nut flesh, I cut my tongue on the sharp splinters of walnut shell.

I was passing by a window when I heard a sort of tapping sound, echoed by a pluck of fear in my brain. I had believed myself to be alone at the silent house. I leaned over the garden bed so that my fingers on the window sill were taking the weight of my body, precariously balanced. I heard the sound again and tasted sour blood in my mouth.

The curtain shifted a little in the breeze. A diaphanous shroud of white cotton, it floated out onto the windowsill, touched my fingers lightly, brushed over them, then sank back inside the room again as the breeze let go of it. Through the square panes of glass, in the centre of the room, stood the round rosewood table with the bowl, carefully filled with flowers from my mother’s garden. She had placed them there just that morning after going into the garden early and gathering them. The dark shades of blue, green, lavender and copper made a glowing iridescence. Perhaps one of the roses had fallen. I could see the raw skin of a rose petal on the table. Perhaps that had been the sound that I had heard?

The breeze began again. The sky was gently swelling with grey, and the poplar tree let go of a blizzard of leaves that turned towards me in a rush. As the
curtain moved I saw further inside. My glance flashed in the dim room, and the image remained in my mind, the geometric severity of it, the bones of it constructed there. The walls were pale with the skin of poplar tree shadows. I strained my eyes to read the contents of the room. Two figures lay on the bed amidst rumpled sheets, striped with branches, the grey corners of the room reaching out to the warp and weft of limbs. There was the insistent hum of desire. A half-seen face, a shiny, dark head was pressed into my father's still arms. In the second before I drew away from the window, I heard the sound of my father's voice.

My heart was a clenched fist.

At the Prom, my mother, father and Ariane went down to the creamy silk sand of Venus Bay where sea and sand formed a smooth curve that contained, subdued the movement of the waves. From a weathered wooden post hung the iron bell that was still sometimes used to summon help when a ship was driven onto the rocks in the bay. My father's eyes were strangely lit by the reflections of the sea. Our mother, in dark Sunday clothes, moved a little apart from the other two and looked out to sea with her Jackie Kennedy eyes scanning for disasters that might lie beyond the horizon.

Isobel and I went up through the smell of hot vegetation to the sand dunes. With the sun flinching in the waving sea grasses, we pulled at Feather, buried ourselves and the dog in sand, and spied on the three figures moving slowly in waves of light by the shore. My mother was further along the beach now. She paused a moment, and raised her arm to shelter her eyes as she looked into the sun across the sea. At her feet the sea foam was littered with the remnants of boats,
oars, ossified fish forms, and emaciated driftwood. From her isolated figure I looked back to where my father and Ariane had also paused. They lingered together, looking down at something they had discovered in the sand. Ariane bent down to pick it up. She overbalanced a little and we heard her laughter rise and disappear again in the wind.

It was the fact that they did not touch that gave them away.

With a sharp cry I leapt up and, scattering sand over Isobel and Feather, ran down across the squeaking sand to the sea. The adults watched with Isobel as I waded out and dived into the stark, cold sea, the surf stripping down my boneless white body.

The next day I found a nest of cracked birds' eggs blown down from the palm tree, lying like a wreath on the ground near the house. It belonged to a dark brown swamp harrier. I had seen the bird with its white rump, long yellow legs, the barred tail and wings, hunting rodents, wheeling over the tall grass, the reeds and rushes, diving from high above. Into the twigs and shredded bark of the nest was carefully woven a strand of shiny black hair, a careful fragment of information that I drew from the nest and studied under the microscope.

The screen door snapped and mother's shoes appeared in front of me, the heels worn down. I reached out to touch them but she moved to the laundry, a basket of washing pushed up against her breast.

My mother stood in the steam in the laundry. I saw wads of clothes and bed sheets on the floor. Her eyes were swollen. Red blotches soiled her face. In her hand was the stick she used for beating the clothes in the boiling water in the
copper. The air burst with washing powder. My bones flinched at my mother’s
grief and hatred settled all about me fed by resentment and a jealousy I did not
understand.

Far off my father was herding cattle to shelter from the coming rain.

Why didn’t you want to go with him, Madeleine? That’s not like you. You
could still catch him if you leave now.

But I had taken out my exercise book and was carefully drawing the hair,
perfectly contrived, a laser of dark light.

By the time the sun had moved further around in the sky, I was helping
Isobel and my mother preserve blackberries in glass jars that had levers on the lids
to keep the fruit perfectly sealed in. Suddenly the linoleum on the kitchen floor
splashed red with my mother’s blood. She had cut her hand on a sharp knife.
Blackberries lay in the blood, and she wept, trying to utter the words of her grief,
to give it a shape. I watched helplessly as Isobel quietened her. She cleansed,
calmed, and wrapped up her pain: a mother to our mother.

Ariane gave us a lesson on silk production in Paris. The Place des Vosges, she told
us, where Madame de Sévigné had lived at one time, had originally been designed
as a place to manufacture silk. She described how a piece of raw silk was placed on
the table to receive its colours. Indigo was crushed in a sandstone tub and then
used to prepare madder, to make a deep red dye. A final indigo bath made their
tones particularly tempered and deep - the mellowness, matte surface and sombre
reflections of madder silk.

The word madder, of course, entranced the class, but particularly me, as I
dipped further into the colour of the heart.
The sky was a cold sulfurous yellow all the next weekend. In the home paddock near the machinery shed, Isobel was speaking to a sheep. We had heard our father say that he would kill that sheep. Isobel could not bear the death of any animal and was looking deeply into its gentle ovine face. She thought that it was important for the sheep to hear a human voice before it died. The sheep had been separated from its flock, and their bleats were like the guttural voices of chanting monks.

Nearby, a tree trunk was mounted on three legs, ready. In the shed were choppers, saws and knives of various sizes. On the wall was an illustration of the cuts of meat; a sheep divided into its eating sections: baron, saddle, loin, rib chops, shoulder.

I wondered how it felt to be chosen for slaughter.

When my father approached, the sheep knew. Again and again I had been a witness to this wrong, and my inaction made me a participant: each time a sheep was killed, Isobel and I suffered and tried to hide this suffering because we knew it was weak. Apart from Isobel, other people did not seem to experience this suffering. The children of our neighbours did not feel this. Nor did the girls at school. My father was not aware of this suffering in each of his daughters. It was something completely foreign to him and would have galled him had he known. We hid our suffering because we were ashamed of it and afraid to offend our father. It was the loss of his love that we feared.

The yellow tincture of the sky deepened. The sheep was impassive as my father dragged it on its back to a worn patch outside the shed, Isobel and I trailing behind him. It was a large sheep and when it began struggling, trying to break
away, my father lost his footing for a second and half fell on the hand he had put out to try to steady himself.

*Get hold of it Madeleine.*

I held the animal against my leg the way that I had often seen him do, not unlike the way a shearer held a sheep when he shored away the wool from its belly.

My father had sprained his hand.

*You do it Madeleine. I'll tell you how.*

The sheep moved against my leg. I did not speak to the sheep. I knew that I could not speak to this doomed creature.

My father adjusted the animal, took hold of my arm with his good hand, and showed me the way you turned the head so that the neck was stretched back, exposed. The sheep struggled again suddenly and almost escaped my grip. I knew from the guide set out in my father’s Coopers notebook that the heart of a sheep would normally beat seventy five to eighty times a minute. As its eyes reached backwards, I could feel it beating much faster. The sheep began to pant as my father gave me the large killing knife which he had sharpened that morning. Isobel had closed her eyes and was holding her breath, but she did not move away.

I dug the knife into the neck and held fast with my other arm as the sheep kicked and screamed. Soon the scream became blood and shot out in a spray of violence onto the dirt. I did not let go but held the knife fast, finishing the job. When the animal no longer moved against my leg, I let it fall to the ground and untied its legs. My father stepped back a little and told me exactly what to do. Because I had seen him do it so many times, it was easy for me to slide the knife down under the bone into the breast of the sheep and drag it down the belly so that it sliced open. I handed the knife to my father and reached through the steam into
the creature and paused a moment, holding the heart in my hands. There was a moment of gratitude at the warmth I found there, for it was a cold morning. As it slipped warmly in my hand, I took the knife again, gripped it firmly and sliced the heart free. I threw it aside as I had seen my father do and the butcher bird waiting on the tree jumped a little in anticipation. It proffered its long hook-tipped bill. The dogs, trained in detachment, crept forward whilst averting their eyes from us.

I slipped the knife under the wool and through the skin making a *stch, stch* sound as I skinned the sheep, stripping it down to a carcass. My father helped me lift it onto the hook in the shed so that it was easier to peel the skin away, which I did by whipping the knife at the fine white fat that attached the skin to the body. It tore, like paper that had been glued to a surface, my fingers feeling, here and there, the texture of bone. I finished, and could tell that I had done it well, and that he was proud of me but for the first time in my life I did not care. The killing, the day's slaughter had merely sealed me off from my father forever. Beside me was the sound of Isobel's twisted breath. I turned to her, giving him my back. The knife lay where it had fallen on the ground, and the dogs licked hard at the dark bouquet of dried blood in the dirt.

Later in the ambiguity of twilight, Isobel and I crept out of the house and climbed a swaying gum tree. She rubbed my hands hard with the lemon scent of the leaves, but I still smelled the flesh and the sour blood of the animal on my hands and apprehended my terrible collusion with my father. It was against this that the course of all my following actions were set.

*S*ometimes, we heard my mother weeping in her room when she thought there was no-one around. Once, when I went into the bathroom after she had been there, I
looked down into the ceramic toilet bowl and saw blood. Much blood. I rushed to find Isobel and showed her, pointing.

*Our mother’s heart is bleeding. It’s fallen through her body there.*

Isobel stepped back, shocked. She didn’t say anything. I remember that she withdrew after that. As my anger swelled into a dark cloud, Isobel retreated. I tried to tell her what was happening, but somehow it didn’t eventuate just as I wanted our father to tighten his grip upon my mother, not let her slip away like that. But he didn’t, and she did.

*One morning when I was searching on the Appaloosa for the fox I discovered the burial place of the lady of the swamp. I had been riding all morning, but the fox eluded me, so I tied the reins to a tree with vase shaped flowers growing from its branches, and set about building a sharp stick fire in a depression in the damp ground. I buried some potatoes in the embers and sat beside it, watching the clouds scrolling across the sky, waiting for them to cook. Feather was tracing deer and fox with her nose. She shifted some leaves and disturbed the shard of an animal, one of her own. She whined a little growing more interested in the soil and the other bones that lay there resting with stones, curdled in the dirt. I pulled her away a little and noticed the remnants of a dog collar, a long narrow bone, too long for any animal I knew. Carefully I pushed aside more leaves to reveal, in a small garden of bones, the remains of the lady of the swamp, lying curled around her dog, Warrigul, where they had ended together ten years before.*

*On my return home I removed my gum boots by the back door on the verandah and carefully leaned the tops over so the spiders wouldn’t enter in the*
hollow time of night. My mother silently placed the food on the table. I told no one of my discovery, not even Isobel when she asked me where I had been so long. I watched my father eating, and bent my head to my own plate, busy with my rogue thoughts. The Aga breathed gently into the kitchen and the warmth shifted to other rooms. Betrayal formed in my mind like the swelling in the body of the silkworm. When the thread comes into contact with the air, it becomes hard.

On the following Wednesday, the day before Ariane would come to us after school in order for my father to continue his riding lessons with her, my father pointed to the sky and said there was a floodrain coming. He instructed me carefully to tell Ariane not to come.

*Be sure to tell her that I will ring her to make another time.*

He said it with such transparent sadness.

The next day I was tired in class because I had been writing all night, full of my plan. Ariane and I were studying the letters of Madame de Sévigné because they were widely regarded as an exemplary model for the epistolary genre. Her husband was killed in a duel in 1651 and following this her daughter Françoise moved away following her marriage. Madame de Sévigné's letters to her beloved daughter were full of news, events and gossip. Her natural manner of writing, the conversational tone of these letters had, Ariane explained, provided an insight into the nature of French society at that time.

*Proust says that Mme Sévigné's letters are like paintings.*

As I had sat in my room that night, contemplating my task, I grew sleepy and allowed my eyes to close and my head to rest on the table. Upon waking I saw
that it was very late. I studied my notebooks, picking out words that I had collected and hoarded.

The next day I went to school full of my plan, like a mosquito bursting with a bloody promise. Everything depended on the letter.

Mrs Teasdale answered when I knocked on the door of the yellow house. She asked after my parents, and led me to where Ariane was waiting for me in her room. I placed my books and pencil case on the table near a blue glass jug. I picked up an ornament made of egg-shell glass so fine that it felt merely as if something had brushed over my hand. Around the room were shelves of books evenly stacked in tight lengths, a tilted mirror. I imagined what would remain in her room and made a mental inventory of the objects that would point to her absence: the silver-backed hairbrush with some strands of hair laced along the bristles, the white cup and saucer half drunk, things she had collected on her travels like the preserved duck egg covered in volcanic ash, a pearl shell from the coral reefs.

Ariane indicated the chairs and table, and I sat down and we went through my exercises.

When we had finished I asked if she could help me and showed her the letter. She read it twice and looked at me a little quizzically. I told her that I had found it in a book from the library, and asked her to translate it for me into English. I handed her a piece of paper.

She glanced at her watch quickly and took it from me. She wrote out the letter in her green ink, in slow, ambiguous arabesques. She wrote, paused and wrote and when she had finished, smoothed the sheet of paper and read it aloud to ensure that she had been accurate in her translation.
Dearest,

By the time you read this, I will be gone. I dreamt of snow last night and knew that I must go.

Let me tell you.

My soul stood like a tree, bare in winter when I came to this foreign land, my heart askew, like a bird flailing across continents. I did not expect to find my resting-place here with you and kept our love like a secret in a silk sack that I wore between my breasts. Like a monk at his manuscript, I have studied you, and the gift that you are. You are the light at a paper window. You have reached the centre of me, opened me like a precious letter. I travelled with you in the night and will not forget the journeys that we took into the deep heart.

I am with you there always...

Ariane was thoughtful for a moment, then a smile animated her face.

It's quite beautiful Madeleine, isn't it?

After the lesson, she asked me to wait while she changed and collected what she needed for the riding lesson. I told her that my father and I were going to show her where I had found the lady of the swamp. I could see that she was anxious to be gone. Dressed in my mother's jodhpurs and white shirt, Ariane returned to the sitting room and picking up a bone-handle brush she stroked her hair with it, so that her face was concealed by the dark hair for a moment. Then she took an opaque jar from the cupboard. She scooped up a little cream from it, and smoothed it over her hands, folding them back and forth across her palms, the backs of her hands. Then she raised her palms to her nose and inhaled the perfume for a second. Her face was a picture of anticipation.
I stopped breathing for a moment. And there was a great stillness in the room before she laughed and, taking up her jacket and things, said, *Let us go then, you and I. We have a bus to catch, n’est ce pas?*

I swept up my books quickly and started to follow her to the door. I turned back a moment and propped the letter against the blue glass jug on the table with wild care.

The trees were scrabbling at the edges of the wide green paddock. The air was glacial, the light fracturing. Clouds were massaging the sky and their shadows fell like a dark pendulum over the land as the wind made water and waves of the tussocks in the blue light. We rode past a group of aberdeen angus, their Scottish faces turned towards us in alarm as we approached.

An iron gale arose and tore in from Bass Strait. The distant sound of a bell ringing was chopped in and out by the wind. Clouds formed in waves and broke in the sky. The horses were skittish, tugging on the reins, picking a path through fallen wood. Queenie pranced sideways around a stump, shying at a wombat that stumbled into our path, miserable with the mange eating away at it, making it blind.

Soon we reached the dense forest of tall straight swamp gums, blackwood, twisted ti-tree, musk, blanketwood, hazel and currant bush. It was the part of our place closest to Cape Liptrap. To the east lay the Bald Hills and Waratah Bay that clasped the wrecks of *Alcandre* and *Rubicon*. We were within two miles of the sands where whales’ skeletons floated in the sea. A bloodwood seeped red resin. Toadstools were acidic orange on the deep blue branch.

A bird’s song of alarm cut up the thickening air.
I slipped off the Appaloosa and he snorted, leant his breast into me, steaming his warm smell into the air. There was the rich scent of sods, the pungent odour of organic decay. The temperature was dropping more quickly than anticipated. I could imagine where the mercury would be on the gauge nailed to the verandah post at the back door, where I had seen my father tapping the falling glass the night before, fearing the full development of an intense low.

The clouds were swollen shapes, dark masses, groaning with their load. Rain was coming in from the slapping sea. It would be a deluge.

Ariane climbed off Queenie behind me and let her feed. She held the reins loosely and ran her hand along the silk of her neck, her face smudged with flung hair. I think..., she started anxiously. The creamy flesh tones of her face had bleached to a pallid ash; she was dematerialising in the frayed light, I think we should head back now, Madeleine. I admire your intrepid adventures but really, the weather is changing...

The rain was like a dark filter over the day.

My father will be here soon, I replied. He said we should wait for him so he can see the bones too. He hasn’t seen them yet.

She stepped on a twig that sharply snapped and she looked behind her.

Tying up the horses quickly, I beckoned to her and led her to the darkest place in the wilderness where the vines dragged down from the trees and the black peat was always moist. Exposed tree roots lay like snakes in the grass. I indicated the grave in the small clearing in the skewed trees where I had left the spade. She bent her head to protect herself from the rain and a strand of hair wisped at the edge of her mouth. When she looked back at me, her eyes were white in a face turned dark by fear. She drew her hair from her face with a gesture that spoke of a
weary sort of submission. There was only the sound of a crake's breaking voice, the soft grunting of the horses.

A flash of lightning entombed the scene.

The gathering cattle stood with their gleaming black backs to the white rain, seeking shelter under trees. The horses' hooves, hurrying towards home, slipped on the grass, bright with the sluicing rain. I gripped Queenie's reins more firmly and brought her closer to the Appaloosa. Trees were bent so low they were dragging in the rising water. The wind ripped at my soaking hair and my lips cracked. A tree nearby split, shrieking in a flash of light, and the horses, shocked by the violent birth of the storm, swerved sideways through pools of water dimpled by rain.

By the time I had made my way along the bleak stretch back to the house and let the horses go in their paddock, I was drenched and covered in the heavy smell of earth. My father's strawberry clover was drowning in the water that was creeping over the land up to the house, making the roads impassable.

In the shed on the other side of the house, I lifted the saddles from the horses' backs and settled them onto the wooden beam where they were kept. I slipped the bridles from their heads and let the horses go. I could see that the car had not yet returned. The rain was drilling into the earth all around me. The icy wind swept off the flat white flood waters and struck my wet clothes making my skin turn blue.

My mother and Isobel appeared suddenly through the olive tones of the drenching rain. My mother called into the face of the gale as they hurried towards me, through the swells of ti-tree, across earth stuck in its own glug, sludge, each
picking up armfuls of wood. Everything was strewn, broken. There was a wreckage of branches, bark stripped from trees, skins of plants, broken webs and thistle stalks like wild duck feathers flying upwards in the gale.

*Come inside Madeleine!* cried my mother, but the rain soaked her words before they reached me.

Isobel hurried ahead through bursts of static to open the screen door and we stacked the wood in the woodbox beside the Aga to dry as the wind rose again and a chair outside crashed down onto the verandah with the sound that made a heart leap. Simultaneously came the thunder and brilliant, jagged bolts of lightning illuminated the room.

It was a long time before we heard the sound of oilskins brushing at the door, and saw my father come in, the water swimming from his hat. There was an urgency in the way he reached for the black telephone to ring a neighbour to get the latest reports about the flood. We heard him yelling down the line as the rain drummed on the corrugated iron roof, so loud that I couldn’t hear my own thoughts. He told us that a ship had foundered in the heavy surf, and I remembered hearing the bell’s voice breaking and rolling in on the wind. Someone had been pulling the bell-rope down on the beach.

The rain fell down the chimney, the power failed and the oil lamps were lit as the cold crept through the house. A door banged open. I moved to the hearth to warm myself, and stared at the intensity of the flame.

That night it was like sleeping under a train, tied to the tracks.

*On the night after the deluge, I saw the moon wading towards me through the lavish darkness, grappling with the black trees, thrusting them aside until it was
full in the sky for a moment. The shadows were crosshatched about me as I sat bleary-eyed in bed. All through the watery night, on successive waves of sleep, the name, Ariane, glided and mumbled. A voice, my own, said out loud, la lune ne garde aucune rancune.

The next days and nights passed dimly with the memory of water like a blanket across my brain. I slept for days, wearing my father's socks and curled up, bound in the safety of sleep, cocooned. I was waking and dreaming – part of each world, belonging to neither. I lifted my head and heard a charcoal nocturne playing somewhere, a river of music flooding down the passage into my room, the final note prolonged on the air and hardly ending. Then I was falling again, diving down to the bottom of the sea of sleep and settling on the sand there, dreaming of that which was irrecoverably lost. It was dark, the moon obscured, and the shape of my fate frightened me. There were lights far off, moving in the trees like lanterns searching against the black sky. A crake swung by my window with a cry like the last sound a human makes.

My mother wiped my forehead with a cool flannel and I roused. In my dream there had been something curled about my back in the bed: a long skin left by a snake in the night.

I listened for my mother's step upon the wooden floor. I slept and woke again to find my mother was still with me. There was a break in the sky; the moon had sloughed off the dark skin of cloud. The sour rain had stalled and in the morning the water had receded. Beyond the window the land was covered in a shawl of spider webs as far as I could see, making their own silver sea. The light waved like a breeze, and the whole room was lit. There was a whistling in my lungs when I breathed, as though a bird were caught there. Isobel brought me breast tea.
and sat with me as I began coughing up pearls of phlegm. She read aloud to me deeply into the night.

After a week the doctor came, suspecting the sleeping sickness caused by hydatids worming in my brain, lulling it into a torpor. He said that it would take time for me to recover myself.

My father drove me to the convent to collect some schoolwork, for the doctor had advised that I stay away from school until completely well. He thought some French books would help me recuperate and amuse me during my convalescence. I looked out of the window on the journey there and did not speak for I had woken from my sleep a stranger to myself.

Sister Paulinus stood in front of us, her large hands uncomfortably crossed before her. Her wide mouth was pressed into a straight line, her eyes creased and dark. A frown on her face. The cross hung against the black curtain of her habit. Her companion, Sister Maria, silently watched her while she told my father that Ariane had left the school suddenly, without a word to anyone. That they were all so disappointed and, she hinted, not a little hurt, by her sudden, unexpected departure.

There had been a mysterious letter apparently. Mrs Teasdale had found it when she noticed Ariane’s absence.

On the way home we stopped at the yellow house and my father and I sat at Mrs Teasdale’s kitchen table as she retold the story. Most people thought that Ariane had left everything after the chaos caused by the flood, gone back to Paris, but Mrs Teasdale had her doubts, she told my father. The police came, searched the
drawers, cupboards, and closets her room and took away some of her things, including some clothes. The police thought that the letter explained the situation.

I've never read such a thing.

Mrs Teasdale pursed her lips, drew the letter from her apron pocket and handed it to my father to read, then moved to straighten a table cloth, her turned back assembling itself into a rebuke. I noticed that the pages were curled in the manner of a document that had been reread many times.

With quiet deliberation, he took the letter, stood up and walked to the window, looking out. He removed his glasses and pressed his forefinger to his forehead, pushing up the skin. He reset his glasses upon his nose and read the letter. On my father's face, an expression I recognised but could not name. He forgot himself a moment, and went to put the letter in his pocket as if it belonged to him.

I went for a ride alone with Feather trotting close to my side. Suddenly, near the river, I came across my father kneeling, his back hunched, his leg flung awkwardly to one side, hand to his forehead as I'd seen him in mass. His gum boots were trimmed in black peat, his hair hung down across his face. His ankle, which he had once broken in a fall from his horse, would be aching in the cold. The gloom lowered, the pockets of grass shone a wet green. He moved his head towards me when he realised I was there.

He turned abruptly away, stood up, walked to his horse and rode away.

Then there was my wild gallop across the paddock. I rode bareback, flung out along the horse's body like hair.

That night my father told me that soon we would be leaving Tarwin.
Isobel was crying in her room.

*It is because of you somehow, that we have to go.*

She would not speak to me.

*Our car had owlish headlights, a chrome bumper bar and a grille across the front.*

I placed my hand on the curve of the bonnet, then pulled the silver door handle out towards me and got in beside Isobel, behind my mother. My father handed me a small suitcase and climbed in to the driver’s seat. And there was just my mother’s hand in a white glove, reaching out from a stretch of dark clothing to close the door, and the car in the settling dusk on the pale road.

A wet leaf on the windscreen was like a piece of stained glass in the last ray of light. My father pointed the blunt forehead of the car towards the bridge and slowly we rode over the moving wooden boards. On the other side, water crept at the wheels. We left behind a sheet thrown over a pile of stacked furniture, exposed lightbulbs, and a fallen picture. My father’s face flashed in the rear-vision mirror.

*I became even more alert to the danger of beauty in women after that. I studied the power of beauty and the way that we are delicately held in its thrall. I slept with my window open to the moon when it was full, because I had read that the moon could make you beautiful. Every month for years, I bathed in the moon’s blue light.*

*I avoided beauty in others. Carefully, quietly I avoided it because it made my heart bleed. It was as though beauty bruised me, injured me somehow: beauty was the fin cutting across the sea towards me.*
Nightswimming

I slip out the back entrance of the lycée and catch the train back into the centre of Paris. Walking up the rue de Rivoli towards my apartment, I turn left and enter the hair salon in rue des Mauvais-Garçons, sealed from the noises of the street by thick glass.

A young man clothes me in a white linen robe and ties it at my waist. He places a ticket in the cuff and I make my way up the circular staircase to the washing room. My hair is loosened now and unwinds upon my shoulders, a veil across my face for a moment before he takes my head, bracketing a hand beneath my chin, one at my forehead and bends it back. I surrender to the warmth of water as my hair is gathered and washed. Lulled by the hypnotic motion of the hand upon the head, the massaging of the scalp, the warmth of the water, the honey silkiness of the shampoo, I dream of ancient Rome when the ornatrix was specially trained in the art of hair arranging. Floral tapestries were woven from the hair of a hundred members of the same family.
When it is time to rise, I reluctantly descend the staircase. Gently propelled, I am seated near the window. I see in the mirror the woman beside me who has emerged from the flashing scissors cry sharply into the clean air.

*C'est différent, c'est différent!*

Armand bends my head forward.

*This swimming Madeleine, it destroys your hair.*

He is surprised when I ask him to cut it all off.

As he concentrates on his task, I glance up for a moment. My face is white in the mirror and my long hair slips and winds about my neck as he cuts. He gently bends my head forward again and closing my eyes, I feel my hair being shed down over my shoulders. A heavy weight let loose, it tumbles onto the shining wooden floor as Armand snips rapidly, carving my remaining hair to make a beautiful shape.

Someone has taken the seat beside me. A small dog curls up beside her expensive Italian shoes. She speaks to Armand in a deep, honey voice and inquires about his health as a second hairdresser approaches.

*What would you like done today madam?*

*Nothing out of the ordinary, the magnificent voice replies, simply make me beautiful, as usual.*

As Armand lifts my head, I see in the mirror a square-faced woman of great ugliness. She catches my eye and laughs at my surprise.

*Night swimming is a ritual I first took up after going with Xavier to see L'Orangerie and the treasure it contained, the swimming water lilies. For this last time I walk along the Seine. On the Île St-Louis I step into a small shop and buy a*
small package of za’atar as a last gift for Xavier. As I cross the bridges to the rue de Pontoise and the swimming pool I can smell the spicy mixture of ground sumac berries, toasted sesame seeds and dried thyme.

The blue of the pool reminds me of the thirteen-year-old girl who, in 1876, slipped on the ice and fell into a deep coma. When she awoke, thirty-two years later, she said that her only memories of the lost decades were of great darkness and blue men. She had been captured, stilled in blue.

There are few people present at the pool this evening. I examine them closely. Some lie, laced on the diving boards, pulling down the legs of their bathers. There are only one or two swimmers gleaming in the dark water. Drawing my dress over my head, to reveal my swimming costume, I take a white towel and walk to the edge of the illuminated pool.

My skin is losing its colour as winter approaches and becoming crinkled around the toes from the swimming I do each night. The pool stretches out before me and I fold myself into the water, which clothes me in silk: it is warmer than the air but not as warm as my blood, so I quickly pull the goggles down over my eyes and slip under the water. My new hair feels light. Immediately my thoughts dissolve in the water.

Deep in the pool I can see ahead of me the blue water and the lights dazzling at the bottom. The water moves against my skin and I reach my arms into it, hardly disturbing the surface of the water at all. My hands break gently and quietly, and my arms dip in and out, pulling me along silently with a lazy ease to the cadence of my strokes. Gaining speed, I lean down upon my shoulders and my arms wave in circles through the water before me, conducting my passage. I take longer, deeper strokes, pausing upon the wave against the side of my face,
slumbering lazily upon it for a moment before waking into the next stroke, then swelling forward again. Already I am halfway up the pool and moving faster, sweeping through the water, displacing it so that my body can pass easily through. Small bubbles press themselves between my fingers and rise in circles of light. Reaching the end I do a tumble turn and feel the water streaming through my hair, waving at my body as I stretch forward, my legs driving me on again. Breathing heavily, my arms are spinning through the water, the blood filling my heart. In the water I am made alone.

When I have swum enough I pause and draw air down into my lungs. I climb out of the pool at the deepest end and lean over the water. It looks as deep as a volcanic lake, and the eyes there meet mine. I am suspended for the fall. My body curves as I dive into the water and swim along the blue tiles at the bottom with my head, my breasts and shoulders arched back, my legs above me. When I dive into the air again it is as though I slip out of my skin, out of my body, and become some wild sea creature in a dream, scooping bubbles of light, my breath stilled for a few moments.

Then I surface quietly, like a peaceful thought.

Xavier opens the door. He stands there looking at my freshly cut hair. He touches it with the back of his hand. My face follows the motion of his hand. His forefinger traces my newly revealed neck, the swollen skin around my eyes where my swimming goggles have been.

*Oh good. I can get high on chlorine tonight.*

We go out into the street with its smell of roasting chesnuts. The moon is a black cat’s eye, half closed in the night. Xavier has been going for many years to a
jazz club, a cave, on rue des Halles. He usually sits at a table with the same group of friends. There is a loyalty about them, and the way they greet new musicians.

This evening he leads me through the press of people down the wooden staircase and we sit at the end of the long table. I am allowing myself to be led because the swimming has made me drowsy. As I turn to watch, I can feel him move a little closer to me. He taps his fingers on my arm, places his hand upon my wrist and listens with me. The music is loud, hot and fast. Added to it are the sounds of chairs scraping back quickly, the clattering of plates and glasses, the smell of sweat and expresso coffee, the haloes of grey cigarette smoke.

Then there is a change in tempo and the crowd settles. Music blossoms from the sax.

*I'm living in a kind of daydream...*

As though we are floating on the surface of the music, Xavier draws me to my feet and we begin to dance. We have not done this before in public. Some months ago he suggested that he teach me how to dance. And we had practised a little in his apartment. But I knew he never danced because the others had told me, laughing. There were women in the group who would have loved to dance with him.

So he takes me into his arms and smiles as I try to get my feet to move the right way. He lifts up my chin so that I cannot see my feet. He makes me look at him. And it is there. Desire. I relax and move with him through the music.

*The very thought of you...*

When the music ends and we walk back to the table to sit down, the crowds of people at the surrounding tables begin to clap. I look up, surprised, not having experienced such a thing before.
We return to the rue de Médicis with the night opening and closing on the moon. Because Xavier is with me, I feel secure.

*I found something precious today.*

Xavier leads me to the sofa.

*Years and years ago I was in Sydney, and I saw this very performance. I was in the audience. Now, today, I found a tape of it. Watch this.*

He is beside himself with the excitement of his good fortune. He plays the tape and I see Joan Sutherland singing *Lucia* in the opera house by the listening harbour. The mad scene. The dark web of hair trailing down onto the long white nightgown, the streaks of blood, the knife still in her hand. In her madness she was unaware of her appearance, indifferent to its meaning. Such is Xavier's absorption in the voice, that he does not see the expression on my face.

He wraps his arms around me. It is the scent of him that I drink first, as though there are tiny neurons in my brain that move, that swoon when his scent hits them. Taking my hand, he leads me to the bedroom and places his other hand upon my throat and slides it up under my jaw. He holds my face and keeps it there, his head thrown back a little, until my eyes meet his. He kisses me then in a slow declension of desire. The warmth of my mouth upon his mouth which moves to my throat as his arms pull me close to him until I am wrapped, cocooned in him. He holds his ear to my heart as though listening for the sound of the sea in a shell.

When he speaks of love, he enunciates his words clearly as if he is speaking to a deaf woman, or someone who doesn’t know the language.

I am swimming as his hands make a curve of my body, and it arches down again, diving into him. And I lose my weight, lose direction in the swirl of the dive. I seek his eyes and close them beneath my lips. There is a tangle of hips, thighs,
sinewy ribs, breasts and long shinbones. I am swollen and soft, tremulous as he pushes his face into my body, along my bones, his hands finding their way to the warm, flowing parts of me.

The silence now as we move together, a coalescence of bodies undulating upon each other, like divers on the sea floor. There is his mouth upon my breast, and my cries are bubbles rising to explode on the surface of the water. Wave after wave breaks in me, and we are washed to lie together upon the shore. And then, when he murmurs, as always without irony, Ma belle Madeleine, there is a sense of great lightness before the amnesia of sleep comes, pressing down upon me like a pillow, sweeping me over the edge of night.

Early in the morning I creep out of his arms. During the night his long body has settled around the curve of mine. He has folded his warmth around me, the hollows in his body like depressions, mauve waves in the sand. He does not wake. Rising from the bed in the dark I pick up my clothes, my boots. I shiver a little. I am slipping my moorings.

In the bathroom where the night lamp casts some light on the floor, I dress in my woolen skirt, the boots Xavier polished for me. I drop one boot on its side and he stirs, murmurs my name. Standing quite still, I hear his breath become heavy again, and wait until he has settled back into a deep, early morning sleep. Then I draw out the letter from the pocket of my coat and place it on the table. Becoming aware of some movement, I pause a moment, just long enough to see the headlights of a passing car slash across Bluey's eye. The bird is hunched, watching me closely as I quickly go out into the street, the flood of air.

The street sweeping machine is making its way along rue de Médicis. I am hit in the face by the diesel fumes from the truck, and suck it in, sniff it up for with
it comes the perfume of grass, flattened and made a luminous green by a sour rain.
Even in the early morning, in the dark, there are shadows. Turning into rue de Vaugirard I am met by water rushing up out of the drains and gushing loudly along the gutter. A black man in a luminous green vest washes water over the stone with a great broom - scrubbing, scrubbing the streets.

Masked by darkness, I walk up the middle of Quai Saint Bernard, my shoes shouting on the cobblestones. Ahead there is a person or a tree standing in the early morning light. The mist is like a hat pulled down over my eyes. A man walks along with his head moving from side to side, like a soldier alert for ambushing guerrillas in the scrub. He carries, in a transparent plastic bag, a cabbage that looks like a head. The square lamps give an orange light. A shutter moves at a window. The airport bus comes for some tourists and the voices of Australian children echo in the empty street. I am tired. My skin drags on my bones.

There has been a storm in the night and people have left umbrellas in bins along the street, flung aside like dead cormorants. I cross the Seine. The lights on the black water, curves of light under the bridges and their distorted reflections, are like Chinese calligraphy. I glean the close smell of imminent rain.

I see a white dog slinking along the street.
I whisper to it as it passes, Mon cœur.

On the train the steady hymn of the train on its tracks sweeps me away from the Gare de Lyon and Paris, turning me against the pull of gravity. Its hollow, drawn out singing like instruments in an orchestra tuning up for a concerto. This journey, like others, no matter how small or how mundane, no matter what its purpose, causes my pulse to quicken. Every journey I take repeats that other
journey when I rode through the icy rain into the darkness, and put beauty in its grave.

The white river of the early morning mist begins to run faster outside the train. The air finally gives way and lets through the rain as the conductor removes his sunglasses and leans towards me for my ticket. He mistakes me for someone who knows where she is going. In *A bout de souffle* Michel tells Patricia that Italy’s the place to go. I am heading for the darkest corner of the forest, because that is where I came from. I’m heading for Ravello and Isobel.

Like the Chinese swallow that regurgitates the crumbly white strips of Japanese moss to build its nest, I am spewing memory. What I have been is collapsing in mid-flight. It must be Isobel, to whom I go. To tell the story in a vast unburdening, because, like me, Isobel has killed what she loved. Was it the harsh landscape that shaped both our futures so? The thought of telling Isobel everything, the whole story, is like glimpsing a far off puff of approaching steam, feeling a small vibration on a train track in the empty landscape of my unspooling memory.

When I struck Ariane with the spade she buckled and then lay on her side like a boat on a beach, stones in her mouth. I saw in my hands the way a skull’s walls fell in, blunting the blood cells, brushing the membrane with bone; the sudden dulling of hair, floating circles of blood, her spine a broken column. In that cool and odorous place, in that darkness, I made myself alone. It didn’t take long for the rest: the spade in the ground made a sound like tearing sobs. The whip bird spoke again and again.

I remember that I looked around, seeking a trace of absolution, if only that left by a stag in the undergrowth, but saw instead three avian heads on the branch
above, watching me. I turned away from them to position the rocks, plucking away a curl of brittle, murdered hair, sloughed from her head.

Now the conductor leaves me, moves on to the next passenger and as we pass a treeless cemetery lying between a railway line and a road, a couple sits down opposite me. He examines his fingernails. The woman feels the lipstick on her lips with her tongue. Their eyes are sharply turned away from each other.

The train is speeding towards Italy. I look at my watch. Xavier would be rising now. He is walking to the bathroom. Sleep is heavy about him and he is looking for me. He thinks that perhaps I am in the kitchen making a bowl of coffee. Because he does not have his glasses on, he does not see the letter at first. It sits on the table, set against the sugar bowl, a square, white envelope.

He sees it now and pauses a moment. Perhaps his heart sinks a little because the envelope has his name on the outside in my handwriting. He takes up the letter and, as he walks towards the light at the window, his hands open it. His fingers are trembling as they slide along the flap, as they tear the paper away. He draws out the letter, unfolds it, and puts on his glasses, turning his back to the window so that the light falls upon the pages. He reads:

Dearest,

By the time you read this, I will be gone. I dreamt of snow last night and knew that I must go.

Let me tell you.

My soul stood like a tree, bare in winter when I came to this foreign land, my heart askew, like a bird flailing across continents. I did not expect to find my resting-place here with you and kept our love like a secret in a silk sack that I wore between my breasts. Like a monk at his manuscript, I have studied you, and the gift
that you are. You are the light at a paper window. You have reached the centre of me, opened me like a precious letter. I travelled with you in the night and will not forget the journeys that we took into the deep heart.

I am with you there always...
Isobel
In Ravello, Isobel sits on a wall at Villa Cimbrone above the Gulf of Salerno sheltered from the autumn wind by orange trees. Amidst the Siberian irises, liliums in the grass, the steps to the Terrazza dell' Infinito are waves upon the sea. She sees the throat of a bird swelling with the dew of the evening, making an arch against the sky.

The coast turns pink and she becomes aware of the shadow and its fall, so she leaves the garden and walks along the walled lanes to catch the bus down to Amalfi, where she will meet Luca at the Caffè Pompeii. She walks down the via del Fusco, past the Hotel Villa Amore which has shut for winter now. They have brought the sidewalks in. A cat growls at her from the top of a stone wall and a light flashes in the evening as a window closes. There are nets strung through the groves to catch the oranges as they fall.

She reaches the piazza and sees some men loading sand into the saddlebags upon two forlorn donkeys. Before she passes into the tunnel that leads to the bus stop, she touches one of the animals upon the neck.

Waiting for the Sita bus, Isobel hides from the wind in the dusk on the steps of a garden hanging over the Costiera Amalfitana. The plane tree above her has already lost its leaves. A little boy comes and sits beside her on the steps, his
schoolbag on his back, his face a lamp. As they wait together, he senses her anxiety to be on her way, and he whispers reassuringly to her in the dark, *Sita*.

It grows colder there on the edge of the high garden. She hears other whispers in the dark. The boy looks up as a black car comes to a sudden stop beside them, seeming to draw itself together, like a dog ready to lunge. He steps towards Isobel as the men approach her.

The boy does not know the language they speak. It is the cut-glass sound of Katoomba cold he hears in their voices, as one puts out an arm to shepherd Isobel into the waiting car. And with a muffled screech of tyres the car wheels around the piazza, and takes Isobel back through the tunnel. It winds her down to Amalfi, away from the boy. Falling away from Ravello.

She hears the scratching sound of a cigarette lighter. In one fluid movement the detective in the passenger seat raises his hand to the ceiling of the car. He turns on the light. Isobel sees that he is fresh from an Australian winter, his hand as white as a glove in the darkness. He spreads a map on his knees, seeking the way back to Naples, and so on.

And he speaks to her while his silent companion drives on into the night along the treacherous road, *Where's your sister?*

*My sister? Madeleine had nothing to do with it,* she replies, confused. He turns away then, his eyes in shadow.

How did they find her she wonders? He takes out the photograph of she and Madeleine, taken so long ago.

*Dr Rose found it and gave it to us.*
As realisation blossoms in Isobel’s mind, he reads to her from a piece of paper, much smaller than the map, a piece of paper with words and official stamps on it.

But it is the unrecorded narrative that grips Isobel. The spaces, the deep gorges of silence between written words. She reads the contents of the blue silk sack she keeps in her pocket. It contains a brooch, a little box, a half-empty packet of cigars, a curled and faded black and white photograph of a bell, and a used Italian train ticket. Her hand finds its way to her pocket now, her fingers rubbing the worn silk as if it were a rosary bead. Luca will be waiting. And Madeleine will come too late. She looks back through the rear window as the bell from the duomo sounds for evening mass. She thinks of the photographs in the books in the house in Katoomba, and Robert Lowell who said:

_I bell thee home._

Luca illuminates. In the Caffè Pompeii he paints scenes, islands of colour on the walls. Here a placid sea, there a disemboweled wild horse.

He is painting Isobel in soft mauves, standing in the currents of light of his garden. From the lamp above the door, more light falls upon a membrane of ultramarine. He has dipped his brush in the palest yellow, a film of green earth pigment.

The bus from Ravello is due soon, so he keeps an ear on the sounds of the evening outside the Caffè Pompeii: a dog barking, the bell, and a car driving too quickly along the road outside the piazza.
There is a purity about his treatment of hues. He wants to capture Isobel in the garden. He would like to use ancient purple dyes here and there - blatta, oxyblotta, hyacintina, or pieces of cloth interwoven with minute birds' feathers.

It grows cold. He puts on a jacket and picks up his brush, a long cone of soft bristles. He holds his brush as though it were a pen: there is a long phrase between the night notes, the end notes by the bell and this brimming morning reverie amidst windflowers, Italian lavender, sea anemones, and bellis perennis. Slaked lime and marble dust make polished plaster of the air; the budding gardenia rests a heavy head; dogwood leaves lie against the air like boats on still water. In the weeping mulberry a swaying worm spits silk. A camellia drops from dark, tea-stained leaves to the earth, like bright pink origami birds.

In this generous dwelling, a breath away from summer, she stands in the mosaic of the moment, listening for the next note of the struck bell and enclosed by the desiccating blossom of the pear tree; the sun first upon her head, then shoulders in sheets of smoking gold. She stands tall and quite still, an iris gloved in green. Around her forget-me-nots are rocked by bees and she can hear the panting of birds' wings. The scent of the daphne is like a veil across her face.

In a pool of night rain the water swells with light under its skin, reflecting pale iris with yellow throats; stroke after stroke of ixia stacked on pearwood; the luminous muslin spider web; spent flowers like empty cicada shells.

The glissandi of currawong voices echo like running water in the morning.

In this illuminated manuscript of broken colour, the blue glaze of her eye is set upon the rottweiler at the end of the road...
The Architect’s Dream

Project Manual for The Concerto Inn

Jo Gardiner
The opening phrases of a prelude gently arise as the Architect opens her
door one evening and notices a letter lying at her feet. Retrieving it, she rubs her
thumb across the envelope, feeling the texture of the translucent papier de soie. She
seeks some sign of its origin. On the back, across the top of the envelope, she reads
the name of her new client, a reclusive, elderly writer who first contacted her a
month ago requesting her services.

The Architect saves the letter until later in the evening, for she is engaged by
the prospect of this project. The letter has tucked itself in the back of her mind and
remained there like a half-remembered fragment of music. As darkness falls,
pianissimo, she drifts from the other rooms of her house and retires to the place she
calls her drawing room. It is arranged with the drafting table beside the fireplace
under the window. On the table, beside her T- square, triangle and scale, lies a copy
of the Client's novel, The Concerto Inn, which she has been reading in the evenings,
and in which she finds the contrapuntal voices of the Narrator, Isobel, and the
Author, Philippe, whose subterranean murmurings appear from time to time
between the lines.

The Architect bends down to the fireplace to set a fire. She strikes a match
and holds it still until it catches. An overture of wind is fluting through the eaves.
She stretches out her hands to the warmth for a moment, then sits at the table and
adjusts the light so that the letter is fully illuminated. As she opens it she senses her
own excitement, as if it were, somehow, a love letter. She recalls the notion that the
'lover's discourse is usually a smooth envelope which encases the Image, a very
gentle glove around the loved being', and suspects that, like 'desire, the love letter
waits for an answer.\footnote{1}  

She sees immediately that the letter is written by someone who is passionate about architecture, about the ‘possibility of making and remaking space’,\footnote{2} someone who possesses an ‘almost Zen humour that recognised the absurdity inherent in narrow forms of logic’.\footnote{3} She notices too that the letter is unsigned.

The letter possesses the attraction of a close-woven story inscribed upon leaves of silk in an ancient manuscript. Its distinctive handwriting appears as a graceful calligraphy. Bending down, she stokes the wood and gazes into the fire ‘which teaches the dreamer the archaic and the intemporal’.\footnote{4}

Finally, the Architect addresses the brief:

I am seeking an interpreter, asking you to ‘design sensation’, and to construct a shelter for the words I have collected over my lifetime.\footnote{5} I wish to have a house for my books, manuscripts, papers, and my dictionaries. I want a place of repose where I can work at my desk and look out over the valley down to the hanging swamp.\footnote{6} I would also like an eyrie, a tower with a dome as the focal point of the building.

My wish is to bring the landscape into the structure, so that mists move into the building and birds fly through its overhanging eaves, mistaking them for branches ...

As the Architect sits before the fire with the letter in her hand, ideas sift through the night and it occurs to her that ‘the work is not a goal to be obtained.

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item Barthes 1978: 28, and ibid.: 158.
\item McCorquodale et al. 1996: 261.
\item Hobbs 1981: 13.
\item Bachelard 1969: 193.
\item El-Khoury in Baxtide 1996:82.
\item The Architect suspects the Client of harboring ideas about the proposed library that recall Jorge Luis Borges’ thoughts: “I suspect that the human species – the unique species – is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret” (cited by Albert Liu in Allen 1998:51).
\end{enumerate}
but a means. So what matters more than anything else is the expression it
transmits. 7

It seems the Client wants the Architect to build for her books a wooden
house, infused with something approaching a monastic quality. In her mind the
Architect conceives of it as a storage shed, but as she sits thinking about the library
it gradually develops a ‘more sacred significance as a kind of chapel or small
cathedral to literature’. 8

The Client informs the Architect that she has decided to name the building
Concerto Inn after the novel she has written and the royalties of which will pay the
Architect’s fee. So confident is she of the Architect’s ability to construct the desired
library, that she has already purchased a small bell that will hang at the front
door of the Concerto Inn, a place from which the music of words will float.

The Architect contemplates the construction in her mind, engaged by a
chimera, a passeggiato of ideas. She is seeking a visual coherence and is intent upon
marrying forms with air. She is not at all interested in expressing herself. What
engages her imagination is ‘possessing and using the surface to effect’ and
addressing the pressing issue of transparency. 9 Architecture is a process of
choreography, of experimentation in performance and form. She is aware of the
idea that ‘the reality of a room was to be found in the space enclosed by the roof
and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves’. 10 She considers the ‘grammar’

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7 Derrida & Thévenin 1998: 5. Thévenin cites Artaud who, when writing about representation in “The
Theatre of Cruelty”, says that poetry comes to inhabit exterior objects and that from their assembly and
their choice it draws consonances and images (ibid.: 6).
8 These are the ideas of architect/builder, Drew Heath, who constructed a library at Blackheath in the
Blue Mountains and whose building serves as a model for the Architect. Architecture Australia 1999
January/February pp.27-32.
9 Coles and Bentley 1996: 27.
10 Frank Lloyd Wright in Kaufman and Raeburn 1960: 300.
of the building, which, she understands ‘means the same thing in any construction
- whether it be of words or of stone or wood’.11 She considers tranquility and its
acquisition, or ‘concinnitas’, the notion that ‘parts of a whole which are different
in form must be brought together to form a coherent and harmonious whole’.12
Soon the Architect is dozing by the fire in a reverie which ‘possesses a sort of
stability or tranquility’.13 She enters the realm of dreams, and understands the
notion that ‘everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected
dream is a rebus that conceals a desire, or its reverse, a fear’, and she travels ‘in
the vague, winding, dark and unsure area of creative forgetfulness – imagination’.
14 & 15 In the territory of sleep, she takes the Client’s words and makes a shape out of
them. In response to the Client’s letter she dreams of a shimmering building made
of rich, woven glass, and the rarest, fragrant, foreign woods, with gateways to the
east, the north and the south. It is arranged in two storeys with a flight of stairs
linking the upper chambers to those down below which are furnished with lamps of
gold, bowls of flowers, Japanese wash paintings, and separated only by fine veils.

From each room drift scents of honey, cream and oil.

Surrounded by gums standing like slender columns, this lofty construction,
a building of extravagant height, is also strong. It is a complex structure designed
to withstand the blight of winter, and, like a wooden pagoda, to give shelter from
the sun. There is movement in the closing of a shutter, the opening of a window to

11 ibid.:296
14 Calvino 1997:44.
allow entry to birdsong. The eloquence of the building lies in the way it responds to the light and in the rhythms and harmonies of its construction. As a thing heard, it resembles a stringed instrument – a cello, a violin – which produces a new musical language of languid ascending and descending notes. As the Architect constructs the building in her sleep, she understands that ‘words really do dream’...¹⁶

¹⁶ Bachelard 1968: 18.
an architectural entrance into the book
The essay is an endnote, a companion piece to *The Concerto Inn*. It might be described as a cosmography in that it combines discourse and maps. It could also be an architectural treatise. Most certainly it is a hybrid of purloined ideas, and takes the form of ficto-criticism. The essay is a text of multiple writings, a 'hinged document that fluctuates between pictorial and written texts; a diatext' (Diller and Scofidio 1994: 116). It takes as its theoretical point of departure, the paradigm of the writing as a building, and desires to take its place amongst 'works with open doors' (Benjamin in Leach 1997: 300). A meditation on the notion that the mind is the architect of reality, it considers aspects of narrative structure using the language and metaphors of architecture: 'Modern architecture', believes the Architect, 'gives the feeling of space opened up, like a fresh book, full of anticipation' (Hoffman 1994: 128).

The essay offers the discourses of a number of perspectives on architecture, each represented by a different voice. The Builder articulates the discourse of geometry and form, the Apprentice, that of misreadings and forgetting, while Philippe, the Author in the novel *The Concerto Inn*, represents the dominant discourse of writing as privileged over the practice of everyday life. It is left to Isobel, the Narrator, to investigate the Other. Many other voices push in upon them in concert, a canon, a chorus that recalls Derrida and Eisenman's project, *Choral Work*, which involves 'musical and vocal at the same time' in a way that makes 'an architectural event out of music, or rather out of a choir' (Derrida in Leach 1997: 340). These voices reside between the leaves of the books on the shelves of the planned library, and the Architect becomes woven into a network of citations which form a textual tapestry, the fabric used in the
construction of the essay. Thus the essay 'becomes musical, an architecture for many voices, at once different and harmonized in their very alterity' (ibid.), and the Architect takes up the baton to conduct this orchestral piece.

This chorus illustrates notions of world views which 'presume a profusion (rather than a Cartesian delimitation) of spatial and temporal vantages on experience' (Gibbons in Bird and Edquist 1994: 86). The voices that haunt the Concerto Inn might well belong to the crowd of architects sighted at the tenth and final ANY conference held at the Guggenheim in New York in June, 2000, although some died before the conference, and some had better things to do, other places to be.¹⁷ The voices enter, one upon the other, not waiting for each to finish, as if in a fugue where each voice has its own part, with 'the strata of this palimpsest' (Derrida in Leach 1997: 343) continuing on endlessly through the night. Beneath the rich surface of her thoughts, the Architect also hears the voices of the Client, the Builder and the Apprentice at the site of the construction where they are discussing her plans for the building of the Concerto Inn.

The Architect seeks to awaken the music within the building and make it eloquent in the spirit described by Eupalinus who maintained 'that some buildings are mute, while some speak and others sing' (Jarque in IVAM Centre Julio González 1998: 35).

Thus the 'voices of the narrative come, go, disappear, overlap; we do not know who is speaking; the text speaks, that is all: no more image, nothing but language' (Barthes 1978: 112), and as the writing itself appears to come to life and offer the writer shelter, the Architect hears yet more voices discussing aspects of space, memory, metaphor, edges and borders and repetition, as well as

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¹⁷ Those who did make it were: Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas, Elizabeth Diller, Elizabeth Grosz, Anthony Vidler, Wolf Prix, Arata Isozaki, Zaha Hadid, Hani Rashid, Ben van Berkel, Jacques Herzog, Steven Holl, Greg Lynn, Jean Nouvel, Beatriz Colomina, Jeffrey Kipnis, Sanford Kwinter, Ignasi de Sola Morales ... among others.
concealment and deceit in writing. This piece of architecture is inhabited by narrative, informed by foreign texts, lost plans, notes, and unrecoverable sources. It is a yearning for another reality, 'a reality that is different from most of the built reality' (Machado as cited by Antoniades 1992: 106). In addition, from time to time the essay is encroached upon by a narrative in which these multiple perspectives are 'enstoried' in the dream of the Architect (Hubbard 1995: 99), for the 'memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place' (de Certeau 1984: 109).

The essay begins with a letter from the Client to the Architect recalling Frémin's *Mémoires critiques* (Paris: 1702), cited by El-Khoury in his notes to the introduction of *The Little House*, which 'contrives an architectural treatise into a series of letters sent by a man who dabbles in architecture to a friend who plans to build a house' (Bastide 1996: 42). The letter containing the brief provides a structure for the narrative, in that it operates as 'a metonymic and a metaphoric displacement of desire' (Kauffman 1986: 38). 'Like so much of amorous epistolary discourse, the letter is addressed to the self as well as the beloved' (ibid.: 162). The letter or brief to the Architect may be viewed as a map. The fact that it is unsigned, thinks the Architect, is an act that subverts 'the hierarchies of authorship and mastery' (ibid.: 287). There are other implications that must be considered however, for the 'signature is not located within the grammatical webbing of a text, nor is it really located within the map; rather it is affixed to the edges, or in the spandrels between a map and its borders' (Conley 1996: 20).

The ideal of the building project is the fulfillment of the various discourses through a variety of registers: 'Architecture is produced in three different registers, through three different texts: drawing, writing, and building' (Agrest in Allen 2000: 164). If models were counted there would be four registers, and it
could be suggested that the texts as objects – the novel, *The Concerto Inn*, and the *Project Manual for The Concerto Inn* – form that model and take the work into the realm of sculpture.

This essay is 'an architecture of flickering texts and images. It is an aggregation of detail' (Bloomer in McCrorquodale et al. 1996: 30). It mines conventional architectural takes on construction, importing 'structural conceits from architectural theory and practice' (Davidson 1995:135) to create a different space. The Architect is concerned with ideas, so that drawings, projects or even verbal descriptions are 'as potent as built works' (Maxwell 1993: 133).

This territory has had many explorers and exponents. Just as 'Derrida had replaced speech with writing, in arguing that architecture was a form of writing anterior to textual writing, Tschumi proposed to replace writing with architecture' (Martin in Coles and Defert 1998: 79-80). The Architect remembers that Peter Eisenman claimed that architecture is a sort of writing, and with *Romeo and Juliet* (1986), created parallels between the ideas in the play and the geography of site. His work explored the 'interrelated elements of present conditions, memory and immanence, revealing aspects of the structure of the textual narrative' (Glusberg 1991: 76).18

In the writing, it is the structural thinking that changes and gives order to the narrative. In many ways, forms 'only have to be "left out", not constructed' (Sigler 1995: 632) for the most important part of the building consists of 'an

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18 The idea of the *Romeo and Juliet* project for the 1986 Venice Biennale was that 'a series of diagrammatic figurations could be extrapolated from the texts which when registered and superposed over one another not only would obscure previous meaningful figurations, but more importantly would reveal other possible alternative, latent figurations ... The given site was the site of the remains of what are called the Romeo and Juliet Castles, visible from the autostrada between Verona and Vicenza. One is designated "Romeo's Castle" while the other is "Juliet's Castle", but they are unrelated outside of this naming to the fictional Romeo and Juliet story. There are three different versions of this story, of which Shakespeare's is the third and last. While Romeo and Juliet appear as stable characters in each version, what happens to them varies'. Eisenman superposed diagrams of the "real" sites of Romeo and Juliet's houses on the site of the old buildings thus creating new narratives. (Eisenman 1999: 186-187).
absence of building' (ibid.: 626) in much the way that the negative spaces of an architectural plan, when filled in with black ink, create a sort of Chinese calligraphy, a language of difference. It is within these gaps in the plan that the writing takes place.

The Architect is concerned with alternatives to the lineage of those theorists whose ideas, with the passing of time, 'face co-option' (McLeod in Coleman et al.1996: 25). She suggests that now, 'deconstructivist practitioners are firmly entrenched members of the cultural establishment' (ibid.), and proposes a site reconstruction where architecture positions create new social and cultural formations and where its inhabitants are no longer seen simply as passive receivers or victims but also as vital agents contributing a multiplicity of new ideas and ways of inhabiting. The works that engage her interest 'offer models of architectural production that counter notions of both cultural elitism and isolated artistic rebellion, finding a stratum of creativity and invention in more familiar terrains' (ibid.). The Architect argues strongly for the 'everyday' as explored in the work of Jane Jacobs who opposed 'the traditional split between domestic and public life' (ibid.: 23), and granted 'a public meaning to domestic life – one that refuses a segregation of the sexes as well as of functions' (ibid.: 24).

The essay acts as an entry foyer to *The Concerio Inn*, and is the point of departure for access to the ideas that preoccupy the writer. It creates a space 'in which two writings, the verbal and the architectural, are inscribed, the one within the other, outside the traditional hierarchies' (Derrida in Leach 1997: 338). It is here that the Architect is 'knocking at the door' and 'opening new possibilities' (Tschumi 1993: 165), the door that mediates the relation of rooms,

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19 Here Derrida is speaking of Peter Eisenman with whom he collaborated on creating *Choral Work*, a section of Bernard Tschumi's *Parc de La Villette*. 
simultaneously connecting and separating spaces. The door gestures towards another place. On an architectural drawing the notation for “door swing” is an arc that traces the passage of the unhinged edge from open to shut ... it registers the possibility of movement and spatial manipulation. At once conventional and abnormal, a moment of graphic folding...


The door’s hinge is not only ‘an axial device that enables the circuit, the trope, or the movement of rotation’ but dreaming ‘in the vicinity of its homonym’, it may be recognised as ‘the place where the hunter attracts the bird by laying out the flesh of a lure’ (Derrida in Davidson 1997: 64). There ‘will always be this interminable alternating movement that successfully opens and closes, draws near and distances, rejects and accepts, excludes and includes, disqualifies and legitimates, masters and liberates’ (ibid.).

Like the novel, the essay begins by turning in the direction of Hong Kong where, in 1983 architect Zaha Hadid walked about inspecting the site at the top of the Peak, seeking new ways to articulate space. She created her Hong Kong Peak design in which she took a ‘narrative stance’ and developed it into a language that was spatial (Betsky and Hadid 1998: 9).

As its framework, the essay employs the paradigm of the building of a library in Katoomba constructed purely in the imagination of the Architect, who draws upon a strong tradition of notions about writing and space. She recognises that “language is the house of all, hanging over the edge of the abyss” (Paz cited in Connah 1989: 46), and that architecture is the ‘spatial expression of human life and experience in time’ (Chang 1981: 7). She knows that ‘what you have to say can only be said with the forms surrounding us’ (Thévenin citing Artaud in

Thus the writing is creating a built space housing ideas; where writing has materiality in text, the architecture attempts an analog in space and light. It operates alongside the novel, The Concerto Inn, 'supplying it with facts, dates, anecdotes, and so forth about which the building is silent' (Coleman et al. 1996: 72). Representations of metaphor, memory, and repetition structure the narrative while the essay itself is a reframed, revised reproduction of the unrealisable project of unbuilt ideas. The novel and the essay are firmly lodged within one another, with the essay giving entry to the Concerto Inn's passageways, chambers, exits, staircases and locked rooms. It is here that we hear the 'amalgam of conflicting discourses' (Huxley in Bird and Edquist 1994: 36) of the Architect, the Builder and the others. In the end, the consequence of this movement is that the Architect accrues 'a culture of inclusionary stances' (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 33).

Glass, light and water create ambiguities, and space may be viewed as 'an ambiguous field where positions change, where viewpoint becomes scene, seer becomes object, and where depth is the very reversibility of dimensions that unfolds with the movement of the body and that gathers meaning through the significance of one's gestures' (Weiss 1995: 34 Emphasis in the original). It is writing that explores this space, which maps itself in relation to an anonymous signature – that of the author.

The Architect contemplates architecture's role in structuring the boundary between 'the spaces of masculinity and of femininity inscribed at the level of both what spaces are open to men and women and what relation a man or woman has to that space and its occupants' (Pollock 1988: 62). She knows too that architecture can be considered as 'essentially a seductive representation of
order' (Martin citing Tschumi in Coles and Defert 1998: 71), or a 'desire for purity, a striving for perfection' (Arets in Tschumi 1993: 35). The Architect envisions her architecture as something that exists at the meeting of thought and eloquence - 'mute poetry' or 'petrified music' (Schelling, as cited by Agacinski in Tschumi 1992: 62), and like the Client, sees that language is a 'poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building' (Heidegger cited in Leach 1997: 111).

In the Architect's dream the entire structure of the Concerto Inn depends upon the intricate relationship between writing and image. Dreaming, she creates a poetic mapping of *The Concerto Inn*, perceives the architectural skin and tissue of the writing, and discovers that once the space is loosened up, the dual questions of how to construct a work, and how to construct a life, emerge, and that every 'work, every novel, relates, through the pattern of events [la trame événementielle], the story of its own creation, tells its own story' (Thody citing Todorov in Barthes 1987: 21). Her job, she sees, is to create a visual logic by taking the ideas of *The Concerto Inn* and making them 'visible and worthy of becoming part of our memory' (IVAM 1998: 36). As she labours at her task she is fully cognisant though, of Barthes' warning that there 'is nothing which provokes more resistance than laying bare the codes of literature' (1987: 65), and therefore seeks to construct a silent, seamless building.

The essay may be viewed (somewhat boldly) as a personal synthesis of ideas, a reflection after the *Hupomnemata* described by Foucault, which were elegant inventions intent upon 'capturing the already-said, of reassembling what one could hear or read, and this for an end that is nothing less than the constitution of the self' (Davidson 1997: 237). Hupomnemata, or the 'collection of the discourse of others' (ibid.: 244), were a common part of the Greco-Roman culture during the first two centuries of the empire. They comprised quotations,
reflections, and interesting snippets of the work of others. Another way of viewing them is as 'a material memory of things read, heard or thought' (ibid.: 236), and as such they were subject to a particular process of 'appropriation, unification, and subjectification' (ibid.).

The essay may also resemble a letter in that it attempts to articulate, through the layering of space, a movement to a central place, to unify the fragments into a 'principle of rational action' (ibid.: 240). It takes abstract fragments and forms them into a narrative structure. Foucault suggests that epistolary fiction is very close to Hupomnemata because the 'letter that one sends acts, by the very act of writing, on the one who sends it, as it acts through reading and rereading on the one who receives it' (in Davidson 1997: 241).

The essay acknowledges the notion that 'the presence of space in language ... sends meaning adrift' (Conley 1996: 8. Emphasis in the original). It comments on the construction of the novel and evolves in much the same way as the novel does, detail by detail, brick by brick in a herringbone pattern. Barthes suggests that it is best if writing 'doesn't allow "the general idea"', hence the fragments with which the reader is presented. They alone, it can be hoped, 'will prevent the production ... of [a] "fantasma of unity"' (1987: 84). It is the found objects, the scraps of ideas and images collected by the writer in the manner of the bowerright, that constitute its materiality, and, in the end, it diverges markedly from the original plan which is 'progressively added to, fleshed out, rewritten, interpreted, and transformed through the indissociable operation of memory and fantasy' (Gibbs in Grosz & Probyn 1995: 137-138).

The writing is elusive. The Architect illustrates this when she describes architecture, like painting and literature, as

the remaining shell of thought. Actual thought

is of no substance. We cannot actually see
thought, we can only see its remains.

Thought manifests itself by its shucking or
shedding of itself. It is beyond its confinement.

(Hejduk in Tschumi 1993: 29).

In setting about the task of building a shape out of ideas and words, of
giving ideas rooms to speak in and move across, doors to pass through, windows
to gaze from, the Architect begins with the notion of ‘language as “the house of
being”, “the home where man dwells”’ (Wigley citing Heidegger in Tschumi
1992: 94), a place where one collects oneself by closing all the windows and doors
so as to establish intimacy ‘with the self’ (ibid.: 66). She develops the notion that
a “word can be a dawn and even a sure shelter”, and offers the possibility of
looking for ‘refuge in a word’ (Vandercammen cited in Bachelard 1969: 47). The
final construction can be conceived of as a house of language. It arises from a
single thought that may have all the beauty and satisfaction of the Tempietto in
Rome, which has been described as a perfect piece of architectural prose – a
statement as clear as a bell, an example of classical architectural perfection that
followed the laws exemplified in the human body. There is clearly a strong
tradition of thinking about creative activity in terms of architecture. Seurat, the
‘architect – painter of verticality’ (Courthion 1988: 31), considered each of his
paintings as a temple like the Tempietto, and the figures and shapes within them
were columns in that temple. Proust too settles upon the architectural metaphor
for describing his moment of cognitive construction when he sees the steeples of
Martinville from his carriage and ‘a thought came into my mind which had not
existed for me a moment earlier, framing itself in words inside my head’ (1981
Vol.1: 1999). The intoxication he felt in the act of framing, then writing that
thought caused him to experience Barthes’ “jouissance”.
The construction of the narrative in *The Concerto Inn* necessitates a sort of literary geometry, geometry being, for some, the best available metaphor to express perfection. If writing were to be considered as an arrangement of words in space, then the geometry of this arrangement is vital to the writer's struggle to create the perfectly told tale.

As the Architect conceives of writing in this way – as a lissome building, a construction developed in close response to concerns of light and proportion – then each chapter of the novel may be thought of as a room, a chamber. The Architect proposes that the words of built space would seem to be rooms. The Architect may wish the Client to move from one room to the next in the spirit described in Nicolas Le Camus de Mézière's *Le Génie de l'architecture ou le rapport de cet art avec nos sensations* cited by El-Khoury in his introduction to *The Little House*, where:

> each room must have its own particular character.
> The analogy, the relation of proportions, determines our sensations; each room makes us desire the next; and this agitation engages the mind, holding it in suspense, in a kind of satisfying bliss.

(Bastide 1996: 31)

The Architect believes that 'architecture is a central element of the narrative' (ibid.: 22), and an 'architectural motif also guides the narrative at a constitutive level' so that the story is 'shaped according to its symmetry and ordonnance' (ibid.: 23. Emphasis in the original). In fact, so central is architecture to *The Little House*, that 'the temporal dimension of the narrative is calibrated to the spatial hierarchy of the apartments and is translated into dialogue and description of corresponding lengths' (ibid.), and the psychological set-up construed by the author is exactly adjusted to the architectural structure.
of the story. This recalls Palladio's attempts to match the properties of his buildings to musical ratios defined by Pythagoras with the notion that architecture was frozen music.

The Architect suggests that 'as soon as we speak ... we are caught in what traditionally are called spatial metaphors, architectural metaphors' (Derrida in Tschumi 1992: 13), and it is upon a journey through these metaphors that this discussion of narrative structure takes place, passing through the territory of space, memory, repetition, deceit/concealment, and concluding with the 'drive to dissociation ... the interest in difference and disjunction ... not synthesis' that Bataille explores and Rajckmann takes up with the notion of writing 'as a transgressive space that precedes and exceeds [architecture]' (ibid.: 161). The Architect, like Foucault, feels keenly 'the weight of words like space, emptiness, limit, situation, division (partage), separation, closure...' (Serres in Davidson 1997: 36. Emphasis in the original).

The model of anticipatory vision is preferred by the Builder. It was the classical theme of intervention which favoured 'anticipation of the result over progressive adjustment of choices' (Agacinski in Tschumi 1992: 57-58), and distinguished the architect from the bee, according to Marx who said: "the architect builds his cell in his head before building it in the hive" (ibid.: 58). But the Architect points out that in this case 'neither bee nor architect, each with his preordained plan, leaves room for chance or accident' (ibid.: 59), and cites the philosopher, Alain, who opposes this idea with his example of old towns that were built "with no other plan than these myriad of thoughts working side-by-side, following each tradition but also chance, terrain, and the beam at hand..." [F]or there is less thinking in plans executed with already carved stones; that is only bees' work" (ibid.). It is timely to mention at this point Barthes' comment
that structure 'is a bit like hysteria. If you pay attention to it, it becomes a reality. If you pretend to ignore it, it goes away' (1987: 89).

It is clearly the task of the Architect to create a world apart for the Client. She proposes to her client the notion that 'the role of space is crucial' because it 'operates to set boundaries, establish limits, and resist encroachment' (Vidler in Bastide 1996: 11-12). Perhaps the Architect's ultimate dream, surely shared by the Client, is to create a writing place, not unlike that place where a blue butterfly is pinched between two sheets of plastic, a space that 'suspends the supreme moment for eternity' (ibid.)
The second movement opens with a gently lyrical passage that builds in intensity as the Architect visits the proposed site which is below the Client's house in Katoomba—a cypress pine construction on the eastern side of a harsh and beautiful valley, above a hanging swamp. Here she finds feather-shaped grasses concealing tiny florets of thought. The land speaks an ancient language of geological disruption and upheaval of the different layers of the earth's crust: lava-flows, basalt domes, soft shale, sandstone embedded with lizard skins, fossil seashells, and beds of granite and quartzite. High cliffs are enveloped in cloud. The ground is figured. A site emerges 'out of the frame of the flattened, detached, visual landscape'.

The Architect stands in the lush garden, some distance below the house, and notices at once that the designated place for the library is already occupied by a shed embedded in the site. Rather than demolish it, she takes possession of it and plans to make the new building a renovation of an existing storey, a surface alongside the other surface. The two surfaces thus coexist, and two 'contiguous stories are written on them'. The Architect is able to see that there will be not 'one story within another, but one next to the other'. The new intervention will cut into

21 In "Partially Buried Woodshed" (1970) Robert Smithson piled twenty backhoe loads of earth onto a woodshed on the campus of Kent State University until its central beam cracked. He considered it "a closed system which eventually deteriorates and starts to break apart and there's no way that you can really piece it back together again". It was a kind of "buried architecture" (Robbs 1981:190-191).
22 Deleuze 1997: 22.
The building becomes no more or less than a ripple undulating out of the site
the existing building which will become a book that tells two stories at the same
time, one set in the footprint of the other. She will construct the building along two
geometries and use two different construction systems in order to amplify the
notion that the two stories are in fact the same story repeated and connected,
perhaps only by an elliptical spiral stair.

The Architect sits and observes the way the light moves throughout the day
across the site. She imagines the texture of the building among the trees. Her
thoughts travel from past to present, lose their way, and are summoned back to the
present moment by the clear ringing call of the bell-bird. Eventually "the building
becomes no more or less than a ripple undulating out of the site, moving up to
encompass spaces and then dying back down into the ground."

A trail of dust appears up on the road, and snatches of operatic music
disturb the Architect's train of thought and the delicacy of place. She looks up from
her construction notes. She has inspected the work of many different local builders
seeking one who can take up her ideas and make spaces from them. She has chosen
one only – an Italian named Brunelleschi. She likes the craftsmanship of his work
and has arranged to meet him here at the site. Now he arrives with his Apprentice
in a ute loaded with plumb lines, float levels, and carpenter's squares. There are
also sheets of prefabricated fibro with an 'encoded language that already possesses
the instruction for its own construction'. A blue cattle dog stands balanced on a
stack of off-cuts. The ute comes to a halt and there is heard the sound of Puccini
blaring from the radio. As the Builder emerges from the ute, the dog leaps from the
tray and closely follows him down to the site towards the Architect, the Apprentice
trailing behind. Left unattended on the road, the radio continues to sing Madam

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Butterfly at full volume.

Voices enter the site by a stairway of fifths, rising through higher octaves, until there is a polyphony of voices, each located within the other. There are introductions. The young Apprentice steps forward and wipes her hands upon her jeans before taking the Architect’s proffered hand, then stepping back again.

The Architect soon learns that the Builder is a blowhard. He holds one eye closed to the sun as he offers his experience in making materials and structures perform to their limits. He says he is interested in conducting the building from the ground up. Having trained originally as a goldsmith, he began his building career by delivering bricks, then constructing walls and buildings. He tells her he is interested in the substance of the building rather than its image, that he is suspicious of ‘the promiscuity of surfaces and images’.

The builder has a mind that is geometric in its construction.

"I’m nervous of upscale origami," he says, "Theory is easy. Practice is hard – and the closet architecture that passes for both is neither. It’s telephone sex". He blows his nose on a huge handkerchief before he goes on, "There is nothing morally wrong with a built environment in which embodied meanings and designative meanings are at odds with one another, nothing wrong with a city that loves you and tries to steal your wallet.

"The meanings of architecture are not permanence in that, like language, it changes every day". The Builder adopts a parodic tone, "Don’t give me any of this ‘critical dialectic’... Give me ‘palace architecture’... Vegas is like Venice in that it’s a continuous architectural environment and a slut. It loves you whether you like it or not. It gives you everything it has and breakfast for $2.98."

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26 Here the Builder is sounding very like architect, Dave Hickey, in his interview with Stan Allen (1995 pp. 33-39).
His discourse is informed by that of his namesake who constructed the dome of Florence Cathedral in the Renaissance. He has not embraced the digital age, and has his own, very distinct views about the "unloving tongue of schlock theory" (chock full of suspect words like "sign, code, text, discourse, problematic, privileged male gaze, phallic mother, hegemony, praxis, fetish commodity").\footnote{Frueh cited by Kandel in Coles and Bentley 1996: 85.}

The Architect, on the other hand, is listening to Kristeva’s concerns about such a cavalier ‘denigration of European theories ... a progressive rejection of Europe’.\footnote{In Coles & Defert 1996: 14.} She protests that ‘after having assimilated European currents of thought for several decades, suddenly there seems to be a fear of having become colonised by it. Thus one witnesses the rejection of the “French stuff” en masse’.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Builder is clearly suspicious of architects, “You have to be careful... The lust for the New, that telic carrot on a string, like nostalgia, is longing for something one cannot have, for as soon as the New is formulated, it ceases to be new. And in order to stay on the cutting edge, the avant-garde architect must move on in search of the next formal frontier”.\footnote{McCorquodale et al. 1996: 18.}

The Architect dislikes what she has heard, but she has seen the way the lines of his buildings fold into the landscape. She says nothing more but she sets out the stones on the earth, making the first marks of the map that her ground plan will become. Her attention is caught for a moment by the Apprentice who stands a little way off, detached, watching. She is a warm presence and her enthusiasms, mistakes and mis-readings will prove invaluable to the Architect. Foucault would describe her actions as something like a perturbation in the information system, something like a mistake. In essence, thinks the Architect, life is what is capable of error...
The novel is travelling in a state of 'perpetual migration' (Neylan citing Valaanesh in Bird and Edquist 1994: 288). It moves on its journey through the landscape like graffiti painted on the sides of a train. It travels from the privileged space of writing to the practice of everyday life in the everyday space of the garden, where the ordinary is illuminated. There the Architect witnesses 'the singular becoming of a place, of the domestic as an eminent place' (Cache 1995: 27). While recognising that 'in no one case does the identity of the site preexist' for it is always 'the outcome of a construction' (ibid.: 15), she tracks this process of transformation of space into another identity as site and structure coalesce.

The Architect contemplates the potential of the landscape before her and prefigures the 'act of inscribing human nature's activities on an earth's canvas' (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 21). She invents the aesthetic of her architecture from the images that are embedded in the site. Gradually the building comes to occupy a 'nocturnal site of dreams' (Conley 1996: 307) where the 'ground itself becomes a sculpture' (Cache 1995: 153) formed by the weather. The geomorphological structure of the earth's body is inscribed with traces of memory in the manner suggested by Frances Yates when she cites the unknown author of A Herennium who says that "places are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script" (1969:22). The floating figure of the building is bound to the site by plane, line, elevation, volume, and proportion.

31 A good example of this process is represented in the work of Ganchegui and sculptor Chillida who designed the Plaza del Tenis in San Sebastian called The Comb of the Wind (Wrede and Adams 1991:59).
The novel begins its journey on its first blank page. It is ‘an itinerant, progressive and regulated practice – a “walk”’ which ‘composes the artefact of another “world” that is not received but rather made’ (de Certeau 1984:34-5). As the night passes and the Architect dreams on, the construction ‘proceeds by successive abandonments of occupied places’ (ibid.: 195), and ‘allows the landscape to speak in its own rich, multi-valent voice of the spaces of inhabitation in-between’ the dominant discourse (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 34).

Several concerns inform the siting of the construction. The Greek word for place, logos, can mean: ‘location’, ‘place’, ‘point’, ‘order’, ‘reason’, ‘underlying principle’, and ‘explanation’. The writing is the site where these different meanings confront each other, where conceptual oppositions meet and multiply. The building, in the process of its construction, establishes itself in the space between these meanings and embraces the site. It differently constructs its identity in the process of writing, generating new versions of itself, becoming other than what it was. Zaha Hadid embedded the idea of site within her work which she viewed as ‘a form of landscape, or shaping of the land’ (Betsky and Hadid 1998: 10). She imbues the frame at the top of her Hong Kong Peak building with the ideas of both drawing and journey when she describes ‘the journey of the beams [which] are conceptual drawings; they tell a story’ (Glusberg 1991: 89).

The Architect situates the construction in various parts of the world, poised between many landscapes, orienting it differently in each place to articulate its changing moods, aware that ‘the surface of the territory is mobile and fluid as it is given to the continual distortions of memory’ (Cache 1995: 11). Rather than imagining that she is constructing the identity of a place, she recognises that identity is already present.
On the site, the Architect alters the axis of the construction and makes pivotal rotations towards the view. For example, in Katoomba the Narrator is ‘wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocation: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you)’ (Barthes 1978: 15). She inhabits the site of exile, a place considered by some a necessary pre-condition for creativity. Commenting on her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva reiterates that in ‘the experience of exile’, if the suffering caused by any uprooting and the ‘pain of reintegration’ are not experienced, then ‘there can be no creative work of any kind’ (Coles and Defert 1998: 16). In terms of location as such in order to give life to new signs ... it is necessary to establish a bridge from one’s origins to the arrival and appropriation of a whole new set of signs’ (ibid.). A direct consequence of exile, she suggests, leads to ‘the unveiling of new intellectual or artistic territories’ (ibid.: 17) — a new site.

This process is not a passive one. In Hong Kong, Zaha Hadid confronted the landscape with violence, head on: ‘The hillside was rock; the idea was you excavate the rock and replace the old geology with the new one’ (Glusberg 1991: 89). She set up an ‘intersection of geometry and geomorphology, of past site and present project’ (Showalter in Bird and Edquist 1994: 32). Similarly, the novel is sited initially in the ‘space of internment’ (Serres in Davidson 1997: 54). The shed is the fulcrum around which pivots the ambiguities of strength and fragility. It is then ‘dis-located from its primary site’ (Coles and Bentley 1996: iii), and travels through Bataille’s territory ‘where architecture clears a space for a park and museum in the heart of the abattoir’ (Hollier on Bataille as cited by Catherine Inagrahah in Tschumi 1993: 114). It is a thing transformed. It ends with an exploration of de Certeau’s everyday spaces and ‘the figure of the familiar’ (Burns in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 76), the quality described by
Beatriz Colomina in her article on the construction of the Eames’ House, as being present in the details of the Eames’ everyday life (Coles and Defert 1998: 120). This contrasts strikingly with the nature of the ‘space of internment’ which, suggests the Architect, represents the ‘foundational regions from where all the languages of alienation emerge and where all their conditions of possibility are located’ (Serres in Davidson 1997: 50). It is also ‘a signed surface not just a built space’, for it contains the signature of architectural history and theory (Burns in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 77). The Architect is thus intent upon moving to ‘unsigned built spaces’ (ibid.), and strives toward multiple representations rather than a single authoritative view.

Thus the writing travels to ‘an intensification of the everyday’ (ibid.: 15) where, the Architect claims, “other” is not so much a question of what is outside everyday life – events characterised by rupture, transgression, difference – but what is contained, and potentially claimed within it’ (McLeod in Coleman et al. 1996: 14). She makes notations in the margins of de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life in which ‘the localised and transitory qualities of daily existence’ are illuminated, and notes that, in contrast to Foucault, who ‘never attempts to see the colony through the eyes of the colonised [and] ... avoids the prisoner’s standpoint’ (ibid.: 11), de Certeau describes “the network of antidiscipline” within everyday life ... an arena of freedom, choice, creativity, and invention’ (ibid.: 13). In addition there is de Certeau’s notion, based on urban street culture, of “spatial practices” to describe the way a physical place is ‘embodied through social actions, such as people’s movement through it’ (Sojo in Kastner and Wallis 1998: 28).

Her work derives from lyrical modernism in architecture and the Architect suspects that ‘any structure that is not Euclidean, or more specifically,
the sacred North American Land Ordnance grid, is invisible or, at worst, distorted, awkward, discontinuous' (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 15). She cites two examples of architectural site that escape the 'mechanisms of discipline, and not primarily through negation or transgression' (McLeod in Coleman et al. 1996.: 27): Niki de Saint-Phalle and Jean Tinguely's Stravinsky Fountain in Paris, and Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. Because it is set into the flat lawn, the latter is invisible from a distance and the 'first sight of it comes as a visceral shock' (ibid.: 43). Its narratives are 'inscribed onto the architecture' (ibid.: 53). Both structures 'present possibilities of architectural space beyond conformity or disruption, both everyday and other' (ibid.: 27), replacing 'the separation of form and meaning with embodied meanings' (ibid.: 54).

These restless voyages from one site to another can be described as 'imaginary journeys from metaphor to metaphor' (Kristeva 1993: 62) involving the 'movement of writing where the fragments used to write are the steps which this movement takes' (Barthes 1987: 85). Between the 'space of internment' which is the novel's point of departure, and the space of everyday life, its destination, the Narrator finds herself in the place Serres describes in his comments on Foucault's Folie et déraison:

There was once upon a time a country called Erewhon. In this wild country criminals are cared for, the sick are judged, and, often, condemned. It is a hell for innocence. Its name, strangely reversed, signifies, for those who refuse to understand, nowhere. Nowhere, or the other side of the mountains.
The writing is thus set upon its journey, travelling towards Italy and light, where "la ligne" is everywhere in the olive groves and lines of cypresses, and in its buildings, where the 'very air is full of architecture' (Russell 1997: 12). Along the way the landscape frames the narrative. The writing is travelling towards the everyday spaces of the hybrid garden. It is caught there - just as the figures in Gozzoli's frescoes of the Journey of the Magi are caught in the moment before arrival in Florence which figures in the imagination as a magical city with a woman's name. It is of Florence that Proust is thinking when he writes that 'the countries which we long to occupy, [are at] any given moment, a far larger place in our actual life than the countries in which we happen to be' (1981: 423). He describes the 'idea' of place when he writes that in his imagination 'the Ponte Vecchio was heaped high with an abundance of hyacinths and anemones' (ibid.).

The building finally comes to rest when it is situated in the rich gardenscape of Ravello, a place where the Narrator becomes one of those subjects 'who can finally speak of their own country, conceive of their own domain' (Serres in Davidson 1997: 52). Here, as in Zaha Hadid's Landes-Gartenschau, 'the figure of our building is not contained. It literally bleeds out and dissolves into the surrounding landscape' (Beck 1999:28). Here, the Narrator constructs 'sense out of the accretion of everyday activities' (Betsky and Hadid 1998:8) in a space where motion and 'gesture have replaced form as dominant elements, and the work is more open, tentative and lyrical' (ibid.:12). And of course, no matter how far one travels into the 'geographical or chronological distance, there is at every point or moment the possibility of a loop in the itinerary that returns to the starting point' (Bloomer in McCorquodale et al 1996: 30), a notion that is taken up by the Architect when she wonders, 'do all these metaphors not bring us back
ironically to our point of departure, to the metaphor of displacement, of change
of location? ' (Ricoeur 1997: 193). Perhaps this place is a 'lived space of radical
openness ... where all histories and geographies, all times and places are
immanently presented and represented, a strategic space of power and
domination, empowerment and resistance' (Sojo in Kastner and Wallis 1998: 28.
Emphasis in the original). It is the space of the Chinese scroll paintings where the
' sweeps of echoing lines folded into a vision that altered and returned a world,
transformed, back to the viewer ' (Betsky and Hadid 1998: 8), perhaps reminding
us that we are all being constantly displaced from the site of the present moment
and that it is only in this moment, to which the bell constantly calls us, that the
garden of everyday space is illuminated.
The builder is clearly suspicious of architects
The concerto is scored for an unheard orchestra. The slow, wistful music is intruded upon by the 'Builder's question: "What meaning does your construction have?" he asks ... Where is the plan you are following, the blueprint?"32

The Architect spreads a piece of paper on the table. She contemplates the plaster smooth surface of the blank page where 'the ambiguities of the world have been exorcised'.33 With sudden leaps of intuition, she plots some internal elements and sketches some lines, aware of 'hidden meanings that might be latent' in the plan.34 As she uses a soft pencil to make these preliminary sketches, to describe volume and space, she is aware of the ancient geomancy of location and designs.35 For her, as for the ancient calligrapher, drawing is a projection of her body.

She begins to 'draw a map to get lost' 36 and her pencil point becomes 'an extension of the mind'.37 The plan soon resembles Artaud's 'written drawings ...[a]

32 Calvino 1997: 127.
33 de Certeau 1984: 194.
34 Eisenman 1999:190.
35 Peter Eisenman notes Kurt Forster's observation of the practice, in the earliest architectural drawings on parchment from late Gothic to the Renaissance, that 'diagrammatic schema is often drawn or etched into the surface with a stylus without being inked' so that the 'diagram implicit in the work is often never made explicit' (Eisenman 1999:27).
form of drawing writing, of ideographic writing'.

She follows the method of perspective construction that was originally developed by Brunelleschi in the Renaissance when he marked the focal point with a nail, measured the lines of the architecture with ruler and string, and scratched them into the wet plaster on the chapel wall.

The Architect sketches freehand on the large sheet of white paper on her drafting table for 'white is everywhere and may be considered the colour of origin and beginning. White is the colour of the between: between conception and execution'. At first she makes merely a scribbled gesture, but she quickly becomes more engaged by the art of inscription and excited by the ideas that appear like the imprints of a bird's fragile feet. As the night deepens and the building unfolds from east to west, she draws more fervently. As soon as the 'impression has been recorded by pencil, it stays for good – entered, registered, inscribed'. In her plan a 'sense of compression is gained where verbal graticules, crosshatched tracings, numbers, lines of vanishment, perspectivil objects, pictograms, and enigmatic centres abound'.

The Architect organises the space around a central room – the existing shed. She begins with a beautifully proportioned building based on the simple geometric relationships of the square and the golden mean rectangle. The emphasis is upon the horizon and the horizontal, bringing the mountainous landscape into the structure. Her drawings are suggesting 'that the manipulation of geometry and structure could liberate a space from its confines'. She conceives of 'a series of images one after the other over a period of time' so that the architecture 'is

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40 Colomina in Welchman 1996: 53.
41 Conley 1996: 49.
ultimately made up of parts, fragments and fabrication'. She collects ideas from her honyard – the journals and notebooks where she keeps diagrams and shapes in soft residues of ink, to be dug up when required. She will put them together to form new connections in the manner of an archaeologist. Later, she will take up the paints to be used for rendering. They are contained in neatly labeled square and rectangular drawers, and oblong and cylindrical bottles.

She works slowly, seeking a harmony of elements. Like an ‘architect-weaver’ she works on through the night. She weaves solid and space together as if she were bent over a Persian carpet. As she progresses, the work becomes ‘more open, tentative and lyrical’. As Marco Polo said to the Great Khan, ‘I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them’.

The drawings on paper are but ‘sketches of possibilities open to interpretation’. The plans will be further extended with the construction of a model of the building which will become an architectural reality, an ambiguous play of volumes with clearly defined conceptual and physical boundaries.

The plan of the library is designed from the inside out, with each opening expressing the entrance to a new interlocking interior space. When the Architect is finished the plan for the Concerto Inn, she will read it as one would a musical score...
Plan

As the plan unfolds from the essay, it ‘gives us the world to read’ (Barthes in Leach 1997: 175). The folds conceal and reveal hidden desire. The plan ‘conquers’ space by marking it with meanings’ (de Certeau 1986: 139), just as ‘the map is an analogue, a metaphorical structure which displays a generalised experience in the form of a model’ (Rhowbotham in McCorquodale 1995: 20). The Apprentice, upon examining the plan, notices that the architectural diagram ‘exists as the potential space of writing’ (Eisenman 1999: 34). Looking up for a moment, she listens to the Architect who explains, ‘The diagram acts as an agency which focuses the relationship between an authorial object, an architectural object, and a receiving object; it is the strata that exist between them’ (ibid.: 35).

As the Apprentice begins to understand, ‘an intensive map is a becoming’ (Deleuze 1997: 64), for maps ‘are superimposed in such a way that each map finds itself modified in the following map, rather than finding its origins in the preceding one: from one map to the next, it is not a matter of searching for an origin, but of evaluating displacements’ (ibid.: 63).

The reader unfolds the ideas of the novel and is thus enfolded into the work as the architectural plan is unbound from the essay. The Architect notes other illustrations of this notion and sees that ‘in the narrative unfolding of Hadid’s work, one can also draw a comparison to Chinese and Japanese scroll painting’ (Betsky in Betsky & Hadid 1998: 8). At this point the Architect

49 This was the thesis of the project La Villette (1987) ‘which was a collaboration with Jacques Derrida, [and] used his text on Plato’s Chora as a basis for an evolving idea of imprinting surfaces. The project began from an arbitrary set of diagrams – those of the Cannaregio project. This was because of an initial correspondence between Cannaregio and La Villette – both had once been the sites of slaughterhouses’ (Eisenman 1999:191).
describes the seductively ornamental complexities of the Deleuzian fold, his notion of the *pli* or fold as a space that emerges ‘both within and against social relations, to constitute a space of self-representation at once connected to and free from social norms’. She cites Deleuze’s interpretation of the *pli*:

It is as if the relations of the outside folded
back to create a doubling, allow a relation
to oneself to emerge, and constitute an inside
which is hollowed out and develops its own
unique dimension.

(Urbach in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 260-261)

*Pli* is the etymology of “complication” of “complexe” (Limon in Allen 1995: 179), and one of the ‘primary attributes of the fold is mutability – if something can be folded, it can be unfolded and refolded. The fold is forgetful.

The crease, on the other hand, can be a more compelling metaphor because it has a memory. The crease is a trace’ (Teyssot in Diller and Scofidio 1994: 59).

The Architect is referring to Barthes’ understanding of the notion of unfolding when she says, ‘I can *unroll* it (this is the ordinary way of reading, the legal one, in which I cruise along; I unroll the volume from end to end like a novel’ (1987: 90). The world is contained within the fold.

The Architect explains that the French word for an architect’s drawing (*dessin*) is a homophone of plan or project (*dessein*) (Tschumi 1993:145) and speaks of the ‘undoing of synthesis’ which is visible in architectural drawings (Tschumi 1992:18). The Apprentice remembers that in a museum once she saw the architectural blueprints of Louis Sullivan which ‘affirm simultaneously, the pleasures of drawing and building and, in doing so, affirm their intimate corporeal connections. The blueprints make a place for our hands even as they describe a construction too large and complex to grasp’ (Cardinal-Pett in
McCorquodale et al. 1996: 98). She felt the 'leathery texture' of one of Sullivan's prints with its 'frayed and stained appearance', its 'traces of translation from drawing to building' (ibid.: 99). She was completely seduced by the enormity of the blueprints, and experienced a 'luxurious, erotic conflation of sight and touch' (ibid.: 98).

The plan and the grid may act in opposition. Architect, Peter Myers, for example, discovers when looking at buildings for Aboriginal people, that the 'template of his own architectural values does not fit over his research material' (Burns in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 81). The Architect explains this by saying that the 'object, or the scene, is perpetually unstable, perceptually rich, significantly ambiguous - all due to the radical perspectivism of our existence' (Weiss 1995: 34). She explains why grids do not sustain much, by suggesting that mathematical formulas 'may delineate and categorize such perspectives; yet they ultimately coagulate vision into a series of static, unambiguous moments' (ibid.). As she says, 'perfection is supplemented by ambiguity' (ibid.: 46). The Apprentice takes up the notion of resistance against the 'totalizing space' of the grid or the government survey by referring to de Certeau's whole rhetoric of pathways spreading out like a 'story jerry-built out of elements taken from common sayings, an allusive, fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolises' (Sojo in Kastner and Wallis 1998: 129).50 Ironically 'straight - line indicators put emphasis on the curves and movements of space' (de Certeau 1984: 129), and it was perhaps this that Frank Lloyd Wright was seeking when, in the Guggenheim Museum, he inserted a spiral staircase into

50 Richard Well describes De-composition, a project in Berlin which superimposed a grid structure on the existing topography of the site 'in the manner of computerised maps or a set of Cartesian coordinates'. As time passes the grid structure decays 'and gives rise to a process of vegetational succession'. The process sees the grid transformed into something 'which holds within its form a vague memory of the original grid' (Bird and Edquist 1994:231).

Without a plan, the architecture appears vulnerable and insecure. On the other hand, it might be suggested that the plan is specifically designed for instability, and that the ensuing movement provides the structure upon which it is built, because ‘traditional grids of interpretation’ suggests the Architect, are best set aside (Kristeva in Coles and Defert 1998:18).

Where is the plan then? Because the Architect is beginning with an already existing building (the shed in Katoomba), rather than a representation, she will discover the plan through the work of excavation. Perhaps the plan is ‘a map of memories, a map infused with time’ (Hoffman 1994: 210), something like the grid of the underground metro carried in a laminated card by Parisians – a poetic map? If we scour the surface sufficiently, we come to Hollier, who in his book on Bataille, Against Architecture, suggests that the plan uses ‘an architectural metaphor borrowed from philosophy: the interplay between pyramid and labyrinth’ (Martin in Coles and Defert 1998: 69). Or perhaps it resembles Jenny Holtzer’s creations where she throws text out into the public arena to challenge social and cultural mores?

A map is ‘a kind of knowledge about the world which offers something by removing something else’ (Rhowbotham in McCorquodale 1995: 20), and architectural drawing ‘is marked by the sign of absence ... its object is not yet present’ (Allen 2000: 6 Emphasis in the original). It can be compared to a musical score which when performed disappears at the moment of its construction. After all, unbuilt ideas are the most seductive and one can identify with the mapmaker’s desire ‘that the map itself become reality, passing over the difficult and unpredictable aspects of material construction’ (Hoffman 1994: 203).
The mapping of the construction takes the essay away from architecture into painting and the translation of calligraphic signs. Because Foucault generated ‘a hitherto undrawn map of the possibility of “thinking otherwise”’ he was a “new cartographer” (de Certeau 1986: 197). Like her colleague Zaha Hadid, the Architect sets about superimposing different geometries and ‘maps elements of history, changing topography, circulation, outlook: traces are collected, obsessively overlaid, subjected to painterly distortions until a moment of epiphany is reached’ (Beck 1999: 30). Her work progresses to the point where ‘multiple mapping processes are condensed into one vast single drawing’ (ibid.). It is clear that her architectural drawings ‘do not simply delineate the building, they embody its fabrication’ (Cardinal-Pett in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 102).

The plan is inscribed with references to other places and other texts as illustrated in the site of Bernard Tschumi’s 1982 Parc de La Villette in Paris which was chosen specifically because it had other places and times embedded within it - the Paris city wall of 1848 and the abattoir of 1867. In his projects, Peter Eisenman used this idea of palimpsest, an ancient manuscript (possibly Greek), which had been rubbed out so that a medieval text could be written over it, while the sculptor, Smithson, ‘turned maps into decorative elements that depict two different types of space: one is referential (the maps outline land formations and sea masses), while the other is tautological (the maps picture themselves)’ (Hobbs 1981: 14).

The evolution of the building is not linear. The Architect desires that the narrative unwind before her like the unravelling of a bolt of lustrous silk; that it unfold, like a plan, a map, an architectural drawing, or like the ‘body’s folding in upon itself [which] is accompanied by an unfolding of imaginary spaces’ (Guattari in Tschumi 1993: 139). A perfect curlicue of thought arises as she
contemplates the role of the plan: ‘to compose a finished, well-constructed poem, the mind is obliged to make projects that pre-figure it. But for a simple poetic image, there is no project; a flicker of the soul is all that is needed’ (Bachelard 1994: xxii).

Thus, if the writing is thought of in terms of a construction, the Architect must invite the soul which ‘comes and inaugurates the form, dwells in it, takes pleasure in it’ (Bachelard 1994: xxii), and by its presence the structure is constituted and altered, changed in ways impossible to predict or plan for. In this way she resembles the architect, Glen Murcutt, whose buildings evolve gradually, often over months and sometimes years during which time the final plan can be preceded by two completely different sites and projects from two different starting points, for example, one in Hong Kong, one in Paris. The two stories, like Davis Langston-Jones’ two houses on the beach, ‘inflect towards each other, creating a sense of openness and individuality, yet they are close enough to be perceived as a pair of gatehouses’ to the garden (Beck 1999: 62).

The novel is constructed from the inside out, employing ‘a web of discursive practices’ (Borradori in Tschumi 1993.: 126) in an inventive manner, using as building materials the ideas that are present in the writer’s life at the time, and those that are generated as the work proceeds. The novel, like our destiny, ‘takes shape as we live our lives’ (ibid.: 127), and is an ‘interactive dimension of recollection’ (ibid.: 128). This manner of shaping writing recalls references to slugs and fishes which make their shells from their own saliva. A fortress city could be built in the same manner, constructed from the central square, forming ‘a gigantic snail’ (Bachelard 1994: 128). Thus the writing grows out from its centre in small accretions. Once the framework is laid out a slow accumulation of words occurs, the form it takes being ‘commanded by the inside’
just as the shape of a nest is constructed by the manner in which a bird, using “bird architecture” presses the twigs with its breast (ibid.: 101).

The writer builds the writing using a plan that is her life, until, like Brunelleschi’s dome in Florence, it ‘has a vaulted ceiling, which is a great principle of the dream of intimacy. For it constantly reflects intimacy at its centre’ (ibid.: 24). The dome drifts there above the city, like one of the nests that Greek mythology had kingfishers build upon the water.

The plan acknowledges Barthes’ notion of the process by which we read one text in a manner which is informed and constructed by the ‘anterior text’, and this process which is ‘circular memory’ means ‘that the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life’ (1975: 36).

As part of the plan, the Architect makes elevation drawings: first one point of view, then another, until she has rotated around the building and shown it from every angle. This part of the Architect’s plan illustrates the building as seen from different perspectives, or point of view. It is the raising up of the flat plan into a two-dimensional depiction. The process of depicting the elevation is similar to the process of film editing where the viewer ‘is being “shifted” constantly in vantage point to a profusion of possible sites-of-being and sites-of-seeing’ (Gibson in Bird and Edquist 1994: 92).

In The Tao of Architecture, which she plucks from a shelf, the Architect reads that ‘regarding reality as what we think it is, instead of as what it is, Laotzu develops every variation of his thinking according to relative viewpoint’ (Chang 1981: 4). Similar to the moon, which moves in relation to the earth and the sun, ‘architectonic form also is passively experienced as moving when an observer moves around it’ (ibid.: 28). This recalls the depiction of gardens in Chinese scroll paintings in that ‘as the scrolls were meant to be slowly unrolled
so as to gradually reveal their depicted scenes, the gardens were designed to be
walked through, to be experienced over time from many viewpoints’ (Weiss 1995:
13). Japanese stroll gardens of the 16th and 17th centuries unrolled a landscape as
a sequence of views observed from points at the edge of the garden.51 Finlay’s
conceptual garden in Scotland is ‘the most purely philosophical garden of all’
(Weiss 1995: 16). Here, other points of view are represented in sculpture. For
example one finds ‘a sundial inscribed with the words *Locus brevis in luce
intermissus* (“A brief interruption of the light”) and, amongst other sculptures, a
tombstone inscribed with the word “Yourname” (ibid.: 17).

On considering her elevation drawings, the Architect recalls that Frank
Lloyd Wright said of the hill on which he built Taliesin: ‘Its “elevation” for me
now is the modeling of the hills, the weaving and the fabric that clings to them,
the look of it all’ (Kaufman and Raeburn 1960: 172).

Once completed, the plan is carefully folded into the Architect’s project
manual, and remains there as a reference as the work unfolds. It must be said
that the overall plan signals the ultimate failure of the Architect to realise her
ideas: ‘Architecture, perspective, maps, routes and flags, the logo and the book,
each system of guidance ends in control, a control that has now failed, leaving us
to admire the elegant skeleton of its intention’ (Dannett in Allen 1995: 248). With
an ironic smile she remembers Allen’s observations about the work of Mies van
der Rohe, namely that ‘the architecture as represented in the drawings appears
to exhibit the exact opposite character of the built work’ (Allen 2000: 72).

51 This process resembles the seeding method used in the landscaping of the Parc de La Villette where
seeds were arranged between two pages of paper which were later unrolled on soil and watered
(Sigier 1995:436).
Like the marks on an illuminated musical score, the Architect draws some ornamental designs until there has grown a thick assemblage. She considers the relationship of colour, structure and form. When she inks the drawings they will become the blueprints of the building. In this library, each part performs a specific structural role and each is freighted with a specific meaning. She constructs strongly figural forms and spaces out of an abundance of markings, scrawlings, scratching-outs, and mistakes. She is seeking a synthesis of rhythm in her temporal order, and geometry in her spatial order. There is soon a density of additions and subtractions, accretions of different collected bits, an interplay between atmospheric zones and strict geometries. She pays obsessive attention to detail and minimalist geometrical rigor. She designs a shape constructed to resist the huge wind-loads typical of the Blue Mountains. As she labours she murmurs to herself, 'Keep the straight lines clean and significant, the flat plane expressive and clean cut. But let the texture of material come in to them'.

The inherent beauty of the construction lies in the gathering of its parts, in the converging of its lines, the alternation of materials, and the chiaroscuro of light and shade. She captures the colour of early hyacinth and designs not marble, porphyries, and alabasters, but simply glass, and a row of windows high in a wall. It is neither symmetrical nor asymmetrical. Its ‘aesthetic simplicity which is a satisfaction to the mind derives, when valid and profound, from inner complexity’. The Architect uses the repetition and accumulation of small elements

52 She is heeding the advice here of Frank Lloyd Wright (Kaufman and Raeburn 1960:81).
The inherent beauty of the construction lies in the gathering of its parts.
to create the woven texture of her construction, a gently rhythmic unfolding sequence of sentences. She recalls the patterns of Persian carpets and Buddhist mandalas which are closely connected with the concept of cosmic order and with the human and divine relationship to it.

The final design mediates between the two storeys and, as she constructs the library in her imagination, it becomes 'embellished with a personal and multiple coding of details, forms and colours inspired by ideas and observations' that arise at the site.54 The Architect uses musical colour and texture to compose an ornamental melody of fast, repeated notes and structures them temporally in a complex of recurrences; the main melody returns again and again in a decorated form...

The Architect considers the role of repetition in the overall design of her building. Perhaps life itself is a sphere of interwoven thought, experience, sensation, each of which is a repetition, each of which has a season and a cycle: the rises and falls of love, dictators, thieves, presidents, husbands, children and dogs follow the same pattern – 'a perfect network of mutual relations, where all things and events interact with each other in such a way that each of them contains, in itself, all others' (Tan in Allen 1995: 154). As in the garden, which demonstrates this process in a visible, speeded-up way, everything is potentially changing form, coming and going, and repeating patterns. And words make up an intricate, repeated language pattern with an energy derived from a process similar to the musical technique of phase-shifting where the pattern is repeated throughout a piece by a fixed point while a second part accelerates to shift it out of phase. Lines of text, like the weft of a piece of cloth, are woven or etched, forming an incantation: Concerto, Sorrento, and Ravello .... Like a series of 'endlessly reflecting mirrors, this struggle [an artist's struggle with matter] reproduces all the struggles in the world' (Barthes 1987: 67), and 'nostalgia and revenge, expiation and exorcism must be obsessively reiterated ... because they reveal the heroine's longing and frustration, not just toward the absent lover but toward language' (Kauffman 1986: 301).

Brunelleschi, the Builder (and the Renaissance architect), was most anxious to be consistent and to keep an austerity in the design and decoration of his buildings. They all have a uniform character in which basic forms are regularly repeated, however Barthes suggests that not only is it that 'repetition itself creates bliss' (1975: 41), but also 'if it is unexpected, succulent in its
nerness 'it can be blissful to the reader that 'what is hollowed out, tamped
down, or what explodes, detonates' (ibid.: 42). It is this explosion, this detonation
that may signal the end of suffering and announce the immanence of 'bliss'.

The Architect desires 'the construction of a work whose metaphorical
weave would be capable of extending over the cruelty of history and of society,
with the writer, joyfully supported by the certainty of his vision, plying his loom
with patient authority' (Kristeva 1993: 68). The design of the writing involves a
reconfiguration of multiple stories for 'works of the imagination – like life itself
– consist of nothing but constantly revolving codes' (Thody in Barthes 1987:19),
and its circularity recalls Barthes' comment in S/Z, that 'the meaning of a text is
nothing but the plurality of its systems, its infinite (circular) “transcribability”:
one system transcribes another, but reciprocally as well' (ibid.).

There clearly exists the compulsion to repeat and the narrative succumbs
to this desire for repetition in its design. The structure of desire itself, as
expressed in the letter to the Architect, is repetitive and comes endlessly back
upon itself, a notion taken up by Kauffman in her study of the letters in Ovid's
Heroides, where she concerns herself with 'the repetitive structure of desire'
(1986: 217), and suggests that 'all amorous discourses are iterative' (ibid.:103).
Each is 'a part of a repetitive structure of seduction, betrayal, abandonment'
(ibid.:43). In her despair, each heroine
does the same thing. She returns obsessively to the
causes and consequences of her betrayal, trying
retrospectively to impose an order and a coherence
on an experience in which she lacked foresight at the time.

(ibid.)

Because the Builder insists that the Apprentice adhere to a strict
repetition which rejects any variation, the structure ceaselessly reiterates the
same pattern. The mantra of the bell recalls attention to the present moment and offers the notion of impermanence, and the ‘heroine proceeds from denial of the reality of her betrayal to doubt of her lover’s intentions, and then to jealousy, outrage, and despair’ (ibid.). This pattern, and the ‘replication of psychic traumas’ (ibid.: 216), the ‘tragic reenactment of emptiness and loss’ (ibid.: 222), is clearly present in the design of *The Concerto Inn* where the overall effect of repetition ‘is a succession of states and time schemes ceaselessly substituted for one another’ (ibid.: 44).

Geometric patterns are used by mankind to locate itself, however: “it is the role of design to adjust to the circumstantial” (Kahn in Venturi 1988: 45). In this discussion of design and pattern, it is worth noting that ‘the intrinsic structure of art ... is nothing other than the reflection in art of the particular structure or limitation of human attention and interest’ (Pepper 1970: 169). There is a limit to the instances of elements of an analytical scheme that can be absorbed by a human mind ‘in a single act of intuition’ (ibid.: 170). The ‘result of the limitations of human attention on art [is called] pattern; the result of the limitations of human interest, design’ (ibid.: 169).

In her reverie, the Architect is captivated and nourished by ‘the perfections of the geometrical being of the sphere’ (Bachelard 1994: 235), and in her dream she constructs and reconstructs the building until it is like Rilke’s “heaven’s great dome” just as the world is round, ‘with the calm of all roundness’, and gathers ‘being together in its centre’ (ibid.: 234). The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul for example, has been constructed as a metaphor of the universe. Its repetitive heavens form the metaphoric base of Islamic architecture originating in the Koran. The seduction of roundness, of coming the full circle is that everything seems to be in repose and the curve of the roof offers an
invitation to remain. The Architect designs the line of the roof of the Concerto Inn in recognition that 'curves represent the curved horizon, the boundary line of our vision, of architecture and painting, and their effect'. Their effect is due to 'their place in the gamut of curves' (Pepper 1970: 137). It is in a curving movement that the ending of The Concerto Inn reaches back to its beginning, the Client being unable to leave the writing of it. She attempts to seduce the reader to remain with her 'for the beloved curve has nest-like powers; it incites us to possession' (ibid.: 146). In doing this she is conscious of Proust who uses the madeleine cake to offer us longed-for completion:

The taste of childhood regained emanates from

_A la recherche_ as it ends and comes full circle.

We think we are at the beginning, and yet the entire closed spiral made manifest by the last book has already been set into motion, magnetized, to go in search of a deeper level, which is certainly that of childhood but, at the same time, absorbs the further destiny which has already come to its close. So the circles of metamorphosis work their magic.

(Kristeva 1993: 30)

The desire for symmetry can be compelling in that it is 'intrinsic, unlearned, direct, and immediate' (Pepper 1970: 185):

The peculiarity of symmetry is that every element on one side of the axis calls for and finds a corresponding and oppositely shaped element equally far away on the other side. We have here again that combination most favourable to aesthetic quality of closeness of relationship together with opposition. The result is pattern in the strict
sense (as two forms easily intuited as a pair because of their simple opposition), but more than pattern by the amount of the demand of element for element across the axis.

(ibid.: 184-185)

The Architect however, subverts the plan of the Builder, and deviates from classical symmetry ‘in the pursuit of movement’ (Coleman et al.: 1996: 93). She achieves this with her ‘use of bound/divided space, continuous flow, constant movement and change, and play of obliqueness and axiality’ (ibid.: 96).

Reflecting on her own design, the Architect notices that the rhythm of a pattern is quickly established and repetitions of a pattern ‘set up expectations of repetition’ (Pepper 1970: 189). Once the pattern is established she seeks a way to introduce variation to sustain interest. Such variation constitutes ‘the organising thread that holds the design together’ (ibid.: 212). She takes the risk ‘of your missing a variation for your delighted grasp of recognition if you catch it’ (ibid.), a strategy illustrated by Kristeva who describes how Proust designs ‘sudden shocks woven into circles to surprise us’ (1993: 64).
Multimedia item accompanies print copy
In her dreaming sleep, the Architect hears a wistful, foreign music, a recurring passage varied in length and by transposition into other keys. She tastes the sweet crumbling cake of memory. Like a Japanese ash jar, memory holds compressed time. Of course Julia Kristeva has been here in this territory of memory, and her footsteps can be heard still echoing up the steps to the library, leading the Architect to a new bridge of thought; ‘the bridge [which] is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities’.

During the early stages of construction, the Architect finds herself deeply immersed in ‘the invisible rooms that structure human memory’, and hesitates a little. ‘Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased’, she thinks, ‘Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once if I speak of it...’

She finds herself spending more time at the site than she would normally allow and when not present, believes she can hear the sounds of the hammering of secret nails, the pouring of cement. One evening she approaches the building and becomes aware of its stillness, which conveys the idea of solitude. The sense of a temple is present. The roof glistens like the moon. She finds herself in a ‘temporal place of refuge’. A thick skin of marine varnish over the wood adds a layer of

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56 Cooper in Davidson 1995: 135.
57 Calvino 1997: 87
58 Beck & Cooper in Beck 2000: 49.
luminosity to the building. She dreams of the image within the text, a network of brushstrokes underlaid with tooled gold, possessing all the fluidity of a silk painting. Her memory is rich soil, a melange of images. As the Architect renders the plan in section, it becomes apparent that 'the identity of the plan contrasts with the pragmatism of the section, which reveals the apparatus of illusion'.

Some ideas are nocturnal.

She comes across the Apprentice rousing from sleep in the half-constructed library, the Builder’s dog at her side, head upon its paws. It seems that the Apprentice is occupying the site herself. The Architect sits down with her and the Apprentice shows her that at night 'reflections make the rows of the books extend indefinitely into the landscape'. The Architect spreads out the section and elevation drawings on the floor and, as the movement ends in nocturnal calm, they examine the plans together, deciphering multiple perspectives...

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60 Simpson 1999: 32.
The notions of memory in the theory and practice of writing, and the production of the text as a 'permutative operation of "deconstruction-reconstruction" of former texts' (Martin citing Barthes in Coles and Defert 1998: 78), are represented in the essay by the architectural practice of making sections in architectural drawings. These sectional drawings are a slice through time and space which reveal the 'Other' in a coexistence of stratified surfaces that cuts into the archaeological strata of the prior existence of the shed, a building within a building.

The strata of the construction resemble geographical layers or layered textures of musical planes in a concerto created by coalescing different tempos and rhythmic patterns in the musical text. There is also a layering of narrative voices, which are, in the end, the same voice.

Through the architectural process of making a section drawing, the Architect reveals the layers, the strata of the library, recalling Adam Womelsdorf's architecture project Make a Temporal Section which 'implies that time can be rendered within a conventional form of architectural representation' by revealing the 'sectional aspects of flame' (Hoffman 1994: 13).  

Sectional drawings give access to what is present in memory, setting up a dialogue 'between personal memory and rational construct' (ibid.: 210). They cut through the 'dense mantle' of pages, laid 'one upon the other like geological strata' (Silver 1996: 15):

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61 Womeldorf used fire as the temporal principle by stacking layers of gridded wood and lighting a fire inside. The unstacking of the burnt-out layers revealed the 'sectional aspects of the flame' Hoffman 1994:13.
the contemporary experience, embracing all of
twentieth-century architecture ... presents itself
as a plural, multiform, complex experience in
which it is legitimate to cut sectional trajectories
that run not only from top to bottom, from beginning
to end, but also transversely, obliquely and diagonally.


The Architect illustrates the nature of section drawings to the Apprentice
when she describes the manner in which ' superimposed elements actually touch
instead of being related only visually ', a method used in Gothic and Renaissance
architecture. She says that the ' shafts and ribs, band courses, and arches ...
penetrate and are superimposed upon each other ' (Venturi 1968: 61), while the
Apprentice notes that Foucault said that his work intended to ' bring to light a
positive unconscious knowledge ... a site that Foucault now also calls the
archaeological level ' (Davidson 1997: 7).

The building is a repository of memory structured by invisible rooms. The
Architect uses the analogy, explored by Derrida, of Freud's double-sided Mystic
Writing Pad to discuss the architectural plan which ' can be conceived of as a
series of surfaces or layers which are both constantly regenerated and at the
same time capable of retaining multiple series of traces ' (Eisenman 1999: 33).]

She notes too, that De Certeau, when writing of Jules Verne, called the library a

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62 'The Mystic Writing Pad, as proposed in Freud's analogy, consists of three layers: the outer layer or
surface where the original writing takes place, a middle layer on which the writing is transcribed,
and underneath, a tablet of impressionable material. Using a stylus, one writes on the top surface.
Because of the surface underneath, the top surface reveals a series of black lines. When the top
surface is lifted from the other two, the black lines disappear. What remains is the inscription on the
bottom surface, the trace of the lines that have been drawn. The indentations made by the stylus
remain, always present. Thus there are infinite possibilities for writing and rewriting on the top
surface and a means of recording the traces of this writing as a series of superpositions on the tablet
underneath ' (Eisenman 1999:33).
'cavern of industrious selective memory' (1986: 138). This realm of memory is where 'the present is determined by the past' (Cache 1995: 44), and the emergent memories, 'these unfurlings', are seen by de Certeau as 'superimposed one on top of the other' (1986: 140), and 'the stages by which the text represents its own production become inverted and coil in successive transformations from written to physical spaces, and vice versa' (ibid.). The Apprentice notes that like his writing, 'Proust's work is a palimpsest in which several figures and several meanings are merged and entangled together, all present together at all times' (Genette 1982: 226). This process is not unlike that used in computer graphic design programs where, by adjusting the transparency of the different layers of images, a background image appears through the surface layer and text is added over the top of that. It is also similar to the process of underpainting over which there is another glaze of paint, and scumbling, a technique used to create a sense of something disappearing and reappearing. Yet another layering process is at work in *Romeo and Juliet* (1986) where the 'diagrams were presented on transparent sheets ... The three different scales of the diagrams, one for each version of the story, were each registered on three different points. The superposition produced new narratives in which something different from the given versions of the story could be read' (Eisenman 1999: 187-188).

The place that emerges as a result of such an architectural process is structured by the resonances of memory, and could be described as a 'strange space of memory' which is 'a place of comings (it is a returning) and goings (it is departing), of descents and surfacings' (de Certeau 1986: 142). In Gothic and Renaissance architectural drawings the inking over the initial diagram on parchment creates a 'superposition of a diagrammatic trace' which only partially 'takes'. Thus 'there is a history of an architecture of traces, of
invisible lines and diagrams that only become visible through various means' (Eisenman 1999: 28). The Architect notes the distinction between Eisenman's notion of superposition and Deleuze's idea of superimposition. The former suggests that superimposition 'refers to a vertical layering differentiating between ground and figure. Superposition refers to a coextensive, horizontal layering where there is no stable ground or origin, where ground and figure fluctuate between one another' (Eisenman 1999: 29-30).

The idea of memory as a chamber is well established. The Architect informs the Apprentice of Augustine's 'spacious palaces of memory' (Yates 1969: 60), and of Rainer Maria Rilke who put it thus:

As I find it in the memories of my childhood, it isn't a complete building; it has been broken into pieces inside me; a room here, a room there, and then a piece of a hallway that doesn't connect these two rooms, but is preserved as a fragment by itself. In this way it is all dispersed inside me.

(cited in Connah 1988: 38)

In The Concerto Inn several layers are at work beneath the text. The Architect thinks of the 'layered spaces' of the gardens created by landscape architects like Rose, Eckbo and Kiley which are 'neither open nor enclosed. Instead they are stratified, constructed, substantial, and articulated' and they are places where 'transparencies take on a temporal as well as spatial quality' (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 24). She recalls Eisenman's suggestion that 'traces suggest potential relationships' (1999: 32), while De Certeau, in Heterologies, describes consciousness as 'both the deceptive mask and the operative trace of events that organise the present' (De Certeau's emphasis 1986: 3). He comments that 'if the past is repressed it returns in the present from which
it was excluded, but does so surreptitiously ' (ibid.), and ' like shelves in a library, the narrative stacks up strata ' (ibid.: 139). It is thus ' indefinite stratification ' which ' offers the gaze a structure " en abyme " ' (ibid.: 140).

This essay is, in essence, another layer of the novel. De Certeau suggests that as readers who read the Jules Verne novel that arises from Gabriel Marcel's research we ' can in turn become its author ' only to find that Marcel has fragmented eighteenth-century authors and made them ' disappear ' in the same way. He suggests that his selection cuts into the body of writing and cuts through the ' manuscript underlayers ' of ' absent texts ' which are represented and embedded within the final text so that the ' definitive work is made up of this relic-filled stratification ' (ibid.: 142). In her own work the Architect has noticed the way in which ' a detail from a contemporary source makes an appearance, suddenly cutting across the stage upon which pasts interpenetrate one another ' (ibid.) The construction becomes a narrative that ' displays a multiplication of trajectories, which unfurl an earlier writing in space, and of documents, which bury the past beneath displacements of location ' (ibid.).

The section drawing cuts through and reveals the layers of memories below. As Proust illustrates, memory is invited to the surface by the senses. In The Little House we learn of the artist, Dandrillon, who invented a process of mixing pleasant scents with the varnish that he used to paint walls so that they were present in a room for many years (Bastide 1996: 76). Memory is like the unseen world that lies below Paris – another, nocturnal Paris is present in the

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63 An expression meaning a telescoping image, that is, an image which gets smaller in constant multiplication of itself. (Leach 1997:347).
64 When de Certeau describes the location, the arrangement of the books in the library, each one 'stands beside the others, yet nevertheless repeats the same depth-effect by placing itself above or below the other ' on the shelf thus establishing a physical stratification where the ' fragments of Marcel's shattered mirror which survive in Verne are studded with slivers of mirror from an older stratum of source processing ' (1986:140).
Métro tunnels, the sewers, the périphérique, the catacombs – a mirror image of
the city above, the one below set out in a grid, the other taking the shape of the
curving boulevards.

Kristeva suggests that Proust 'offers us the space of memory' (1993: 6)
and develops 'a category of felt time' with which he uses memory to construct
'the new cathedral' of Remembrance of Things Past (ibid.: 7). She refers to 'the
unending search for that lost temple, that invisible temple which is the felt time of
our subjective memories' (ibid. Emphasis in the original), and which is discovered
among the paths the writer takes in her search for the perfect tale, a path she
dreams will lead her 'to create a world as vast as a cathedral' (ibid.: 23).
(Emphasis in the original).

In her lecture, In Search of Madeleine, Kristeva traces the history of the
development of the famous madeleine cake episode and concludes that 'Proust's
madeleine is ... the condensation which embraces two moments in time and two
different spaces within the vast "structure of recollection"' (ibid.: 48), a moment
that is described by the Architect in the section drawing of the Concerto Inn and
suggests that 'Proust's teacup and madeleine are personal keys, unlocking a
history previously inaccessible within his unconscious' (Hoffman 1994: 208). This
parallels de Certeau's idea of Foucault's reading as 'a poaching' where he hunts
'through the forests of history and through our present plains' and 'traps
strange things which he discovers in a past literature and uses these for
disturbing our fragile present securities' (1986: 191).

For the Architect, it is 'at the very antipodes of the place of birth' that 'a
maximum distance, a foreign country' is discovered which, in turn, gives access
to 'the definitive stabilisation of the loss and transference of meaning and
representation whose story is recounted to us in the episode of the madeleine'
(Kristeva 1993: 48-49). The madeleine cake can be described as a memory bell that recalls us to ‘possess the world in attentive ways’ (White 2000: 162), that ‘brings us to the present moment, the moment in which language and meaning are manufactured in writing’ (Kauffman 1986: 207). The present is recast in the building and in the present moment the Architect hears language speak with ‘the peal of stillness’ (Wigley in Tschumi 1992: 207).
As the night shifts and the dream deepens, slowly the Concerto Inn evolves in a movement that is a nocturne, a night-song. It emerges from the depths of the garden and is rich and harmonious. Following the Architect’s design, the Builder constructs a summer palace, an elegant pavilion. The treatment of the elliptical curved roof objectifies its presence. It floats above the body of the building. The library, now cleared of anything superfluous, is sheathed in glass. The strong colours and forms create an abstract, sculpted architecture. The intention is to facilitate movement and to create a sense of calm and reflection within its fluid spaces. The architectural language of the library is modern, but tempered by references to its ancient site. From within, its windows construct the landscape outside.

The viewing tower is an obstacle. There is nowhere for it to rise without transgressing the building restrictions of the Blue Mountains Council. The Architect reaches for pen and paper and, as quickly as sunlight floods into an opening doorway, she sketches a light-well and a viewing platform instead. She creates a timber jetty, an arc that reaches out beyond the boundaries of the building into the landscape. It ends in the calculated harmony of an intricate hide with a curved endpoint, designed to hold the Client and her notebook.

The Architect invites the Client to step outside memory, to accompany her on an inspection of the work-in-progress at the site, and together they take ‘the
winding walk of each sentence.

As they make their way down from the road, the Architect indicates how the approach to the building is inseparable from the landscape:

Approached from above, it is a quiet timber box, offering a rhythm of columns, a red door and a curved roof as hints of what lies inside...
The building reads as a tightly coordinated assembly of elements – base, platform, spine-wall, roof – with frameless glass between these elements so that light comes in between them during the day and glows between them from the outside at night.

Pausing in the porch-like portico, they see stories inscribed on the exterior of the lofty walls of the library. They hear an incantatory song. The building culminates in the floating roof that envelops the whole construction. It resembles a curving, half-extended wing. As they pass beneath it to the front door, they notice that the ‘openings – doorways, corridors – into the entrance hall serve as witnesses to an event, the act of capturing an infinite number of temporary images witnessed by the viewer’s changing perspectives’.
The Client cannot but think of Freud’s use of the spatial metaphor when he compares the ‘system of the unconscious to a large entrance hall’.

Finding herself seduced by the language of the building, the Client recalls the erotic-architectural epic written by Francesco Colonna, the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, published in 1499, which ‘revealed the secrets of ancient architecture

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through the pleasant conceit of a love-poem'. Because of its dream-like form and architectural detail, its author may actually have been Leon Battista Alberti, the renowned Renaissance architect.

Each room resounds with their voices, their footsteps, and the sound of their breathing. They pass along walls into corridors, up stairways, past niches, wooden panels, and imagine they see a glass staircase. They follow the flow of thought and fluctuations in light until they come to an idea that is offered like an extended hand.

The library is constructed almost entirely from glass, the reflections of which are layers with areas of transparency and opacity. Here there is glimpsed an illuminated hand which, reaching for a teapot, floats in the garden outside the window. A light unattached to a wall, appears in the darkness. These overlappings, overlays, superimpositions of images created by glass, are like the drafts of a piece of writing.

Through the night the building grows, in the Architect's mind, out of the ground and up towards the light. The reflections involve the Client in a process of turning, bending and folding back. The glass invites her to fix her thoughts on a meditation, a remembrance, a recollection...

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69 Vidler in Bastide 1996: 11.
The glass invites her to fix a meditation, a remembrance.
Glass

The Builder assembles the recycled timber, plywood and steel that form the building fabric but, in essence the Concerto Inn is an 'architecture that privileges glass - this material' the Architect suggests, 'that does not retain traces of the event' (Déotte in Davidson 1995: 34). The light penetrates zones of glass, falls upon the Narrator's everyday life and illuminates it, for glass is 'the material of vision' which 'offers an invisible door to the soul' and 'makes the world transparent' (Hoffman 1994: 27). Images circulate endlessly between the inert surface of the wood and the multiple reflections of the glass.

The Architect comments to the Builder that in our desire to render the grid of existence visible 'we frequently opt for translucent material; penetrating light is important. We have no secrets. We want the architecture to bathe in the transparent northern light' (Arets in Tschumi 1993: 41). She utilises great sheets of glass which resemble 'air in air' (Wright in Kaufman and Raeburn 1960: 314), and creates a careful composition of walls and windows. Glass gives multiple interpretations and 'plays on the Duchampian structures of logic, mathematics and language' (Diller and Scofidio 1994: 103). She uses it so that bright lights illuminate the interior of the building at night, and during the day the glass reflects the sky.

There are many opinions about the Architect's use of glass. The Builder reminds her that a 'fully reflecting surface ... has no definite being of its own' (Chang 1981: 55). By using glass in his sculptures, Smithson 'subverts the presumed order ... the rational becomes irrational; systems conflict; and a calm, discreet chaos prevails' (Hobbs 1981: 87). Reflections in the glass of the construction represent change and movement. For 'Derrida the meaning of the
text was caught in the labyrinth of mirrors – a model similar to the Lacanian 
chain of metaphors with which Barthes was, at the same moment, characterising 
arrested meaning’ (Martin in Coles and Defert 1998: 67). The window is no 
longer simply a frame through which the world is viewed, but also functions as a 
mirror to reflect, distort and multiply, and represents the ‘fissure of appearance 
and being’ (Weiss 1995: 69). De Certeau describes ‘a broken and anamorphic 
mirror’ where ‘others are fragmented and altered’ (1984: 44). The eyes of others, 
it is said, are the mirrors ‘that the world provides for our own acts and 

The Architect constructs mirror images that ‘offer a vast series of 
rhetorical and poetic effects transposed onto the visual realm: multiplications, 
substitutions, enlargements, diminutions, combinations and distortions’ (ibid.: 
84-85). This ‘wave is decomposed into an infinity of juxtaposed facets’ (Genette 
cited by Weiss 1995: 86), and the mirror ‘transforms the world into a 
representation’ and reveals ‘a miniature, transportable cosmos, always on the 
verge of disappearing’ (ibid.:85).

The library is clearly an architectural metaphor for the Client’s writing. 
The Architect uses metaphor in the construction to constitute the text as an 
unfolding spatial narrative in the reader’s consciousness. With all the fidelity of 
the enemy, the Builder holds metaphor as a building material, in disdain, 
describing it as ‘a fabricated image, without deep, true, genuine roots. It is an 
ephemeral expression’ (Bachelard 1994: 74-75). He accuses the Architect of 
retreating into metaphor. Furthermore, he goes on to insist that ‘we must be 
careful, therefore, not to give it too much thought’, in fact ‘it is dangerous to 
make a thought of it’ (ibid.:76). To his annoyance the Architect describes her 
intention to use a ‘metaphorical weave’ (Kristeva 1993: 69), and to gather ideas
that assemble themselves into an argument to build a 'cathedral to literature'.

The Builder cites Wittgenstein and his 'language games', which he nominated as the 'primary units of meaning'. The Builder insists that 'using language metaphorically is a language-game' and that this 'language-game is parasitic on the literal uses of language' (Hintikka & Asandu in Hintikka 1994: 177), and therefore construction. He is inclined to believe that the 'altered relationship between structure and image, structure and skin' has weakened architecture. He describes the metaphor as ornament and sees things in terms of a tension between structure and ornament. He cites Leon Battista Alberti, the Renaissance architect: "Ornament has the character of something attached or additional" and as such must not detract from or weaken the structure (Tschumi 1993: 86).

The Architect, on the other hand, describes metaphor as the 'rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality' (Ricoeur 1997:7). It is inevitable that she will 'succumb again to the seduction of metaphor' (Efrat et al. 1994: 388). It has been suggested of Proust that 'the Overture could be viewed as a cascade of metaphors and metonymies, establishing the structures along which the narrative will move' (Bann in Kristeva 1993: xii). As these ideas come to obsess her, the Architect herself comments that metaphor 'is just a way of becoming part of the continual weaving of connections that takes place at the heart of living' (ibid: 59), and that being 'is doubtless there before us, but we can enjoy it only by imagining it in metaphors' (ibid.: 68). She notes that 'analogy is the technique which gives rise to the instantaneous effect, like a bolt of lightning' (ibid.: 64). Proust's assemblage of perceptions and ideas, Kristeva describes as 'the fusion of analogy, the very stuff of metaphor' (ibid.:57).
Furthermore, the Apprentice, as one naturally inclined to error, is closely involved with the use of metaphor in the construction: "If metaphor always involves a kind of mistake, if it involves taking one thing for another by a sort of calculated error, the metaphor is essentially a discursive phenomenon. To affect just one word, the metaphor has to disturb a whole network by means of an aberrant attribution" (Ricoeur 1997: 21).

The Architect insists that our conceptual systems, in terms of which we both think and act, are essentially metaphoric in nature, as distinct from the idea that 'rational' thought is free from metaphor. For her metaphor represents the creative use of language, the gap where new ideas are not predicted. What is metaphor, she asks, except the struggle to better express the human condition? She employs it to 'describe the unspeakable' (Kauffman 1986:185). Furthermore 'it is as though ... imagination were entirely metaphorical ... a metaphor gives concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express' (Bachelard 1994: 74-5). The Client understands this perfectly: metaphor is an attempt to 'express the otherwise inexpressible' (Espy 1983: 108).

The Architect points to the work of the construction partnership of Steinhart and Kittay to illustrate to the Builder that there is a practical, structural framework for metaphors, that they can be mapped as 'sentential frames', 'genetive frames' and 'contrast frames' (Hintikka 1994: 81). In fact 'the semantic network is a linguistic deep structure. Surface structures are generated from this deep structure by traversing the network in accordance with syntactical rules' (ibid.). More importantly these structures and frames put up a window to a new world where 'the wall delimits and the window selects'. The window 'frames the landscape' in 'as much as the landscape encompasses the frame' (Cache 1995: 140), an idea that finds a parallel in Smithson's art where we
examine ‘not only the objects but also the contexts, the frames ... Sometimes they are one and the same’ (Hobbs 1981: 16).

Thus the metaphor provides a building material that is tight and sound as is evidenced by the work, cited by Steinhart and Kittay, of Brooke-Rose (1970) and Tirrell (1991) who presented taxonomies of the many different grammatical forms of metaphors. This vast mapping of the structure of the metaphor reveals a frame strong enough to hold a ‘cathedral to literature’ but more important is the work on the cognitive processes involved in the use of metaphor to constitute a reality. In fact ‘similarity-creating metaphors lie at the crux of creativity’ (Indurkhya in Hintikka 1994: 103), and ‘novel metaphors – metaphors which almost always appear discordant at first’ play an important role in that they go ‘beyond noticing existing-similarities ... and create the similarities’:

In fact, novel metaphors are so pervasive and their cognitive force is so different from conventional metaphors and comparison-theoretic or similarity-based metaphors that they have been treated in Wheelwright’s (1962) theory of metaphor under the name ‘diaphor’; and the so-called anomaly theory of metaphor has been proposed just to account for them.

( Ibid.)

The Architect does not retreat into metaphor as the Builder might accuse, but is engaged in finding hidden paths to new ideas, tools with which to create thought. She sets about the process ‘of inventing other modes of logic and response, modes based on feeling as a way of knowing’ (Kauffman 1986: 201). The Architect points out that ‘many innovative solutions to problems came as a result of viewing the problem in “strange” ways’. This underlying cognitive

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The Apprentice appreciates that the charm of metaphor lies in its unpredictability, which makes it an important source of creativity in language, for no matter how carefully you have observed previous occasions of metaphoric language, you will not be able to predict the meaning of a new metaphor.

‘A good metaphor’ is an invitation to a way of life. A good metaphor:

introduces a conceptually innovative substance
that we are not (yet?) ready to usher into our
canonical ontology. It unites the items denoted
by the terms of the metaphor by suggesting a new,
hitherto unthought of, essence.

(Zemach in Hintikka 1994: 253)

If a metaphor is ‘an elliptical simile’ with the difference between the two being that ‘the latter does in a grammatically explicit way what the former does implicitly’ (Haack in Hintikka 1994.: 5), then there is much that is hidden, concealed. The metaphorical ‘“is” at once signifies both “is not” and “is like”.

If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth’ (Ricoeur1997: 7). The critical element about metaphors for the Architect suggests the Client, is that ‘the narrator gains access to “some general essence” that becomes her “nourishment and joy”’ (Kristeva 1993: 65).

What it really comes down to in the end though, is that metaphors ‘lie at the centre of creativity’ (Hintikka 1994: 103). Their impact is described most effectively in the final retort of the Architect to the Builder: Metaphors are ‘the dreamwork of language’ (ibid.: 19).
Everything here is at the level of symbol, emblem, sign...
The music begins again—a long, elegiac, slow movement that ends in a silence ushered in by a beating of wings. The Architect leads the Client deep into the interior of the library until they come to a locked door, the entrance to what was originally the existing building—the shed. Thus the building conceals a hidden interior structure, a covert narrative.

They pause a moment before entering, and the Architect detects a shiver of desire or fear in the Client. Her face is grave. She seems older, vulnerable somehow, as if ill health or adversity will carry her off. The Architect produces a glass key from her pocket and as she turns the key they enter 'an isolated landscape within an enclosed structure'. They enter the interior room where 'there is no language without deceit'.

Like the attic where Dorian Gray placed his portrait, the interior of the Concerto Inn 'becomes a kind of metaphor for the Lacanian unconscious ... Not only is it physically distant within the house, it is also dusky, dusty, and eerie just as the Lacanian unconscious, with its archaic accounts of the past, is opaque'.

The interior room is full of that strange, diffused glow that is produced by high windows. It is like a walled village in the heart of the city. Its essence is

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70 'Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspective deceitful, and everything conceals something else' (Calvino 1997: 44).

71 Betsky & Hadid 1998: 75.
73 Ragland-Sullivan in Woodward & Schwartz 1986: 120.
unutterable, and here nothing is ever as it seems. It is a construction full of mazes that seems to offer a way out, but boxes one in instead. The subtle gradations of light and dark confuse. Everything here is at the level of symbol, emblem, sign ...
Like the Broken column in the Désert de Retz which was created 'to make a multi-level house look like one storey from the outside' (Ketcham 1994:7), the exterior of the Architect's building is designed to hide what lies at its foundations. The Concerto Inn is constructed upon a deceit. The interior of this room disintegrates as it is entered. Like the visitor to Daniel Libeskind's zinc-clad Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Narrator undertakes a 'wildly disconcerting journey into disturbed inner worlds' where the uneven black floor and walls that are 'off true' create a disorienting and oppressive sensation. Libeskind 'eschews right angles' and 'avoids symmetry' to give the visitor the experience of the "others" - in this case, Jews in Nazi Germany. The result of this architectural manoeuvring is 'marginalisation by spatial practices' (Lefebvre in Leach 1997: 145). Thus the interior room is enclosed and protected within the existing walls of the shed, almost cell-like - an introverted space.

The interior room also recalls Monville's Chinese House in the Désert de Retz, which, although cleverly designed and crafted, was essentially French, its chinoiserie taken from illustrations. Here the Author in The Concerto Inn uses mirrors to obfuscate, to create a 'mere box of spatio-temporal tricks' (Baudrillard, as cited by Leach 1997: 220). This succeeds in confusing the Narrator. In Enantiomorphic Chambers Smithson shows art's subject as 'its own

74 The Désert de Retz near Paris was a folly garden built by François de Monville, created between 1774 and 1789, and dismantled a few years later during the Revolution. He built a complete miniature world.
75 The Architect has read Shirley Apthorp's article in The Weekend Australian, July 22nd-23rd 2000 pp. 2-3.
76 The Chinese House, set in a garden on the edge of a lake, was constructed in 1777 from Indian teak. 'The facade was made up of panels of carving and latticework, trimmed with violet and red paint, and divided by columns carved to imitate bamboo. The three-tiered roof was covered in fish-scale tiles and topped by a lantern and latticework railing. The roofs curved down to extended eaves, with bells hanging from the corners... the second story was taken up by a library, linked to the salon by a secret stairway' (Ketchum 1994:23).
being, and the result is a type of nonseeing or visual blindness' (Hobbs 1981: 13), where 'the rational becomes irrational; the mute and apparent, puzzling' (ibid.: 20). The 'work of art is a mirror of reality, but the realities it reflects are other mirrors, other myths' (ibid.: 154). All of this gathers to a point where the accepted psychological states for the Narrator in *The Concerto Inn* are distorted, and the 'mirror displacements ... are reflections of incomprehensibility' (ibid.: 153). The mirrors reflect illusions even though they themselves are real, and the same can be said for art: 'art has the ability to deceive through reflections' (ibid.: 153).

This interior room is both the place from which the Narrator is excluded, and the place she is locked into, a place Frank Lloyd Wright would describe as a 'cellular sequestration that implied ancestors familiar with the cells of penal institutions' (Kaufman and Raeburn 1960: 43). The Architect too, is concerned that architectural discourse 'too often imitates or caricatures the discourses of power' (Lefebvre in Leach 1997: 144). It is Bataille who nominates the slaughterhouse, the abattoir, as the 'site of exclusion' (Leach 1997: 20), and Foucault who describes the architectural layout of Bentham's Panopticon which 'affords various techniques of control' (Leach 1997: 348). He describes it as an closed, sectionalised space which is observed at every point and which created 'in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (in Leach 1997: 361).

The Architect notes that interior space is most often connected with the female body and exterior with the male (Rendell in Coles 1999: 181). Boxes 'are metaphors for the female body, specifically the female genitalia', just as the box-like space of the locked room can perhaps be read here as a metaphor for the Narrator's body. (ibid.: 182).
The Narrator has been interned by the discourse that privileges the Author’s writing over the experience of the everyday. The sight of the Builder and the Apprentice working on the construction reminds the Architect that she must not ignore the fact that the terrains of artistic practice and of art history are structured in and structuring of gender power relations’ (Follock 1988: 55). These thoughts recall de Certeau’s explanation of Foucault’s idea that ‘the development of a cellular grid ... transforms space itself into an instrument that can be used to discipline’ (1986: 186). In this room the Narrator is forced to consider the act of betrayal, the Author as traitor.

The hidden room recalls Deleuze’s baroque house. As described in The Fold, it consisted of two parts: ‘the upper part is a single enclosed chamber with no windows; below is a horizontally extended suite of rooms with windows that admit the knowledge available to the senses’ (Hoffman 1994: 66). In Hong Kong the Narrator receives this type of knowledge, but is unable to understand its meaning via her senses.

It is in the locked room that all that sits uneasy within us resides. It is where sleep ‘opens within us an inn for phantoms’ (Bachelard 1969: 63). As the Architect leads the Client into the interior room, they are entering the domain of Foucault’s ‘excluded language (a language that is circumscribed, consecrated, dreaded, erected, and elevated far above itself, whose reference is but a self-reference within that useless and transgressive fold we call literature)’ (Davidson 1997: 104). It is here that they find ‘the vicinity where language folds in upon itself still saying nothing’ (ibid.). This room is the locus of the Author’s

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77 This room recalls Hoffman’s telling of the story about the ruler who governed his empire from a small windowless room, which he entered daily and emerged, after a long time, with decrees relating to all the matters of government. Hoffman describes how many theories arose concerning the nature of this room. Its walls were supposedly inscribed with drawings of all the ruler’s possessions. It was only as he lay dying that, when asked the secret of his method of reading, he replied, “I listen”. (1994: 221)
duplicitity, the point of departure for the whole building, and where we become aware that 'art is primarily the consciousness of unhappiness, not its consolation' (Smock in Blanchot 1982: 5).

It is here, in the locked, concealed room that the Narrator is immured in the manner depicted by Manuela Antoniu in her article, "The Walled-up Bride: An Architecture of Eternal Return". She describes the way in which 'sacrificial rites have been integral to construction' throughout history (Coleman et al. 1996: 109). It is the builder's wife whose sacrifice prompted Antoniu to probe the text of southeastern European legends for their 'contemporary relevance to entrenched dichotomies of architectural making' (ibid.: 111). She investigates the 'span between the instrumental (woman as building material) and mythical (woman as generative principle)' (ibid.).

In The Concerto Inn the Author places mirrors within the interior of the inn he describes to the Narrator. The mirror 'is a virtual plane between the real and the representation of the real. Because it has this property, it is also capable of playing with or tricking reality' (Agrest 1991: 143). This technique resembles that of Smithson, who, in his Enantiomorphic Chambers (1965), uses mirrors to deprive the spectators 'access to a unified gestalt self-image' (Coles and Defert 1998: 94). He sets up mirrors so that

- two images could be experienced only fleetingly as a unity due to a fundamental and natural structural split.
- After some effort, however, the two images could be made to coalesce enough for the viewer to see a unified but non-existent space, a prism-shaped area which certainly

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78 The legend follows the same narrative sequence: '1. An incipient construction collapses unaccountably every night; 2. The builders involved enter a covenant by agreeing to sacrifice a woman kln; 3. The wife of the master mason is immured, in most cases, alive; 4. A child is orphaned or dies as a result of the woman's immolation' (Coleman et al. 1996: 108-9).
could be perceived quite without metaphor, but could not
be entered, because just like the ego, it belonged to the
world of optical illusion ... the spectator was made
to encounter unified space as a "fake".

(ibid.100-101).

Howard Caygill examines literary fakery in his article "See Naples and
Die ", where he analyses Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacs' visit to Naples as
described in Naples (1924), an essay about the contemporary process of ruination
occurring in Naples. He criticises Benjamin's inability to lose himself in the city
and to really see it. He describes the text as a 'magnificent fraud' because
Benjamin is not really present in Naples' (Coles and Defert 1998: 100-101), just as,
perhaps, Mies van der Rohe was not really present once in a photograph that
implied his presence, and the Author was not really present in the Concerto Inn
on Lamma Island in Hong Kong. 79

Beneath its exotic exterior, the city of Hong Kong conceals secrets from
the Narrator. It traffics in deception and draws her inward to the 'insane space
of internment' (Serres in Davidson 1997: 45), wherein lies a secret code, not
available to her. The Narrator is 'subjected to the systematic alteration of the
sign systems by which she makes her world coherent' (Kauffman 1986: 187), and
so is brought to the brink of madness. The story within the story is a ruse. 80

Hong Kong is a Chinese box, a 'graduated series of things in things or

79 In "The House That Made Mies" we are given a description of the catalogue that Philip Johnson
produced for MoMA's first Mies exhibition in 1947 which showed a picture of a 1:1 wood and canvas
model placed in the landscape. The picture looked bizarre - as if a graft between two realities had not
"taken" (Sigler 1995:80). In 1982, when asked about the photo, Philip Johnson said it was a fake.

80 Magar describes Philip Johnson's article "House at Canaan Connecticut" as 'a written substitute
for his building' and suggests that it is a 'diversion and a substitution for his real wish: that the
Glass House were [Mies van der Rohe's] the Farnsworth House' (Coleman et al 1996: 75).
enclosures within enclosures' (Venturi 1988: 74), or a 'matrix of voids'. It is filled only with the rhetoric of loss, where the 'least important secrets are put into the first box, the idea being that they will suffice to satisfy his curiosity, which can also be fed on false secrets. In other words, there exists a type of cabinetwork that is "complexualistic" (Bachelard 1994: 82). Here are 'rotundas and chapels that are the sanctuaries of the secret' (ibid.:29), and like Escher's mazes, promise a way out, but enclose one instead. The Architect notes a 'homology between the geometry of the small box and the psychology of secrecy' (ibid.: 82).

The Builder has constructed the interior room neatly, recalling the Duomo in Florence where there is a dome concealed within a dome, the former being the basic structure that supports the latter, and only revealed when peeled back in architectural sections. Brunelleschi constructed a double-skinned dome, the outer shell of which was created for optical effect only. It can be described as a multi-layered text with a 'double lining of sensation' (Kristeva 1993: 58), where concealed from view, were two minor radial ribs between each major rib, twenty-four in all, to make the inner shell. The structure is, in effect, an eight-sided Gothic vault expressing the synthesis of the circle and the square, movement and repose, time and space. By concealing the functional elements and shaping a smooth external silhouette, Brunelleschi crossed the bridge into Renaissance

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81 Eisenman placed scaled versions of a house in a 'matrix of voids'. Each of three different scales 'was nested inside the next largest scale, like a series of Russian dolls ... It was no longer a house but a museum that contained the model of a house ... These three different scales made it impossible to say which was the appropriate, or real, scale. It was also impossible to name the objects and thus relate form to function' (1999:177).

82 Brunelleschi, who trained originally as a goldsmith, devised for the dome of Florence Cathedral, a continuously self-supporting masonry system which was without centring – a feat of structural engineering, and a synthesis of the medieval and Gothic. He prefigured the whole project. His demonstration of the application of geometrical principles of the perspectivl representation of three-dimensional space as a plane surface constructed new ways of looking at architectural and urban space. Starting at some 54.9 metres above the ground, he set eight massive ribs which reached for the heavens from the angles of a supporting octagon - the footprint of the building – to a point almost 30.5 metres higher where they converged at the base of a lantern tower.
architecture, condensing two different architectural elements into one construction, the two thicknesses of masonry forming props to each other, like two storeys/stories. This is similar to Kristeva’s notion of ‘the condensation which embraces two moments in time and two different spaces within “the vast structure of recollection”’ (1993: 33), and Kauffman’s idea that one ‘of the fundamental traits of iterative narrative [is] the ability to keep one’s thoughts focussed on two disparate moments simultaneously, to see them as identical and to merge them’ (1986: 44), just as a circular timber hoop (secured with irons at the junctions) bound the whole of Brunelleschi’s dome together.

Thus the dome is a series of self-supporting rings upon which bricks were laid, piece by piece in a manner that recalls Barthes’ description of writing which is constructed by ‘the constant addition of sentences to one another’ (1987: 63). Brick and stone courses were laid in a herringbone pattern on inclined surfaces converging towards a single centre which was gradually raised to a point of curvature, thus obtaining the advantages both of light, ribbed Gothic structures, and the ancient structures of solid mass which Brunelleschi had studied in Rome. Between the two skins of the dome the reader can travel, climbing a hidden stairway that leads up to the lantern and the light. She can stand there and gaze out over the whole of Florence.

Brunelleschi then, like the Author, was adept at the manipulation of illusion and reality, a thoroughly Machiavellian architect.83

Illustrating how ‘the act of writing is itself a lie, a disguise’ (Kauffman 1986:206), the Author in The Concerto Inn, ‘the master logician’ (ibid.: 266),

83 In the ‘apparently true story, The Fat Woodworker’, written by Brunelleschi’s biographer, Antonio Manetti, there is a series of intricate set-ups with Brunelleschi deceiving the woodworker into thinking he had ‘lost his assumed identity and became someone else. After the deception has been revealed and the fat woodworker becomes aware of the elaborate trickery, the surprising outcome of the story is that his life is positively transformed’ (Monument 33 Dec-Jan 1999 – 2000:69).
'concocts a powerfully crafted version of events' (ibid.: 204), and writes
dupliculously, creating a construction designed to deceive, to enable him to be
somewhere else, to be someone else. His story creates an 'effect of trickery, of
embedded images, riddles, or hidden agendas in the texture of the writing'
(Conley 1996: 75), and is created as a 'panoptical mechanism of control' (Weiss
1995:24).\textsuperscript{84} His story recalls Smithson's *Hotel Palenque* (1969/1972), a
documentation of the sculptor's visit to the conundrum of a decaying hotel in
Mexico in 1969 where, upon 'entering the hotel the subject engaged in a fantasy
relationship with architectural objects'. Its door 'opens on nowhere and closes
nowhere' and 'stood like a *vacant gaze*' (Martin in Coles and Defert 1998: 112).\textsuperscript{85}
The Architect describes this process as setting up 'an opposition between
appearance and concealment, between the visible and invisible' and finds that a
'space of secrecy, an inside of otherness is created' (Mulvey in McCorquodale et

The Author (Philippe) constructs the Narrator's demise with a pen as
sharp as a geometer's compass, consigning her 'to silence and madness'
(Kauffman 1986: 217). She experiences a process of erasure in the silent space,
for, 'he who holds the pen inhabits ... the space of reason' (Serres in Davidson
1997: 41).\textsuperscript{86} In her consideration of gender, genre and epistolary fictions,
Kauffman illustrates the nature of the space of the locked room in her study of
texts in which fifteen heroines write to an invisible other who has seduced,

\textsuperscript{84} Limon describes Bentham's Panoptican as 'police-state political geometry' 'where one man can
control all the inmates from one central spot thanks to transparency' (Allen 1995:181).
\textsuperscript{85} Robert Smithson was interested in the ruins of his own time. He presented to architecture students
a lecture and slides on a run-down hotel that was being torn down in some places and newly built in
others e.g. Parts of the Hotel Palenque were roofless; a suspension bridge spanned the empty
swimming pool; an inoperative dance floor had its own live Spanish moss. (Hobbs 1981:165).
\textsuperscript{86} Antonia, in her discussion of the 'walled-up bride, describes how the builder, when asked what he
is prepared to sacrifice so that the construction will stand up, replies that if he sacrifices his daughter
he will have no daughter, and if he sacrifices his mother he will have no mother, but if he sacrifices
his wife, he will have the chance to find a better one. A wife, says Antonia, 'is indispensable for the
life of the construction, yet is also matrimonially replaceable' (Coleman et al. 1996:121).
betrayed, or simply left them behind. She notes that ‘each letter repeats a pattern of challenge, rage’ (1986: 17). In all the texts ‘passion is transgressive, woman is disorder, and discourses of desire are repressed. Their speakers are literally exiled or imprisoned or metaphorically “shut up” – confined, cloistered, silenced’ (ibid.:20).

The Author’s story, “The Concerto Inn”, the Architect sees, is an envelope freighted with notions of the erotic, and constructed carefully from air. His story structures a ‘space of madness’ (Serres in Davidson 1997: 41) and so the walls of the locked room form the border between rationality and madness and this border is a mirror where ‘the boundary that separates the two domains, changeable in its nature, pluralizes them to infinity’ (ibid.: 46). When it is discovered ‘its secret, at once kept, concealed and yet exhibited, is won but lost in its exhibition. The secret is, as its name indicates, the separation’ (Derrida 1998: 148). Like the Narrator, Faulkner’s Rosa is ‘isolated from “general space”, from the world at large, by time and space; she lives “partitioned”’ (Kauffman 1986: 272) in “a secret interior within the public square” (Derrida cited by Kauffman 1986: 273).

In his discussions on madness, the ‘discourse of unreason on reason’ (Davidson 1997: 51), Foucault, in Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique, finds the language of geometry particularly useful as it contains ‘the geometrical” of negatives” (ibid.: 50) and ‘the idioms of rejection and covering up, as if one were talking about a foreign land” (ibid.: 37). The Client, standing in the interior room, refers to ‘the caged space’ and ‘the domain of silence’ (ibid.:41), the ‘pure theory of internment” (ibid.: 50) which is a ‘formal theory of separated spaces where the quarantined suffer” (ibid.: 50-51). It is such geometry that ‘acted as an internal code for formal control from the classical period of
Greek architecture' (Agrest 1991: 41). In the mid-sixties, however, Smithson subverted such discourses when he made fun of such rational systems as the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis in his Sites/Nonsites. Following his example, the Architect works to create confusion, rather than clarity. Her purpose is 'to employ cool, austere shapes indicative of rational thinking and then assemble them in ways that would undermine their rationality' (Hobbs 1981: 20).

The Architect is reminded of "On Walking", where de Certeau describes the 'metaphor of the illicit – the production of an individual reading is illicit – furtive, subversive. Hidden within the territory of the enemy'. The illicit is hungry and getting hungrier, and its consequence is pointed at by the Architect when describing the work of Foucault as 'an explication of the silence of the mad. The spatial style that expresses the fundamental experience of quarantine becomes the style of the conditions of possibility of this silence' (Serres in Davidson 1997: 39). The Narrator in The Concerto Inn alludes to this 'insane space of internment' when upon burning the house to the ground, she cries, I am the mad wife. I give you to the air. She is the natural heir to Jane Eyre's Bertha Mason, exiled to the 'extreme silence and solitude' (Kauffman 1986: 252) of the locked and concealed room. Here she engages in a ceaseless lament against the structure of loss, lack, abandonment and feels herself to be as one interned in Dachau. Barthes describes the lover's discourse as existing 'in a sense a series of No Exits' (ibid.: 142). And it is here perhaps that the self-surveillance that renders one docile is performed.

In response to her internment, the Narrator in The Concerto Inn takes on

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87 Barthes asks, is 'it not indecent to compare the situation of a love-sick subject to that of an inmate of Dachau' (1978: 49). He acknowledges the triviality of the former and the 'unimaginable' suffering of the latter, yet concludes that 'these two situations have this in common: they are, literally, panic situations: situations without remainder, without return ... I am lost forever' (ibid.).
the "mantle of invisibility", a cloak of animal skins and feathers worn by the Plains Indian warriors to make them invisible to their enemies (Hoffman 1984: 162), and secretes her own story within that of the Author's, inserts it into the weave of the fabric much as the Apprentice conceals personal codes within the library she helps construct (the Architect has discovered that the Apprentice has inscribed her name there, etched it into a wooden wall). 88

Thus the Narrator's exile in the locked room results in her creating a text of her own and inserting it inside that of the Author's. There is then, a cache of meaning secreted by her much as building plans, classified documents, secret maps, and drawings the size of coins were once hidden inside books (Silver 1996: 14). Very quietly something is beginning and it comes as no surprise that 'what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of origin' (de Certeau 1986:4).

88 In her discussion of Proust's notion of the significance inserted into names, Kristeva suggests that names 'cause the imagination to crystallize, they possess a magic within themselves' (1988:34), and she proceeds to trace the significances concealed within the proper name of Madeleine.
A short musical passage links the darker mood of the previous movement with the full-throated response of the next one. As the piano's right hand is followed by a calming passage of tremolando, then a gentle counter-melody, the air becomes the colour of manganese violet. The rooms darken as a storm rises and breaks over the little building. The rain sets up a pattern on the gently sloping roof, which collects the growing volume of cold water in gutters shaped like cups, and conducts it into pipes and away from the library. The wood creaks as it shivers and contracts in a spasm of coldness, and the rain slides across the darkened windows as the Architect and the Client move into the passage that stands like a breezeway, an airy corridor between the interior and exterior rooms.

Suddenly there is heard a rapid sequence of notes and a narrow seam of light appears at the top of the roof. The sun emerges and the washed glass walls glisten in the light. It is here in this passage of desire that a transition from one state to another occurs, for it is via the passageway that together they escape the prison room of language, leave the locked room and enter the writing room...
Multimedia item accompanies print copy
Between the locked room and the writing room is a direct passage, a space that connects. Here begins the Narrator’s transformation ‘from the archetypal Woman Who Waits into the Woman Who Writes’ (Kauffman 1986: 25). Passing through the passage, she is engaged upon a journey that takes her away from being a victim. The transformation is ‘only perceptible in its full force when caught in the act of passing from one space to another as in the moment of collapse’ (Bastide 1996: 17). It is only in this process of falling into doubt that the infinite permutations are promised.

She recognises that ‘the stuff of building is always in a state of movement or transition from one state to another’ (Hoffman 1994: 12), a notion illustrated by Smithson who created the idea of a passage between locations with his concept of ‘non-site’ which included containers of raw materials such as rocks, gravel, and salt salvaged from distant mines. He exhibited with them, maps that directed the viewer to the original site. He set up a dialectic between site and non-site.89

The Architect suggests that our ‘perceptions of landscape depend on difference and on displacement’ (Muecke in Bird and Edquist 1994: 72). She cites Mary Cecil Allen who, when writing in 1950 about the Australian Central Desert saw the landscape as written:

The whole landscape as one travels through
it has a calligraphic quality as if it were written
in multi-coloured two-dimensional shapes. One
feels as if one had seen something like it in

89 Lawrence Alloway cites Smithson: “What you are really confronted with in a Nonsite is the absence of the Site ... a very ponderous, weighty absence”. He continues, “The non-site exists as a kind of deep three-dimensional abstract map that points to a specific site on the surface of the earth. And that’s designated by a kind of mapping procedure” (Hobbs 1961:42).
Chinese drawings...

(ibid.)

The Client enters the discussion on the nature of the passage when she says of writing that it is 'simultaneously the opening of passageways and the construction of a body' (de Certeau 1986: 114). The ideas are 'mobilised in a scenography of passage (transference, translation, transgression from one place to another, from a place of writing to another, graft, hybridization' (Derrida in Leach 1997: 330). The passageway may resemble one of the Parisian arcades which so interested Walter Benjamin, fascinated by 'a passage where the windows of the old facades look out onto the interiors' (Déotte in Davidson 1995: 35). Benjamin saw these arcades as an 'inexhaustible source of metaphors, analogies, and dream figures' and he projected 'endless ramifications of meaning, associations and connotations' onto them (Heynen 1999: 103). For him, their transparency was alluring. He noted that "to live in a glass house is an intoxication" (ibid.:115). His Arcades project considered the arcades as a miniature labyrinth within the greater labyrinth of the city of Paris:

the arcades occupied a threshold position in space, time and consciousness: internal and external, past and present, dream and awakening. The arcade is at once a public and private space, a momentary constellation of past, present and future, as well as a dream landscape composed of everyday matter.

(Rendell in Coles 1999: 171).

The Architect is cognisant of Luce Irigaray's work on the gendered spaces of the arcade from a feminist perspective and suggests to the Client that:

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90 Benjamin stayed in a Russian hotel where he was 'astonished by the number of bedroom doors left open by the guests' (Heynen 1999:115).
Female subjectivity is, for Irigaray, a spatial condition, one of topology, space/time, dwelling, reflection, mediated through configurations such as thresholds, passages, boundaries and surfaces. All of which suggest alternative ways of interpreting and imagining the arcade as an architectural space of openness, interiority, mobility, fluidity, porosity, veiling and artifice.

(ibid.:173).

For Irigaray, the female figure 'situated in the artificial envelope of the arcade begins to articulate the unspoken spaces of female subjectivity' (ibid.: 188). It is at this point that the Client takes up her pen and passes into the next room.
The composition unfolds in rich, musical language. For the Client, writing is life itself. Because of this she is eager in her inspection of this light and airy scriptorium, her writing room. She moves forward quickly, smiling. It is here that she will experience the balm of language and remake herself through writing. It is an awareness of this process that informs the hidden undercurrent present in everything the Architect does.

In the writing room the 'act of writing becomes a fluid, volatile process of continual metamorphosis – of ideas, forms, modes, styles, passions'.\textsuperscript{91} Here, the Client leaves behind the 'language of rejection and covering up' and the 'structures of separation', and finds that 'transparent geometry is the moving language of those who undergo the major suffering of suppression, disgrace, exile, quarantine, ostracism, excommunication... And amidst such suffering appears the attraction toward all limits – the vertigo of proximity, the hope of new connections'.\textsuperscript{92}

For the Client, language is a doorway. When she steps across the threshold she finds herself free from the practices of expert knowledge. It is here that the meaning she makes constitutes her life. Now, she pauses a moment at the entrance, entranced by the power of possibilities as she apprehends the edge of meaning.

\textsuperscript{91} Kaufman 1986: 296.
\textsuperscript{92} Serres in Davidson 1997: 41.
limned with a new thought. She begins to attribute different meanings to the experience of failure. She is engaged by the Architect's notion of 'beauty as the imperfect, ... thrilled by the idea of the unpredictable – what [s]he calls the badly done – for the way it reflects the imperfections in mankind'.93 She hears the ancient whisper of Laozu who tells her that 'that which is likely to be overlooked, is the most useful'.94

It is here that the Architect and the Client celebrate the art of forgetting and not knowing. Laozu's influence is again apparent: "The way to know is to forget." He goes on to say that "consistent with the philosophy of non-being, to forget is regarded as an affirmative and constructive action ... the more forgetful a man is, the less he will be inhibited by his own knowledge."95 This is illustrated in the way in which Proust 'forgot' his childhood scene as reminded when he remembered it. The forgetting made it much more potent once recalled – it was an absence that, in its 'becoming', provided richness.

It is to the writing room that the Client moves from the concealed room. Here she finds ink-wells, pens and many books by the likes of de Certeau and Gilles Deleuze, that 'theorist of flux, plurality and movement' who 'rejected the more traditional concepts of sameness and representation in favour of repetition, proliferation and difference'.96 It is in the writing room that the Client, as an apprentice, creates her narratives in a 'defiant effort to break the pattern of nullification' with which she has been framed in the concealed room.97 Her 'space escapes the boundaries of the perspectival box' and she moves into 'a space

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93 Field 1999:55-56.
95 Ibid.: 70.
96 Leach 1997:308.
97 De Certeau, in Heterologies, records the manner in which Surin, in 1655, after 18 years of being unable to write, suddenly began to write again. He says that 'the "interior" finds an "outlet" allowing it to escape its confinement. The excluded becomes embodied and appears on the outside' (1998:106).
"other".\textsuperscript{98} She inserts her text into that of the Author, 'poaches' on it, 'is transported into it', and 'pluralizes' herself in it.\textsuperscript{99} Hers is a feminist intervention in the privileged discourse of the Author.\textsuperscript{100} She seeks within it, the beauty of a richly illuminated manuscript inscribed upon velvety smooth vellum. The text is bordered with gold chiaroscuro scrolls, cameos, pearls, and images of musical instruments. The frontispiece of the manuscript is designed as an architectural entrance into the book, and is an arch created from gold leaf applied over gesso and then burnished.

The meaning of the words is unclear at first because the discourse of the text is difficult to decipher. As the sheets of parchment are turned however, there is the graphic unfolding of the narrative which tells of a heroine who journeys far across the world seeking the place where the present moment of being is to be discovered. Each of the illuminations illustrates an episode in her journey. Inscribed there architecturally is the Chinese character for poetry composed of the character for 'temple' and that for 'word'.

The Client and the Architect sit together at the door of the writing room. The Architect turns to the other and says, "It is evening. We are seated on the steps of your palace. There is a slight breeze ...".\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Agrest cited in Allen 2000: 166.
\textsuperscript{99} De Certeau 1984: xxii.
\textsuperscript{100} Pollock 1988:17.
\textsuperscript{101} Calvino 1997: 27.
In *The Concerto Inn* transgression 'lies in telling ...[T]he writing is the revolution' (Kauffman 1986: 20). In the writing room which is of course a reading room, the Client selects from the shelf *The Practice of Everyday Life* where de Certeau attends to 'what "ways of operating" form the counterpart' to Foucault's 'grid of "discipline" which is everywhere' (1984: xiv), and understands that it is these ways of operating that liberate the space of the alternative story, the unwritten narrative which the Narrator begins to write in desperation as a 'sort of game of substitution' (de Certeau 1986: 185).

Perhaps the Narrator in *The Concerto Inn*, attempts 'to make us hear, and become unable to ignore, the stifled call of a language spoken by no one ... For this distress, this utter insecurity, is "the source of all authenticity" ' (Smock citing Blanchot 1982:3). It is as though the whole novel is 'a reply to another text' (Kauffman 1986:18), just as 'Jane Eyre's amorous discourse was addressed to Rochester' (ibid.:205).

The Architect gives visual form and structure to the writing space. This writing room, which unfolds out from the passage, is not unlike the one in the Hotel Carnavalet in Le Marais in Paris that Madame de Sévigné used as a point of departure for the letters she wrote to her absent daughter. The genesis of the Narrator's writing lies in the letter she writes to the absent Author, and in the writing room she explores language as 'a means of exorcism or of enchantment, a ceaseless lament against the underlying structure of loss, lack, absence' (1986:

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^102 Madame de Sévigné (1626 – 1696) was the French writer whose letters represent a model for the epistolary genre. The 1,700 letters that she wrote to her daughter after her marriage and departure from Paris provide an entertaining view of current events and day to day life.
253). She explores the 'fluid boundaries between the letter as literature, literature as letter' (ibid.: 160). She suggests that epistolary texts combine elements usually regarded as opposites: 'discourse and narrative, spontaneity and calculation' (ibid.: 26). She goes on to say that what makes the language of amorous discourse distinctive:

- is that in every discourse of desire a lament is inscribed;
- every single heroine is engaged in the act of writing,
- but paradoxically, what she writes in one guise or another, is, "words fail me". Because desire lies between the needs to which the body responds and the demands that speech articulates, it is always a gap in language that cannot be filled, and consequently every discourse of desire is a critique of language:
- it cannot encapsulate, enclose, sum up desire – much less satisfy it.

(ibid.: 301).

Here, the Client finds 'the resistance to avoid being ... captured by the dominating, interpretive systems of discourse' (de Certeau 1986: 229). Her narrative is a struggle to comprehend but it is as though 'no telling can express the meaning of her tale; it has to be traced and retraced as Theseus retraces Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth' (ibid.: 253-254). Here she seeks 'the language hidden between its printed word and images' (Conley 1996: 22), and her 'thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces' (de Certeau 1984: xxi). When she slips into the Author's place, she 'makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment' (ibid.). De Certeau describes the process whereby renters

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103 One need not be a chamber to be haunted/One need not be a house:/The brain has corridors surpassing/Material place./Ourself, behind ourself concealed./Should startle most:/Assassin, hid in our apartment,/Be horror's least. (Emily Dickinson cited in Kauffman 1986:202).
move in and make changes 'in an apartment they furnish with their own acts and memories' (ibid.). It is interesting to also note de Certeau's description of a North African living in Paris in the cultural system imposed upon him, and Allen's description of the alternative cities that exist underground such as San Salvador in El Salvador, where people live in shacks along the creeks and ravines that wind through the city above (1995:13).

The Client chooses another volume from her collection and reads of the Walled City in Kowloon in Hong Kong which operated as a 'cluster of parts and functions of such diversity, sited so close that boundaries and definitions are blurred' (Tan in Allen 1995:152). The closest analogy of such a city is Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome in the way that it suggests a 'multiplicity of perspectives rather than a single viewpoint, all operating in one dimension - the present' (ibid.: 153).

It might also be said of the Narrator that 'without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down his laws for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation' (de Certeau 1984: 30. Emphasis in the original). De Certeau describes the way in which the Indians, when confronted with the Spanish, 'metamorphosed the dominant order: they made it function in another register'. He proposes that they 'remained other within the system' (ibid.: 32). Such a phenomenon may follow upon the heels of the occurrence of the unexpected, a falling, a catastrophe such as the one that befalls the Narrator in Hong Kong. As de Certeau describes it: 'The fall is that second moment of realisation: the ground upon which we believed we walked and

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104 The Walled City was a waterfront development, a military base as early as 1197 and a point of surveillance on Hong Kong for the Chinese government in the nineteenth century. The name derives from the fact that in 1810 a fort was built housing a garrison of Chinese soldiers. Until the mid-nineties the Walled City survived repeated attempts to raze it.
thought has vanished ' and a ' new universe of thought opens up ' (1986: 183).

This is the territory of the Apprentice who is inclined to error, but who finds that ' irregularities and deformations are not the sites of compromise here, but rather the agents of meaning ' (El-Khoury in Efrat et al. 1994: 386). Anomalies and uncertainties destabilise those spatial categories based on logic, and disrupt the closure implicit in common sense definitions much like Deligny's "lines de erre" which, says de Certeau, 'circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain ' (1984: 34). They come up against 'crosscuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system ' (ibid.:38), and create "sensations of vertigo and disorder as sources of pleasure " (Virilio in Silver 1996:6).

The Apprentice, the newcomer, like de Certeau in that she forgets, 'bursts in through comical, incongruous, or paradoxical half-openings of discourse ' and 'is not the author, but the witness of these flashes traversing and transgressing the gridding of discourses effected by established systems of reason ' (1986: 194). She generates novel ways of thinking because she disturbs 'the constituted domains of knowledge ' (ibid.) of the Builder. De Certeau takes pleasure in the outcome when 'two practices of space clash in the field of visibility, the one ordered by discipline, the other based on astonishment ' (ibid.: 196-7). The Architect notices that the Apprentice dares to think 'the unthought that breaks through the grid of the established order and accepted disciplines ' (ibid.: 197). She offers 'unclear meanings, possible uncharted courses of significance ' and the result is 'an uneasy conjoining of contradictory systems of thought ' (Hobbs 1981: 19). Her 'circumstantial oppositions ' give an alternative meaning (Venturi 1988: 41). The Architect acknowledges the Apprentice's function, and tracks her 'errant trajectories ' across the building site, almost as an accident (Allen 2000: xxiii). She is aware that with the Apprentice's 'opportunistic use ' of footholds
such as cracks and fissures in the building construction, 'the creativity of everyday practices can often outwit the rigid structures of imposed order' (ibid.).

The Architect thinks of the Client's writing as a 'minor literature', as 'writing that takes on the conventions of a major language and subverts it from the inside' through a process of "determinitorialisation" as explained by Deleuze and Guattari in their study of Kafka (Bloomer in Lynn et al. 1992: 86). The activity of writing is thus located in the 'space in between', in the 'intricate maze of residual space inside' which the Architect calls 'left-over space' (Venturi 1988: 80). Such 'residual space' exists in between dominant space.

On her journey inside the writing room, the Client experiences the conditions necessary for creativity. As de Certeau says, "the long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations, no matter how panoptic they may be" (cited in Allen 2000: xxiii), and it is 'while on the move ... while walking, moving from one place to another, that one sees how the arrangements of the architecture develop' (Allen 2000: 107) in the 'unfolding of the space in time' (ibid.).

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105 Deleuze and Guattari develop the notion of a minor literature through their study of Kafka, the Czech Jew writing in German. They examine the "determinitorialisation" from within of the dominant language. A minor practice constructs a 'line of flight' with the materials at hand — the impoverished elements of the dominant language, rather than resisting by retreat or confrontation: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:16. Emphasis in the original).
Towards evening the Architect and the Client hear the simplicity of the pastoral movement as they reluctantly leave the writing room and enter the final room in the building – the courtyard garden. As they pass through the door communicating with the garden, their heads are brushed by the wing of a low-flying bird and they are roused by the sharpness of the mountain air. A secluded, exterior room, like the atrium of a Roman House, the garden offers stillness. Located in the negative space of the building, it is a microcosm of the world, a giardini segreto, the place where the novel begins and ends, a place that represents lived experience. Here, amid the virtuosity of plants, the collusion of colour and light, the cultivation of the soul takes place. Here resides the concept of "the "moment ", a fleeting, intensely euphoric sensation which appeared as a point of rupture which revealed the totality of possibilities of daily existence".106 Here, engaged in the production of her own life, the Client will become other than who she was and slip out of the story that self is. It is here that the 'user's space is lived - not represented (or conceived)'.107

Animated by light, this is the most open of rooms. The Client finds transparency in this 'illuminated glass box through which the interior's activities can be detected'.108 Here, the Architect organises and explores the different

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107 Ibid.: 146.
108 Betsky & Hadid 1998: 34.

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relationships between place and space, noticing that place is worked space that has been transformed by memory and desire.

The Italian garden is configured by the Architect to gradually reveal its secrets through the structure of stonework (a dry-stone wall which itself is like a painting), cypresses and water, using the laws of perspective and quadratura developed in Renaissance painting to illustrate purity and unity of design. A cuisine des couleurs, it contains a long limonaia, azaleas like patches of light, geometric box-edged flowerbeds, and pleached alleys.

Beneath the green swaying branches of a weeping mulberry tree with silkworms working its abundant leaves, is a pond that appears at night as a large basin made of polished silver like those used by alchemists to collect and condense moonlight. Everything is reflected and repeated in the garden, and the pond offers its face, Escher-like, to the sky.

The building is grateful to the garden in which it rests. It would be of the garden, not in it, and like a sea horse, a chameleon, it is becoming something else in the changing light of the day. It stands polished and gleaming after the rain shower. It is from the garden that the Architect has drawn inspiration.  

As the Architect and the Client move deeper into the unfolding garden they see, a little way off, the Apprentice sitting against a tree in the thin gold of late afternoon, pausing in her labour, her soiled T-shirt bearing the legend, “Conceptual art was just a good idea.” She is reading and smoking, one leg thrown out along the ground, her other knee drawn up, and her hand loosely holding both the book and the cigarette, resting on her knee. Her eyes glaze with

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109 For Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect’s garden was full of materials such as: ‘handfuls of yellow aggregate’, ‘masses of fresh shingles’, the ‘smothered incandescence of the kiln’, the ‘flashing facets of crystal’ and the ‘mineral matter and metal stones folded away in veins of gleaming quartz’ (Kaufman and Raeburn 1960:223).

physical exhaustion as she draws hungrily on the tobacco and the words on the page.

A breeze arises and they hear the movement of trees, and see petals falling, or birds dropping from the white limbs of birch saplings. The Architect and the Client are lulled into amnesia induced by a heavy cloud of pollen. The Client says, "Perhaps the terraces of this garden overlook only the lake of our mind ...".\footnote{Calvino 1997: 115.}

They hear the rustle of ideas that might dwell in the garden, and it is here that one idea is grafted onto another and nurtured until it takes.

A cat leaps languorously up a high wall into an open window. They glean the penetrating scent of the attar of roses. At the moment the Architect and the Client are about to turn away and leave the garden, they glimpse another figure moving about—a short stampy person in a large hat who is bending over watering the roses.\footnote{This figure could well be Gertrude Stein whose 'staging of writing as gossip, as a collective mode of enunciation has its raison d'être in the encounter with the other. At the limit, it is this encounter which enables writing' (unrecoverable source).} In the centre of the rose-garden she stands enclosed by glossy Japanese box, below a weeping birch tree, its outstretched branches, cantilevers.

The light moves. The evening star appears. Darkness will soon come, and long after the music of it unfolds in serenity, when the night arrives like an animal settling down upon its nest, the Apprentice will remain in the garden navigating the night by the stars like a mariner...
garden
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illness...
The novel ends where it begins — in the garden where the Architect finds ‘opportunity for chance, formal invention, combinatorial transformation, wandering’ (Derrida in Leach 1997: 331). The garden is a source of spiritual, intellectual and physical nourishment, and is a ‘looking glass through which larger truths are potently received or fleetingly reflected’ (ibid.). ‘It is in this space that the “private” realm asserts itself, albeit more or less rigorously, and always in a conflictual way, against the public one’ (Lefebvre in Leach 1997: 145).

It is ‘in the infinite garden of creative forgetfulness where the soil is fresh and resourceful, one will find countless possibilities for a composition’ (Chang 1981: 71). Edith Wharton wrote of a garden as ‘no mere parterre of heaven; it is the very “cielo della quieta” that Dante found above the seventh heaven’ (cited in Russell 1997: 18-19), while the Apprentice describes gardens as ‘theatres of memory’ and notes that Foucault ‘classes gardens amongst what he calls heterotopias: institutionally sanctioned “other spaces” which represent but also contest and invert modes of societal and cultural placement’ (Abrioux in Kearton 1997: 7).

The garden ‘acts as a meeting point between our private gaze and public inspection; an open environment where our relationship to the world is defined’ (Watson in Kearton 1997: 48). It is a hybrid place where ‘the Other’ proliferates and blossoms, a place which tends to ‘romanticize the prosaic and cultivate the ordinary’ (Hobbs 1981: 29).

Like the Architect, the Apprentice prefers ‘elements which are hybrid rather than “pure”, compromising rather than “clean”, distorted rather than “straightforward”, ambiguous rather than “articulated”, perverse as well as
impersonal, boring as well as "interesting" (Venturi 1988: 16). She suggests that a 'valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combination of focus: its space and its elements become readable and workable in several ways at once' (ibid.). She insists that it 'must embody the difficult unity of inclusion rather than the easy unity of exclusion. More is not less' (ibid.: 16).

The garden is "a curious room, crammed with wonders" ... a vehicle for opening up a serious consideration of the mining of nostalgia, the longing for home' (Kolodny, cited by Bloomer in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 24). Here, in the garden, 'the cutting edge is not a metaphor, but a material tool of the imagination' (McCorquodale 1996: 24).

The essay seeks its end in the constant flux of the garden and attempts to construct a space for the landscape between the categories of many dominant discourses. It is a place where, the Architect suggests, we might leave behind rigidity and be surprised by what is new within a familiar space. The already-present is illuminated in the garden where the 'assignments of value oscillate and flicker' (Bloomer in McCorquodale et al. 1996: 22). Like Derek Jarman in his Dungeness boundaryless garden we might find 'a generous expression of the relationship between internal vision and the external world' (Watson in Kearton 1997: 49), a place he suspected, was haunted by paradise.

It is here that the essay privileges the unwritten narrative rather than privileging writing itself. It is in this unwritten space, a domestic, everyday, garden space, that life grows in the novel. De Certeau describes it thus:

> Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the "weak" within the order established by the "strong". (1984: 41)
It is here that the Narrator is taking space for herself. It is here, in this everyday space of lived experience that is experienced by using all the senses that the everyday objects surrounding us are infused with a sense of place and with ourselves and are potential routes to a future remembrance (Hoffman 1994: 208). The Client cites Beckett, who in his analysis of the madeleine episode in his book on Proust, says that the “whole of Proust’s world comes out of his teacup ... the shallow well of a cup’s inscrutable banality” (ibid.:21). It is in this space of the banal that the Client too likes to polish up her ‘household words’ (Bachelard 1969: 46).

The Architect looks between the spaces occupied by traditional architecture and takes her work there – to the garden where rotting and blooming occur. Here the structure of plants is subtle and changing: ‘planting design speaks a different language from architectural design because of the flux inherent in organic materials’ (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994: 24). In the garden the Architect is intent upon experiencing movement in space and writing because ‘the combination of movement (doing things) with an art of timing transforms place into practiced place or space’ (Buckley in Davidson 1996: 82). It is in this place that different elements in the garden narrate different stories in multiple voices. Continuing the ideas established by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex, one could describe these voices as ‘other’ or ‘that which is outside a conceptual system, or that which is negative, inessential or abnormal to the narrative discourse’ (Meyer in Bird and Edquist 1994:13). The Architect considers the landscape’s role as ‘other in the discourses of modern art and architecture’ (ibid.), and states that as such, landscape ‘does not have another order. It has no order. It is an other’ (ibid.:15).

The Architect is cognisant of the history of an aspect of the dualities, the
split between mind and body in terms of ‘the opposition between cities and gardens. Classical or romantic, Apollonian or Dionysian, gardens were the mirror either of nature or of the city’ (Tschumi 1994: 72), and she examines ‘the point at which the textual images of the philosophers and the optical and mathematical structures of the gardeners reverberate as each other’s echo’ (Weiss 1995: 11). The Japanese Zen garden, she understands, ‘is never entered, but only contemplated’ (ibid.) in the quest for satori, ‘a pure intuition of the nature of things as an organic whole’ (ibid.).

In the garden something different is taking place. The Architect suggests making a radical move: ‘to put the edge, to make something new, one might propose to situate an architectural or philosophical endeavour in the territory of the corporeal, the interior, the small, the concrete, the soft, beautiful, private, subjective, and “natural”’ (Bloomer in McCorquodale et al. 1996:22). She suggests gardens ‘are about making lovely, controlled constructions that sway and rustle, mutate, give forth exquisite and repulsive odors, and sometimes simply disappear’ (ibid.:23).
In just a few seconds the Architect’s plans burn and exist only as an afterimage.
The final cadence of her dream, a coda of broken chords, finds the Architect at the drafting table amid an illusionary synthesis of form, line and colour, surrounded by now, with the records of the work: blueprints, original transparencies, letters, working drawings, specifications, scale drawings, elevations, sections. She is contemplating completion, aware that the ‘act of making a closure increases the desire to open’,¹¹³ It is clear by now that the library is the autobiography of the Client and that she would come to inhabit the Concerto Inn, she would come to live in this house of words by day and by night. It was not simply a place to which she would make a visit. The words would lead her there as surely as a siren’s song.

The Architect knows that a ‘work is finished, not when it is completed, but when he who labours at it from within can just as well finish it from without. He is no longer retained inside by the work; rather, he is retained there by a part of himself from which he feels he is free and from which the work has contributed to freeing him’.¹¹⁴ The Architect is attracted to the idea of beauty as imperfect, incomplete, like the city of Hong Kong which is continually being deconstructed and reconstructed, and where nothing lasts. When she sees the painters cleaning their brushes on a wall that is the last to be painted, she does not allow them to touch it

¹¹³ Hoffman 1994: 128. It is also worth noting Silver’s description of a volume which has a house and meadow illustrated on its unbound edge. The house appears as a complete image only when the book is closed (1996:18).

¹¹⁴ Blanchot 1982: 54.
again. It is finished. She thinks that the most exceptional thing about her building is that her work provides 'illusions of finality'.

The Concerto Inn will never be built. This is merely a dream and the construction an imaginary one, like that of the self, and indeed, like that of Zaha Hadid, whose Hong Kong Peak building was also never constructed.

Thus, in the end, the library stands like an unsolved enigma, an unheard fragment of music with an inclination to suggest something other than what it is: a shed in Katoomba. The light has moved from the site and settled in the blue mountains in the deep, dark distance.

In her dream, the night is deepening, time is passing, and the air is growing colder. The fire has died down. Just at the point of revelation of the confluence of the geometry of architecture and the structure of writing, the Architect, rousing from her reverie a little, turns to the fire for warmth. She becomes aware of the plans of her unbuilt ideas slipping from her knees onto the embers. As she feels the possibilities of meaning drifting away from her, she knows that what her dream has done is to stir her consciousness with infinite possibilities by approaching the brink of meaning yet never falling over it. Architecture, she thinks, 'is always the expression of a lack, a shortcoming, a non-completion'. She senses the disintegration of the figures of her mind and before she can rouse herself fully, the plans catch alight. As they flare in the flames, she recalls that lovely moment Barthes describes where X is lighting candles in an Italian church, the moment that saw him 'tilting the new candle toward the one already lit, gently rubbing their wicks, taking pleasure when the fire "took", filling his eyes with that intimate yet brilliant light'.

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117 Barthes 1978: 164.
A strange mood passes through her. As an endnote to her dream she hears
the bell’s wave of sound – the rapid rise followed by a long slow decay into
inaudibility, the last notes of a lost concerto. In just a few seconds the Architect’s
plans burn and exist only as an afterimage. They disintegrate and will be
interred in the cemetery for the ashes of thought ...  

118 Frank Lloyd Wright lived and worked in the Villino Belvedere in Fiesole above Florence in 1910
preparing a German publication of his work, the American edition of which was stored at Taliesin
which was destroyed in the fire of 1912. Three fires beset his winter home near Scottsdale, Arizona.

119 Hejduk’s *Cemetery for the Ashes of Thought* (Venice, 1975).
The library can only be conceived of as being complete when it has had bestowed upon it the texture of difference and incompleteness. The Architect tells the Apprentice of Eisenman's *House X* which forces the occupant to 'experience the space as a linked set of opposing terms' (Krauss in Coles and Defert 1998: 46). He achieved this by constructing glass floors and ceilings and windowless walls and explains that the 'plane on which openings normally occur is thus transposed to the planes that are expected to be visually solid' (ibid.). The effect is the delivery of a sort of 'somatic shock' of coming up against 'the fundamental opposition in an architectural language between closed and open fields' (ibid.). Smithson too, concerns himself with the process of "de-architecturization" which is illustrated in his study of the disintegration of the foundations of an abandoned hospital (Hobbs 1981: 120). His sculptures are similar to Zen *koans*, in that his 'contradictory works compel viewers to transcend mere systems of logic in order to gain real understanding' (ibid.:21).

The faint grid of the drawing of the construction overlays each chapter: a layer of memory, idea and dream which, in the end, dematerialises as the novel reaches the 'o' of completion. In the end there is 'dis-location, de-familiarisation, and dis-mantlement' (Tschumi in Coles and Bentley 1996), and the Architect 'gathers together the difference' to build a path to 'another writing' (Derrida in Leach 1997: 333).

The Architect constructs the library using inherent contradictions, quite different materials in order to reveal its errant geometry, to promote a dissonance and difference that creates a little 'jouissance' in the reader of the building. This process disrupts the spatial logic of the narrative. The contrasting
forms of the building amend one another, creating spaces that are like apertures in the constraints of the text, and which allow the reader access to new ways of thinking. The Architect notes that, 'unlike a Derridean conception of thought or representation, as difference that is deferral and detour, as the failure to reach a destination ... Deleuze thinks of difference primarily as force, as affirmation, as action, as precisely effectivity ' (Grosz Davidson 1995: 17). The ideas of enclosure and fixed space are thus diffused. The Architect designs at the edge, sets horizontal corrugated iron against fibro, and glass along wood, referring to Barthes' ideas in *The Pleasure of the Text* about edges achieved by cutting:

Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarising edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and another edge, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours) ... the place where the death of language is glimpsed ... the seam between them, the fault, the flaw ... What pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut...

(1975:6-7).

Like a wooden panel embroidered with metal, the construction has meaning despite the use of different edges. In fact, 'putting edges up against each other creates an "exemption from meaning" that provides pleasure' (ibid.). Cutting 'is used as a form of designing (a means of removing the common signage) before assigning new meaning' (Diller and Scofidio 1994: 99). Such moments are 'picturesque', involved in a 'process of small readjustments in the structure of all meeting fabrics and fragments, a fine tuning of alignments, patterns and biases that exploit the violent ruptures' (El-Khoury in Efrat et al. 103)
The Architect explains 'the double value' of Artaud's use of the word 'cut', considering the surgical use of the word of course, as well as the idea that to cut is also to regenerate, to strengthen by lopping off everything restraining growth, to prune, to thin, cut back, rejuvenate... [T]o enable it ... to grow and spread out its truth, revealing itself as it grows' (Derrida 1988: 140). This metaphor is taken up by Architect when she refers to Derrida's (1981) *Dissemination* and comments that discourses of desire are 'always a tissu de greffes, a fabric of grafts, in which something is always added on, borrowed from something else, embroidered' (Kaufman 1986: 304). She describes how 'Mies [van der Rohe] stitches space to bind heterogeneity and to divide homogeneity'. She goes on to say that 'stitched on cloth adds to a continuous piece of fabric' (Magar in Efrat 1994: 90-91), while El-Khoury describes 'the juxtaposition of multiple perspectival frameworks within a single frame' (ibid.: 385).

Facades on the building are fragmented into different elements in disparate textures and colours. The Builder refers to this process as "superadjacency", an inconclusive process in that it 'can relate contrasting and otherwise irreconcilable elements' (Venturi 1988: 61). He advises the Architect that this process with its complex play of spatial layers can 'accommodate the valid non-sequitur' (ibid.).

The Apprentice mistakenly cuts the wrong way the corrugated zincalume intended for the facade above the western windows. Her cut is made to give a horizontal corrugation instead of a vertical one. The Architect poaches upon her 'circumstantial misreading' of the plans and incorporates it into the design because 'the shock of contrast... of itself stimulates discrimination of the qualities of the contrasted sections...' (Pepper 1970: 175). The Architect refers to
this effect as 'the emergence of frictions' (Kristeva in Coles and Defert 1998: 17). Furthermore, given an unbalanced composition, the result may be that it takes on 'a bright and piquant character' as a result of the 'shock of conflict with our expectations of balance' (Pepper 1970: 188). The new components overlay and penetrate each other and these opposing forces set up the structure of interest, which is seen as variety. Contrast is of course the 'simplest and most violent way of achieving variety' (ibid.: 203).

For the Architect 'a work is always a montage, a composition, an agencement' (Tschumi 1993: 37), and architecture is ephemeral due to the fact that it always replaces something else. The Apprentice adds that it is also cinegraphic in that we experience the city through the window of a moving car as if watching a film.

In using metaphor, the Architect delivers a multiplication of meaning and a new direction in the writing appears. The rupturing, raggedness, brokenness of the pattern creates a slippage in meaning and when projected axonometrically, the plans provide different points of entry to the work, refusing to supply confirmation of the known:

Ex-centric, dis-integrated, dis-located,
dis-juncted, deconstructed, dismantled,
disassociated, discontinuous, deregulated
... de-, dis-, ex-.. These are the prefixes of
today. Not post, neo-, or pre-...

(Tschumi in Coles and Bentley 1996 iv).

The way we think about architecture is always organised by the way we think about boundaries, as illustrated in Christo's Running Fence (1972-6) which interrupts the landscape and acts as an artificial barrier that connects the sea to
the land and sky ' making explicit the arbitrary nature of political and geographical boundaries ' (Kastner and Wallis 1998: 72). The longed-for equilibrium of the construction is replaced with fractured boundaries, asymmetrical structures and the pattern is dispersed. Where the crystalline and the abstract meet, fissures in language appear: ' is it not said that Chinese writing was born of the cracks appearing on tortoise shells which had been heated white – hot? ' (Barthes 1987: 77). Thus the text is ' organised into a splendid series of irrelevancies ' (ibid.: 75).

Just as Brunelleschi's dome was never fully completed (Michaelangelo or Leonardo Da Vinci having stopped a plan to decorate it), so the novel can never be completed and is reconstructed, reconstituted with each reading. The Architect, thinking of the garden of Versailles, describes this idea as ' the inclusion of real infinity into the garden's finite closure ' (Weiss 1995: 73).

It is inevitable then, that just as the beam the Builder uses, never exists literally, being made up of pieces, so the pieces of the essay and the novel suggest a theoretical wholeness that is approached but never realised because the building is claimed by the garden.

This meditation ends with an ' intersection ' of Barthes' " The Death of the Author " (1977 pp. 142-148) and extracts from a draft of the Client's novel The Concerto Inn, including the scene depicting the death of the Author at his book launch. It becomes a melange of images, a laceration and slaughter of sentences and alterations that require near surgical methods such as the removal of structure, the recontextualisation of existing entrances and exits, and the reinforcement of another spatial order. It juxtaposes language in sudden combinations. It pays homage to what the Architect describes as ' the beauty of scars ' (El-Khoury in Efrat et al. 1994: 388), and approaches the ' vertigo of
proximity, the hope of new connections' (Davidson 1997: 44).

Fire is used in the writing as a temporal agent, and the Architect experiences the way in which 'the fire inhabits the house' (Bachelard 1969: 194. Emphasis in the original), then, with a warmth that is 'fragrant', it overcomes the house, 'unbuilding' it (ibid.). The Architect thinks that perhaps "the burning of libraries and the building of the wall are operations which secretly nullify each other" (Borges cited by Allen in Silver 1996: 3).

At the end of the essay the distressed surface of language cracks and bubbles in the heat of the fire, then darkens and disappears. The reader's unquenchable thirst for meaning however, reconstructs, regenerates the disintegrating narrative, revealing a secret coherence that in turn disintegrates and thus continues on as a line of thought that disappears and returns. To 'see something disappear'; again, this is an experience which cannot actually start. Nor, therefore, can it ever come to an end. Such, Blanchot insists, is the literary experience' (Smock in Blanchot 1982: 9. Emphasis in the original). This idea is represented in one of the Client's precious books that is housed in the writing room. It is a Wittenburg volume with dos à dos binding where the back covers of two books have been stuck together 'in a way that forms an extended narrative running forever in circles. A reader completes the first book and rotates the entire assembly one hundred and eighty degrees to begin the second, which ends again with the first' (Silver 1996: 20).

The Client's final appearance in this essay sees her standing at the edge of the site throwing pieces of ripped-up pages from books over the edge, taking literally the idea that "the earth's history seems at times like a story recorded in a book each page of which is torn into small pieces. Many of the pages and some
of the pieces of each page are missing " (Clark and Stern in Hobbs 1981: 122).\footnote{In the flickering light of the fire she resembles the sculptor Robert Smithson.} Disappearance too, was the fate of Monville's Chinese House in the Désert de Retz which, by 1953, when viewed by Colette, was crumbling and falling. In 1972 it vanished into the lake.

It is the Client's voice the Architect hears as she wakes from her dream, suggesting that 'architecture should be built and burned just for pleasure' (Martin in Coles and Defert 1998: 68), and we witness the subversion of the narrative structure and watch until it falls, caves in, and is destroyed by fire. This recalls Artaud when he set fire to a painting 'making holes in the paper here and there with a lighted match. The traces of burning and perforation ... is really a question of destruction' which makes it impossible to distinguish 'between the subject and its outside' (Derrida in Derrida & Thévenin 1998: 88-89).

Finally there is the dissolution of light to black, and the fading of the concert of voices that includes the Architect, the Client, the Builder, the Apprentice, voices that are of course all one. In the end, there is only a 'voice asleep, a voice no longer inhabited, a voice acknowledging at a great distance, the blank fatality' (Barthes 1978).

What remains is an ossuary, the cinerarium of the novel...
Cemetery for the Ashes of Though, Venice, 1975. Site plan
The Death of the Architect

The birth of the reader in a shipwreck, smashed against a reef of writing, is eternally written here and now. In the multiplicity of writing she finds an antique map, places it on a table, unfurls it, furnishes it with a final signified, allows it to spring back. She is carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning.

She will wake with her head still turned to the window: this was woman herself, on the wooden floor, with her sudden fears, her brain burning like red algae on the snow, her impetuous boldness, her task, her anxiety to be on her way, and her own departure. Her entire poetics consists of snakes in glass jars, Mallarmé’s madness, Van Gogh’s warmth, Tchaikovsky’s signals of distress. And the book itself groans and rolls in the gale. It rolls for days, rubbing its back against arrogant antiphrasical recriminations.

From the dark where she is sitting, it is language which speaks. She hears her own voice, the voice of a single person, the Author, confiding in her. No doubt it has always been that way. The house burns in the lamplight. The image of literature hangs like a kite over the eucalypt forest, encumbered by the winter ahead. The walls are stacked with books: his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, refusing to assign a secret. When she wakes it is because the voice loses its origin, the apparently psychological character of it. As the Classics would say, it is the enchantment of distance she feels. Informed by her nightmares, Proust himself eats mooncake, sleeps under the house, entrusting the hand with the task.

Somewhere there is the dark voice of literature itself.

Let us come back to the savageness of passion: the explanation of a work is
always slick with wet and oil in the warm dark. The Ego, a receiver of sound, light, colour, is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject coughs in the night, slips away.

She takes more books, no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively. She takes two books from the top shelf, places them in a box: the negative where all identity is lost. She lives day after day like this, exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense. Schools herself in solitude. There is no other time than that of the enunciation. There is only the dog, the message of the Author-God. Did he wish to express himself? She leans forward to translate. He holds up his book, glass. Very precise. We know that to give writing its future it is necessary to rise and fall in the opaque air, gaze across Victoria Harbour to a subversion of codes floating on the dark face of the sea. Though the sway of the Author remains powerful, the words fall from her like the soft wings of blue silk, the more or less transparent allegory of fiction. The Author still reigns in all his books, files, biographies of writers, manuscripts, interviews, magazines, cards, notes, photographs, newspaper clippings, histories of literature, faxes, letters, the symbol itself.

'I am the mad wife', she says to the house. 'Where only language acts, performs, and not me.' ('I' is nothing other than her own dark story which defines it, suffices to make language hold together).

She is waiting for winter - the total existence of writing. At night she dreams there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity. She hears the sound of shards of images carving from the glacier, the call of the myth. She is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost. She is something living, but very still, born simultaneously with the text, eternally written here and now in the discourse of damage.
She sees herself hidden in the Author's manuscript, amongst the bones of his story, his work. A figurine at the far end of the literary stage, the past of his own books. The flesh of his language is empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it. In the dusk of morning light she sees the relation between the writer and his very life, a work for which his own book was the model.

She stands at the door of the bookshop with the gun, equipped with a being preceding, exceeding the writing. She is seeking the modern scriptor, the fact that writing can no longer designate an operation of love.

Unable to accord language a supreme place, the dog shifts, lifts a paw. Book and Author stand automatically on the wooden floor. People have come from work with a valuable analytical tool. The Author has created for himself an unfailing dictionary, its voice, its source, not the true place of writing that is beneath the wind outside.

His words blaze in the night, are vastly more extensive and complex than those resulting from the extraordinary patience of purely literary themes. In the cold, to refuse to fit meaning is in the end, to refuse God, the Critic.

She leans against the heavy body of books. Slowly she is being ground to a tissue of quotations, can thus no longer believe what may be called multiple writings, drawn from many seas and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation. Her mast is broken. Trails in the sea of double meanings by which the written text is constituted. Disconnection occurs, finds its way to the surface of the sea like oil from a ship below where dead men lie sleeping. The claim to decipher this cold keening which is reading, is illusory.

It is dusk. A moon. The Author enters into his own death. In the dark wind outside the bookshop, she wears his shirt, his boots. Her mouth is open. Her tongue will settle on the floor of her mouth like a rare verbal form at the dark end of a
sentence. She will lose the capacity for speech: there is no more than a secondary fragment of movement, at once sublime and comic.

A butterfly folds into a before and an after.

The Author must emphasise his delay and indefinitely polish his phosphorescent forms.

'Once the Author is removed,' she whispers to the dog, 'Do not ask for help.' In the dusk she joins the human wave pressing the Author. Her eyes move slowly in her face, visibly concerned with the task of extreme subtilization. She is wavesson. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel the Author, diminishing, wants to write, but cannot, his mastery of the narrative code a calligraphy of bone, skin over stone. As if it were always the dead language in the end.

Writing is the destruction of every voice, falling, falling away from him, and so on indefinitely.

She is learning it is necessary to overthrow the myth. The Author coughs. Speaks. The dog dives. The famous surrealist jolt of the Chinese revolver as familiar as a spotlight competing with the moon for the sound of his voice. Life never does more than imitate the book, which is to say he exists before it, thinks, suffers for it.

The destruction of the Author, the blood swelling from the round hole in his throat, utterly transforms the writer's interiority, cut off from any voice, the truth of writing.

The removal of the Author designates exactly what linguists, call meaning. She reaches for a book, the image of the Author. Places it in the grate carefully - the subject with the book as predicate. Her language that ceaselessly calls into question all origins has no other origin than language itself. After all this she is

112
here again in the dark, undermined along with the Author.

With the next match she strikes a deal borne by a pure gesture of inscription. Everything is to be disentangled in her sleep, nothing deciphered. The pages catch fire, substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner.

The excess of stimuli, the abundance of odour is only an imitation that is lost, the morning infinitely deferred. This perpetual misunderstanding and the constitutively ambiguous nature of the Author’s first novels (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novels) have lost her concentration. The walls reveal themselves, scraped back to the essentially verbal condition of literature. The temporality is different, bending, stretching, groaning like a boat on waves of heat.

The moon outside the window is an old, old one - itself moreover illusory. She takes a pick down to the creek. Hooks into earth and struggles to close the writing, an imitation that is lost. She forgets to breathe. There are Chinese colours in her brain. The space of writing is to be ranged over. Is there. And not there at all. The morning is a slow leak of light that is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman.

The body writing lies in a hollow of dirt. The Author is absent. He is gone. He is not there. Having buried the Author, she wears his shirt. There is a rawness to her organs that finds a skin in his clothes.

The novel ends when words spark above the bonfire of the house and writing at last becomes possible. She takes up pieces of yellow paper, feeds them to the fire, writes: The Birth of the Author...
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Illustrations

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