Communing with Ghosts

Stephanie Hester

An exegesis on the novel 'Hungry Ghosts'

Presented as part of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Discipline of English, University of Adelaide

South Australia

June 2009

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: A DELICATE ACT

Balance. This issue, so pertinent to the construction of my novel, has also proved to be a great concern during the writing of this exegesis. I have found myself repeatedly asking the same question, or variants of it: 'Am I paying enough attention to this theme? Have I emphasised this key facet of the novel, at least as I see it to be, to the detriment of others?' My decision to lay out this exegesis in three sections was one initially made, I think, to address this issue of balance. My intention was to examine, in separate but interlinked essays, what I have seen as key historical, spatial and personal aspects of 'Hungry Ghosts': to give suitable weight to each in the hope that through this trinity of narratives something of the book's 'truth' would be exposed.

Challenges to this goal of 'illumination' in the exegesis have consistently presented themselves. The themes of my three essays (which will be outlined shortly, but which for the moment I shall describe nominally as historical, critical and biographical) have rubbed against each other as often as married happily. Questions of voice have troubled me: I have found my style of speaking changing with each section, either in an attempt to adhere to the traditions of the genre I am writing within or to kick against it. I had always intended, I think, to alter my voice for each section: another of my lofty aims in creating a triptych of essays (not being satisfied with the goal of identifying the 'truths' of my book) was to potentially sate the curiosity of at least three 'types' of reader. The first essay, in which I provide an analysis of the role of place in the novel manuscript, discussing ways in which I have tried to use settings to advance narrative and explore the key textual theme of memory, was undertaken to appease the critical theorists (as much as they are ever appeaseable). My second essay, in which I have detailed certain 'real life' commemorative events that have shaped the development of 'Hungry Ghosts', (with dates and [unreliable]

eyewitness accounts supplied), I envisioned as responding to those curious about the historical 'veracity' of my novel manuscript (which in itself is a problematic idea, as I shall discuss in that essay). And my third and most personal essay I saw as perhaps answering a few questions for my (hypothetical) future biographers. (Or at least providing them with some autobiography within which 'truths' might be gleaned in the shadows; I subscribe to Inga Clendinnen's suggestion that, just as we convert our 'vivid but inchoate experiences into words', so readers must then 'move from the words on the page to the experiences experienced back there in the shadows' [2007: par. 17].) So, in my final essay, I have made an attempt to explain the role personal grief and mourning have played in the creation of 'Hungry Ghosts'.

I am aware of knowing certain 'shadowy truths' about the creation of this exegesis. At different times during the writing of this exegesis each essay has presented itself particularly loudly, demanding more weight than I was previously prepared to allow it; the anxiety-producing fact that this has brought home is that there is seemingly no one thing I can conclusively say this book is *about*. At some points, for example, it has seemed blatantly obvious (to me) that the key concern of my novel is that of geography and travel, both physical and temporal: that I have built my narrative on the concept of how we exist in different realms simultaneously, trying to balance the equally ruthless demands of the remembered and 'actual' worlds. At other times war and its ghosts has seemed the overriding theme of my manuscript: wars that never end for some and for others, equally pitifully, never can be comprehended. I believe we can be as haunted by the unknowable battles our loved ones have faced as by our own struggles. At other times again 'Hungry Ghosts' has seemed to be about one ghost, and only one ghost, with all other figures and themes added to provide (auxiliary) flesh. But this somewhat gloomy pronouncement does not explain the lightness of my manuscript, the humour of it, unless, as I suspect, it can be

said that humour is strengthened by sombre subject matter, its 'lightness' thrown more sharply into relief by the contrasting dark.

A good deal of anxiety has been caused by this recurring sense of being unable to say what my novel primarily is: a grief story, a social comedy, a multi-dimensional travel narrative. A similar anxiety has accompanied (and perhaps been caused by) my struggle to say what I originally imagined my novel to be. Even if, (to show the 'cards' of my final essay early), I believe 'Hungry Ghosts' began as a response to grief, a desire to examine the experience of grief in narrative form, I know 'other' ideas of place and characters came quickly into 'being'. The imperative of narrative is that as soon as you think of a 'moment' to write you begin to consider what might happen in the next moment. If ideas can be said to grow into novels, it seems to me it's a kind of growth best described as cancerous: it is almost impossible to determine the 'alpha' cell in the resulting lump. The book I have written is not the book I intended to write when I began. It has not just grown; it has mutated.

This 'mutation' is something I have attempted to track through the course of each of my three essays. I have tried to explore how my original ideas concerning aspects of my novel have developed into their current form. In my first essay I explore how my original concept of using (a) space to reflect grief has grown into a representation of a city, or at least scenes from a remembered one. In my second essay I look at how a 'general' interest in the phenomenon of war commemoration as something that seems to speak of forms of grief relevant to my novel has grown into a more nuanced understanding of the experience(s) of Changi POW's and their families. In my final essay I have tried to show how an initial experience of grief was almost immediately accompanied by a desire to write this grief in novel form; these two forces, mourning and narrative, have influenced and challenged each other throughout the development of 'Hungry Ghosts'. Even as I

describe the ‘linear’ outlines of my essays, I am aware none of them progress in quite so orderly a fashion; likewise none of the essays reveals many of the red herrings, wrong-turns and dead ends my novel has hit over the years. I am still uncertain as to how ‘accurate’ the accounts of my novel as given in this exegesis are, and how much they are representative of how I *choose* to remember the past, and to retell it to myself. I consider this idea of the unknowability of the past, however, to be a key thread that binds the parts of the exegesis and the novel it examines together.

The ordering of my three essays is in itself, perhaps, an attempt to get back to the originary cell that sparked the growth of ‘Hungry Ghosts’. If my first essay can be said to map the landscape of my novel manuscript, and the second the ‘population’ and ‘action’ of it, then my final piece is an attempt to pinpoint the ’spark’ that began ‘Hungry Ghosts’. I shall be attempting to follow the thread of my text back to its beginning while simultaneously acknowledging that this perceived beginning is itself a remembered point and therefore susceptible to the tricks of memory. Reiterating the point made at the beginning of this introduction, I suspect the success of this exegesis will lie in how well I have balanced its parts. In the same way Walter Benjamin suggests the ‘perfect narrative [can be] revealed’ only through the ‘piling one on top of the other the thin, transparent layers’ of different stories (93), so I feel that it is only through combining the parts of this exegesis that any ‘truths’ of my novel can become visible.

THE ROLE OF PLACE IN 'HUNGRY GHOSTS'

'SPACES AND MOMENTS': MY REPRESENTATION OF SINGAPORE

I see the idea of place, and in particular fictive treatments of 'real' places, as having a strong relationship to the idea of 'unknowability': a concept, as I mentioned in my introduction, that is a unifying theme of this exegesis. The less known a place is to the writer, the more she must 'imagine' it: fill in the 'gaps' of her 'knowledge' of a location with creative rendering and representations. Chinese-Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun has written of the 'unexperienced happenings [and] unfathomed depths' that a writer explores when he visits other countries, the 'spaces and moments' he or she has 'to invent vocabularies to describe' (in Wee and Lee 13).[i] This imperative of invention is something that has been brought home to me through the years of writing this novel. My attempts to 'write' Singapore have led to many anxieties about the balance of topographical veracity and symbolism: to constant questioning of how much a landscape can be manipulated to reflect the concerns of a novel and how much a novel (and its author) must respond to a landscape that, somewhere outside the realms of the novel, exists. 'Hungry Ghosts' is not a novel that is set in Singapore. It is set in my 'imagined' Singapore: a *representation* of a city that has been 'built' according to what I have fleetingly seen and subsequently remembered. The Singapore in my novel is not Singapore as it 'is' or even as it 'was' in the time period that I have set it, the weekend of the eleventh and twelfth of September of 2005. A good deal of the things I saw and the people I met in Singapore during the time that I visited it in September of 2005 have *influenced* the scenes in my book. But nothing in my book is the 'true' Singapore. I am aware that even if I had managed, with absolute verisimilitude, to represent one thing I saw in that amazing city, the display in the window of one shop I visited or a few lines of an overheard conversation in a cafe, the best I could

say would be that I had represented a microscopic aspect of Singapore as *I* had witnessed it to be, in a single place, at a particular day and time. And my viewpoint would differ at least slightly from those of the four-million odd inhabitants of Singapore and the many thousands of visitors (including two thousand or so commonwealth war veterans and their families, by historian Romen Bose's estimate [116]) that were on the island-city at that moment. And I suspect many of their gazes were less prejudiced than mine.

VISITING TWO FOREIGN COUNTRIES

I chose Singapore as a setting for my novel before I made my trip there, when my 'imagined' Singapore amounted to a collection of generalised concepts formed predominantly by my early readings on the city. From these readings a particularly interesting set of contradictions seemed to recur: the contrast of modern Singapore as a 'globalised' city with its recent past as a colonised / 'Asian' location. Singapore's remarkable modernity is referred to by numerous theorists and travel writers. Tourism theorist John Urry suggests in his seminal text *The Tourist Gaze* that Singapore is the 'ultimate modern city', a city-state that has primarily promoted its 'attractions as a modern shopping centre' to the world (56). Singapore's 'rapid transformation from a city of squatters and slums ... to a foremost new industrialising country' with a 'showcase economy', as geographical theorists Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong have described it (54), seems to have come at a cost. Geographical theorist T.C. Chang suggests that during Singapore's modernisation 'little emphasis was placed on identifying historic areas because conservation was regarded a luxury ill-afforded by the land-scarce city' and that there has accordingly been an 'erosion of [Singapore's] cultural and architectural heritage in the name of modernization and advancement' (50-51). Singaporean author Alfian Sa'at, in the 'ode' to his country, 'Singapore You Are Not My Country', states 'Singapore you have a name on a map but no maps to your name' (41); this is a comment that Rajeev

Patke suggests reflects the ‘theme taken up aggressively by ... Sa’at [that] ... Singapore’s modern success is paid for by certain kinds of amnesia’ (77). Certainly, a great deal of the architectural structures of Singapore’s ‘past’ seem to have been preserved by being placed on the list of the Urban Redevelopment Agency [URA], an authority charged with the preservation of ‘the nation’s fast vanishing heritage and cultural anchors’ (Chang 50), although this organisation has also been responsible for the demolition of many such ‘anchors’. I was interested in the comments of Singaporean poet Arthur Yap in ‘old house at ang siang hill’, in which he writes of ‘re-development/which will greatly change / this house that was / dozens like it along the street / the next and the next as well’ (495). Many of the sites in Singapore thought worthy of preservation apparently still have been altered significantly; John Urry suggests Singapore has actively played down its ‘exotic character’ by the modernisation of Raffles Hotel, arguably its most famous landmark, and the transformation of ‘old Chinese shophouses’ into ‘modern hotel complexes’ (56). Yeoh and Kong suggest these and other renovation projects reflect the ‘emphasis’ of ‘state conservation efforts’ on the ‘visual qualities, the facades and concrete forms which constitute place rather than the lifeworlds integral to the making of place’ so as ‘to reflect an idealised picture of the [Singaporean] past’ (59).

This idea of a profoundly altered landscape, a place where so much of the ‘past’ has been so quickly erased or ‘idealised’, struck me as providing a fascinating setting in which to tell a grief narrative: a backdrop against which the story of a young woman engaged in the ‘opposing’ acts of travel and mourning (or, put another way, forwards and backwards motion) could be set. Such a landscape struck me as a potential metaphor for mourning; everything is materially available but some ‘intangible spirit and soul’ is constantly felt to be absent. This is a critique many Singaporeans, Yeoh and Kong suggest, have of their city (58). I could see, for example, in the regret Singaporean commentator Cherian George

expresses for his ‘old street [which] ... no longer exists’, a fact which has left him feeling as if ‘the place where [he] spent [his] childhood was just a dream’ (190), a link between the ways in which we mourn the ‘loss’ of people and place. I was touched and intrigued by George’s account of retrieving and keeping the ‘tangible memento’ of a ‘breadbox-sized chunk of flooring’ from the ‘rubble’ of his house (190); it made me wonder how many other Singaporeans may be housing similar artefacts from their own vanished past residences. I was also fascinated by the idea of Singapore’s preserved past. Sites such as Raffles Hotel have been saved by the ‘URA’s Conservation Master Plan’ and are now, according to Yeoh and Kong, exemplars of ‘history ... recycled as nostalgia’ (59). This description spoke to me of the nature of loss and longing; mourning is not triggered by complete absence but by the remnants of a ‘lost’ object, the artefacts and memories that haunt the present like ghosts. Memory can play tricks, can itself come back in ‘idealised’ form; we can never get back the past, but only, it would seem, ‘recycle’ it. This very unreachability of the past, this unknowability, perhaps spurs us on to compulsively reconstruct it, to yearn for its ‘intangible spirit’.

Inevitably, I expect all of my ‘pre-visit’ reading sent me to Singapore with a profoundly biased gaze. Like every ‘tourist’ I think I travelled looking for what Urry considers to be ‘signs’, his assertion being that ‘tourism involves the collection of signs’ (3). I wanted to look at both architectural ‘signs’ of Singaporean modernity, and the structures that seemingly signalled opposition to this modernity. I wanted to see examples of the luxury modern hotels renowned architects such as John Portman had built in Singapore: grandiose structures such as the Regent Singapore,[ii] which had required URA approval before it could be built (Womersley 152), and the Marina Square Complex of convention hotels.[iii] I also wanted to see the regenerated Raffles Hotel, a powerful metaphor, as I saw it, for ideas of the ‘vanished’ past of colonial Singapore. I wanted to see

the famed shopping centres with their cross-cultural lines of wares; I also wanted to see examples of Singapore as a specifically 'eastern' destination, the sites that spoke of its 'Asianness' (although I know this concept is inherently problematic, as I shall also discuss shortly.)

I went to Singapore in 2005 with a list of 'must-see' destinations. I suspect that much of what I accordingly registered about the city either affirmed my pre-conceptions of the place or radically differed from them. I am sure I overlooked what others would consider to be 'key details' of Singapore. I imagine I was guilty, like the sightseeing couple Mary and Colin in Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*, of having let many of the sights I saw fall 'dully on [my] retina, as on a distant screen' (12). I know a good deal of what I have subsequently recalled about Singapore must be inaccurate, if only in tiny details; this is spelled out to me every time I dig out one of the many photos I took on my trip. I'll see the incense burner I remembered as large and golden is actually small and red. The face of the elderly woman feeding the stray cats that I remembered as chalky and lined is flushed and smooth. The children in the shopping centre that I remembered as being solemn-faced are laughing, and the centre itself is more beautiful, better lit, less crowded. But even as I look at these seemingly 'truthful' photos, these indisputable indicators of 'what has been' as Roland Barthes puts it (93), I am aware of how much they do not show. Much of what I remember of a scene (the heat, the noise, the smells) is completely absent from these images; as the historian David Lowenthal suggests of all photographs, these 'frozen, static' snapshots have been 'instant antiques' (257) since the moment they were taken.

'Hungry Ghosts' is actually a novel set not in one 'foreign country' but two: not just in (my imagined) Singapore, but also in the past. If I were to get on a plane tomorrow and go back to Singapore I would probably find most of the cityscapes and buildings I

have written about to still be physically ‘there’ (although I could not vouch for that, not in the fast-changing and ever-renovating world of Singapore, a city ‘with a compulsive urge to rearrange its face’, as Cherian George puts it (189), whose skyline I found to be dominated by ‘cranes bent towards each other like giant courting birds’ [‘Hungry Ghosts’ 16].)[iv] But there is no way I can ever revisit the Singapore of the eleventh and twelfth of September, 2005. That time is now in the past and the past, as Lowenthal suggests, is the one ‘foreign country’ that will always be ‘beyond reach’ (187).

The ‘unreachable’ country of the past has been my central focus for the last three and a half years. I have tried to ‘map’ the past not just as it ‘was’ in September 2005, the past that is my novel’s *present*, but the remembered past as it exists in the mind of my central character, Sarah. I have tried to depict the shadowy kingdom of bereavement and painful memory in which she mentally *exists*, even as she dwells, simultaneously, in the sunlit and air-conditioned spheres of Singapore. I have tried to reflect the ‘place’ that her mind returns to: the land of the past, a fragmented realm of memory and loss and uncertainty, a truly ‘other’ country whose differences from the physical ‘realm’ make it almost impossible to represent. In showing Sarah’s recollections I drew upon my own recalled memories: my attempts to remember how I felt in the weeks after my mum’s death; what sights and scents produced instant and agonising flashbacks; what things I suddenly found horrifyingly difficult to remember. In making use of my own remembered past, I have had to operate without photos, without any piece of evidence I can retrieve and examine, any image that can verify Barthes’ concept of ‘what has been’. I am unnervingly well aware, as Virginia Woolf writes of her memories of her own mother, that there is ‘nothing to check [my] memory by; nothing to bring it to ground with’ (85). So this novel represents not my own past as it happened, but a past I have recreated and given to my character Sarah to ‘relive’ on the page.

I have tried to show how a sense of the past can shape the way a 'present' situation is viewed. I now want to look at how I have worked towards addressing the demands of both past and present in several different 'landscapes' of my manuscript. I want to look at how I have come to understand landscape as a means by which I can reflect my protagonist's 'present', show how Sarah's 'physical' surroundings affect her. They express the realms her remembered past can take her to.

A WOMB WITH A VIEW – THE HOTEL ROOM

The 'originary' setting of the novel is that of the hotel room. I have always loved staying in business hotels. I love their neatness, their symmetry, their clean beige lines. I love the little generic gifts that you'll find in their otherwise empty receptacles: the wrapped soap in the scum-free soap holder, the line of bottles in the scum-free fridge, the packet of condoms and the bible lying side by non-judgmental side in the otherwise bare drawer. The impersonality of these spaces, the 'dreary uniformity' that make them so unattractive to architectural theorists Albrecht Bangert and Otto Riewoldt (9), is for me a big part of their charm. Like many messy people I know I've always fantasised about being a tidy person; having permanently co-existed with clutter I have always dreamed of being able, one hedonistic day, to throw it all out. A pipe dream, I suspect: like Leo Gursky's obituary in *The History of Love*, mine will probably read that I was 'survived by an apartment full of shit' (Krauss 3). But my inherent messiness makes spending a night in a business hotel room a vicarious pleasure, gives me an insight into what it would be like to live in a decluttered space, free of 'shit', where drawers could be opened without resistance and empty wardrobes filled with my *things*. When I walk into a business hotel room and see only bare surfaces and clean floors I feel, if only for a moment, that I've been given a chance to start all over again.

In 2005, when I began drafting ‘Hungry Ghosts’, I was longing for a (hotel) room of my own. Even by my own standards, I was surrounded at that time by a whole lot of stuff. I had lost my mum to cancer the year before and had, in the subsequent months, inherited a good part of her possessions. They waited for a long time in the bags and boxes they came in, berating me silently every day I neglected to put them in order: boxes of her beloved books, garbage bags full of her good clothes (gold braid and pink silk visible through the rents in the black plastic), the squashed shoebox containing her Christmas cards and letters. Collectively they formed a mess in my wardrobe that I seemed to be unable to confront. For a long time I think I was afraid of the mess, afraid of even looking at it, of accepting what the pile of bags and boxes proved: mum, their owner, the one who would have kept them neat and tidy, was gone. As Vladimir Nabokov says, the possessions of the dead can become ‘monsters’ in their owner’s absence, ‘misplaced and misshapen because [their owners are] not there to tend them’ (in Stallybrass 32).[v] The ghost of a dead person can ‘live’ in their clothes, cultural theorist Peter Stallybrass suggests, waiting ‘to step out of wardrobes and closets to appal us’ (33).

These feelings have abated as time has passed. I now accept Stallybrass’ suggestion that ghosts don’t only wait in wardrobes to ‘appal’ us but also to ‘console’ us (33). Mum’s jackets now hang amongst mine, and my main fear in regards to her umbrella is that I’ll lose it when I take it out (such a loss would, indeed, be irreplaceable). Kerryn Goldsworthy wryly suggests she can ‘commune with [her deceased] mother’ through the handwritten notes in her old cookbook (par. 5); I find seeing mum’s name written in the front of one of her books enables a similar act of communion. (Other words in her handwriting are more difficult to face: the phrase ‘Lots of love, Mum’ is still a ‘direct blow to the solar plexus’, as Goldsworthy puts it [par. 5].) Some might find my keeping these items strange, even morbid, but for me there is no other option. These possessions are not just part of my

mum's identity, but mine. They affirm not only that mum existed, but that I existed alongside her, as her daughter. Looking at them occasionally triggers a moment of pain, even despair, but that is part of their value. They are sacred relics, both *memento mori* and reminders of a precious life.

***

One of the first decisions I made about my novel was that one of its 'core' settings would be that of a hotel room. Before I knew what my central character, Sarah, would be 'doing' in Singapore, I knew the novel would show her and her partner, Paul, enclosed within a small suite of a large business hotel.

I saw Sarah as a person who had travelled to Singapore with an intention to make a 'break' from her past: to put some distance between her mother's death and herself, and to be somewhere different from Adelaide, the site of her recent loss. I also saw the trip as reflecting an attempt she was making to reengage with the world; I intended to show, however, that Sarah was still some way from being able to do this. I wanted to signal a greater 'rupture' in Sarah's recent history, one that had left her subtly, but significantly, out-of-sync with the world. My aim was to portray Sarah as someone initially caught in a state of emotional limbo, desirous of moving on to her 'future' but unable to reconcile herself to the pain of her recent past.

I tried to tailor the hotel room to reflect this sense of 'limbo'. My aim was to create the sense of a space that is like the interior of a 'bubble', sealed off from external space. Urry, in a summary of theoretical approaches to the study of tourism, writes of cultural theorist Daniel Boorstin describing chain hotels as being 'environmental bubbles...which insulate the tourist from the strangeness of the host environment' (Urry 7).[vi] I wanted to stress the separation of the hotel room from the city outside by emphasising the contrast in

temperature between the two. Sarah, standing close to the window, can feel the heat rising off the pane (HG 16); the heat is a sharp contrast to the artificial cold of the violently air-conditioned room, which leads Sarah to comment that she feels like she's in Iceland rather than the tropics (HG 15). Through this and other 'environmental' details such as the vase of fake orchids nodding in the artificial breeze (HG 13) I intended to suggest how the room was truly separated from 'reality': an 'environmental bubble' that reflected Sarah's own sense of dislocation and the extent to which her recent experiences had left her feeling 'unreal'.

I wanted also to portray the 'impersonal' room as a strangely comforting space, at least for Sarah, one that provided her with something of a haven, however artificial, from the chaos of the recent past. In her comment that she finds the room 'womblike' (HG 13) I wanted to both enforce this sense of comfort, of momentary respite, and signal the altered mindset that made her respond to the space as she does. To signal why Sarah might take such comfort in the bare room, I contrasted an image of the bed in the centre of the space, smooth as a 'marble slab', with a flashback of the bed in the spare room back home with its 'chaos of items heaped upon the old sweat-stained duvet': 'the cluster of sympathy cards waiting to be responded to, the banana box of yellowing books grabbed en masse from her mother's bookshelf' (HG 15). I wanted to emphasise how this recollected clutter would make the immaculate environment of the hotel room more appealing to Sarah: how it would increase her pleasure in the 'hygienic' feel of the bedroom and the ease of access to the 'bare' wardrobe that is again a contrast to the 'cluttered recess' of her wardrobe at home (HG 13-14).

Architectural theorist Eleanor Curtis has suggested that the modern hotel room is supposed to 'simulate the idea of no history': guests do not want to feel like other people have stayed in the space they now occupy, so designers 'must create designs that

complement the work of the chambermaid' (9). From the inception of this project I was mindful of the role chambermaids play in sustaining the illusion of rooms without history, how they uphold this ideal of perpetual 'blankness' by endeavouring to re-order rooms while leaving no trace of themselves, no tell-tale sign of their visits. Like the 'invisible cables' Sarah is anxiously aware of holding up the lift (HG 18), the support systems she knows exists outside the stone box, I have imagined these maintenance workers as almost 'ghostly' forces in my hotel. These are people who are very real but whose roles dictate that they should remain 'unseen', where possible, by hotel guests such as Sarah.

Curtis states that the hotel room is designed to have no memory, no 'ghosts in the closet' (9). This is what I saw as being the central reason for the strange comfort Sarah would find in such a space: it would be a room that seemed exorcised of the ghosts of memory. In a barren space she could hope to keep such troubling spectres at bay, just as Macon Leary in Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist* seeks to ward off memories of his dead son by keeping his bedroom as 'sleek as a room in a Holiday Inn' (9).

Of course, memories do find their way into the 'non-remembering' space of Sarah's hotel room. Near the end of the novel, dazed after breaking up with Paul, Sarah looks at the phone by her bedside and instinctively thinks she should call her mum (HG 169). This is an instance in which I tried to demonstrate the link between the 'physical trace' and memory, the way in which 'familiar objects' such as phones can act as direct conduits to the past. It is also a way in which I tried to emphasise the persistence of memory, suggesting that there is no void empty enough, no space impersonal or unfamiliar enough, for all recall of 'things past' to be avoided. This is something I deliberately reiterated as Sarah moves through other landscapes.

THE TOXIC HOTEL

There were times early on in my project, prior to my visit to Singapore, where I considered setting nearly all of the 'action' of 'Hungry Ghosts' within the walls of the hotel complex. I thought I could emphasise Sarah's sense of dislocation from the world, and her desire to 'retreat' from it, by having her 'travel' through the landscape of a large hotel complex, interacting almost exclusively with other 'uprooted' souls. Recent films such as *Lost in Translation* have made great use of the inherent drama of the hotel setting: the potential for the paths of two 'lost' souls to cross; the juxtaposition of 'private' spaces, lifts and vestibules and private rooms, with public arenas, restaurants and lobbies; the promise of glamour and adventure advanced by chandelier-lit bars and smoky clubs. I was interested in the construction of the modern hotel, the ways in which a contemporary hotel designer apparently tries to 'introduce narrative into [his or her] design', to 'view [his or her] project as a film director, a theatre set director or an author of fiction' might (Curtis 8). I was particularly intrigued by the work of 'visionary' architect John Portman, as Bangert and Riewoldt describe him (10), whose 'breathtaking' hotel complexes are designed to create the sense of 'cities turned inwards' (10). Marina Square in Singapore seems a good example of this: the complex occupies 370,000 square metres, with all of its structures, its three hotels, shops, recreation facilities and a convention centre, facing each other around a central green.[vii] I could see the attraction for Sarah of a place expressly designed to 'shut out the insecure world' beyond its walls (Bangert and Riewoldt 159). The inherent contradictions of such a setting, the paradoxical nature of a purpose-built 'city' populated almost entirely by a transitory population and tended by a staff travelling in and out of the 'real' city beyond it, were fascinating to me. I could see how I might set a book in such an environment, making my characters move through and interact in its 'theatrical' set pieces.

I moved on quite early from this concept of setting my novel primarily within a hotel complex. Singapore itself, as I came to 'know' it, seemed a landscape too rich, too

possessed with seeming contradictions and quirks, not to be explored in my novel. I also realised it was important for Sarah to move into the outside world: for her journey to be a physical as well as an emotional one. As Sarah travelled through the exterior world of Singapore and engaged with different characters, she could slowly be drawn out of her grief 'bubble' and forced to engage both with her surroundings and her past. Once I made this decision my concept of the hotel compound in which Sarah stayed changed radically. I no longer envisioned a Portmanesque oasis, complete with the 'exploded' foyers and 'kinetic sculptures' that are hallmarks of the designer (Portman 7-8). Instead, I imagined a setting that was more in keeping with that of the conventional business hotel, a complex that was slightly oppressive and cramped in design. I imagined a claustrophobic setting could reflect Sarah's altered mindset, like the bereaved protagonist in C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* who writes of a 'vague sense of wrongness...spread over everything ', as in 'those dreams where nothing terrible occurs...but the atmosphere, the taste, of the whole thing is deadly' [30].)[viii] I tried to reflect this sense of 'deadliness' in the hotel's construction, emphasising its claustrophobic settings: the lift a 'black stone box ... damp with exhaled breath' (HG 18); the corridor filled with 'humming yellow light' as though 'the cloistered guests were being incubated' (HG 18); the ceiling of the foyer low enough for voices to ricochet off it like bullets (HG 1).

What I discovered as I wrote these settings, however, was that the features in some of them unexpectedly stood out and seemed to assume a 'life' that differentiated them from their 'deadened' surrounds. The pond in the foyer, which I originally put in to illustrate the artificiality of the environment (a manmade tub of water hosting a solitary fish) is an example of this. Almost as soon as I 'put' the pond into the foyer it occurred to me that this was something guests would be drawn to. I could envision people (and in particular children) standing around the basin, searching for fish in its mucky depths. From this

thought came a scene that I have come to see as one of the most important in 'Hungry Ghosts': an interaction between Paul and a small child, Dougal, looking for fish. From the first draft this scene seemed to have a 'liveliness' about it that came as a pleasant surprise. It pleased me partly because it had a humour and 'natural' lightness of tone that I was trying to achieve in my book as a whole; it also revealed a side to Paul that came as something of a revelation even to me:

> Paul raised an eyebrow at the boy. 'OK, genius.' He knelt on the basalt ledge, balancing on one spindly knee. His grey trouser leg rose on his hairy calf, a bunched tube of striped sock. 'Then what's that?'
>
> The boy followed the line of Paul's outstretched finger. 'Whoa!'
>
> 'You see?' Paul looked triumphantly down at the child.
>
> 'It's a shark!' The boy donkey-kicked his hind legs up in amazement.
>
> 'No, it's a goldfish.'
>
> 'But it's massive!' (HG 62)

Something I realised about this encounter was that Paul and the boy seemed more animated *because* of the sombre setting in which they were interacting. It seemed more interesting that the boy should get excited about an ugly pond than, say, an elaborate aquarium. The dullness of the surroundings somehow made the encounter between these two more interesting, more spontaneous, more organic: the scene's lightness, like Paul's striped sock, was enhanced by its drab surrounds.

I also felt I was able to reveal a lighter and more sympathetic side of Paul through this exchange. The need to do this had previously been pointed out to me: comments from my mentor, Tom Kenneally, on the first draft of my novel included the observation that he simply could not see why Sarah would stay with such a gadget-obsessed businessman as Paul. Through an anecdote regarding Paul's 'fish-keeping' past, showing the sympathy he has retained for fish (telling the boy he'll scare the goldfish if he slaps the water [HG 61]), I felt I could hint at a potentially 'nurturing' side of Paul. I also felt I could signal reasons for why he has minimised this side. Paul's interaction with Dougal takes a turn for the worse when his jacket gets wet, an incident that leaves him worrying about giving his presentation 'smelling like a fish tank' (HG 66); in this detail I have tried to suggest that the world of business requires an almost clinical level of neatness, a neatness embodied in the clinical space of the business hotel. Paul's rejection of mess, I hope to imply, is perhaps also linked to a deeper rejection of 'messy' attachments to people and living things: the moral Paul takes from the death of his fish is that 'you shouldn't name anything that might end up getting eaten' (HG 64). Through this stated philosophy of rejecting potentially 'painful' attachments, I hoped to open up the possibility of 'future' rejections in my narrative. I also felt I could present (and indeed, find for myself) an explanation of Paul, and reflect something of his character, through the setting of the hotel. Either through choice or by necessity, he has come to adhere to the tenets of 'neatness' embodied in the business environment.

I now feel that my 'bare' spaces, my corridors and balconies and gardenless Rooftop Garden, have facilitated interactions that more opulent surroundings may have stifled. Sarah's initial recruitment by the Major to help Carol seems more likely to occur by a crammed rack in the corner of a crammed foyer than amongst the luxurious surroundings of an 'exploded' atrium. The vividness with which the Major recalls his past is perhaps

more apparent for the fact that the 'apparitions' of memory come to him in such a non-evocative space as the rooftop terrace. There is perhaps more pathos in his gesture of reaching out for the 'small brown bird' threshing cigarettes with its beak (HG 19). This particular image was inspired by Singaporean poet Ho Poh Fun's 'in the proximity of humans (the case for bird space)' in which she writes that although 'birds may still base / a style of living on trees / track an insect / peck at a worm' they now must contend with 'high sky-scouring scenarios' of 'sand, gravel, cement in continual increase' that are 'more congenial / to crows than to sparrows' (215). Through my positioning of a bird in such a 'scenario' I have attempted to both reiterate the 'unnatural' quality of my hotel and to introduce the idea of a 'modern' Singapore where 'timber's yielded to concrete', as Ho suggests (215). I see the terrace as an important transitional space in my novel, a first step for Sarah out of the cocoon of the hotel: the first time she loses her 'chilled air supply' (HG 18) and is introduced to the heat of the external environment.

My hotel setting also allowed me to play with what John Urry calls the 'core component' of tourism's 'global culture', that of 'the hotel buffet' (142). I intended the buffet, with its combination of 'Western' and 'Asian' dishes ('mounds of luminous rice, leaning towers of yellow mung bean pancakes, a ring of eggs' [HG 30]), to reflect what I see as the subtle irony of the hotel buffet as a signifier of 'global culture'. The buffet enables hotel guests to sustain an illusion of being 'adventurous', of sampling different and seemingly 'exotic' dishes, whilst also providing them with the 'safe' option of food they are familiar with. This irony has been used to good effect in *The Comfort of Strangers*, where Ian McEwan shows the tourists in the 'cramped dining-room' of Mary and Colin's hotel 'leaning politely towards each other's tables, comparing notes ... on restaurants used only by locals' (77). The observation encourages reflection on tourist culture: the pathos and bathos of the lengths people go to for 'authentic' travel experiences. The 'comparing

of notes' of Colin and Mary with other pairs of guests suggested to me a collection of couples seeking to find in external stimuli what they no longer received from each other. It made me reflect on how I might portray Paul and Sarah's behaviour towards each other across the breakfast table. I sensed I could use their differing approaches to sightseeing to reflect a greater disconnectedness: her using a fold-out tourist map; his reliance on 'Google Maps' (HG 30). The buffet, like other public spaces of the business hotel, strikes me as acting as something of an environmental membrane, allowing some aspects of a 'culture' in while keeping others out. This is a zone Sarah must step out of, in more ways than one, if she is going to begin to engage with the world again.

NON-MYSTICAL SINGAPORE

I found myself faced with a dilemma regarding my depiction of Singapore 'outside' the hotel. I was anxious about passing 'judgement' on Singapore in any way: in particular, of making any literary comment on it as an 'Asian' or 'non-Asian' location. Certainly I have never wanted to use Sarah's trip to Singapore as a morality tale: to write any kind of literary cliché involving the protagonist Sarah, fleeing the 'artificial' surrounds of the shopping centres, finding enlightenment in some deserted backstreet, perhaps through a meeting with some kindly healer, the last of his line, who bestows upon her words of Eastern Wisdom or perhaps gives her a herbal treatment that cures more than her physical pain. Nor have I wanted to critique the Singaporean landscape for its seeming lack of exoticism. As Singapore-based T.C.Chang puts it, 'it is arrogant ... to say that local societies and cultures must remain exotic in order to be appraised by the global traveller' (49).

I think, though, it is inevitable that this is what I have done: appraised Singapore. I have viewed it in my capacity as 'global traveller' and subsequently used these sightings to create a representation of a modern, and therefore non-exotic, city. If I am able to make this admission it is partly due to the fact that this 'appraisal' of Singapore as 'non-exotic' is something many westerners have been found 'guilty' of making for some time. Chang reports that a Singaporean Tourism Task Force [TTF] convened in the mid-1980s found a perception among visitors that Singapore had suffered a 'loss' of 'oriental mystique and charm' (in Chang 51).[ix] John Urry suggests that Singapore is a location that is '"in the east" but not really any more "of the east", a place that does not construct itself as "exotic/erotic" for visitors' (56). I know these observations should not automatically permit me to make the same generalised pronouncements, but I think they point to the inevitability of my initially receiving Singapore in this way, and my character, Sarah (herself in Singapore for only two days) doing likewise. I have made a point of reminding myself of my own first 'takes' of Singapore as I have written Sarah's initial impressions of it, tried to remind myself of my own acts of 'gazing' through the windows of moving cabs and from under the awnings of quayside restaurants. Repeatedly I have revisited my impressions of Singapore's staggering modernity, its cleanliness, its prosperity and technology. How much these impressions of the cityscape were the result of disappointed expectations of exoticism, my hopes of spying the 'old buildings, traditional activities and bustling roadside activities' the TTF reported Western tourists as associating with 'Oriental mystique and charm'(in Chang 51), I probably am not entirely in a position to judge, if only because such a question, and its implications of cultural imperialism, fill me with the kind of anxiety Sarah experiences when she thinks she is 'offending' a Singaporean: 'a paralysis of the kind caused by glass breaking underfoot' (HG 137). I have taken comfort, albeit of a cold kind, in the observations of cultural theorist Trevor Hay that 'being anxious

about [making representations of] Asian culture' can rob artists of the 'raw curiosity and imagination needed for sifting through the stereotypes and finding odd traces of truth or for simply looking at them afresh and finding inspiration' (in Copeland and Scollen 36).[x] If my 'views' of Singapore, and my subsequent representation of it, have been informed by stereotypical perceptions of it as a 'non-exotic' city, I think it is also true to say I found inspiration in this perspective; the great sense of modernity, and momentum, I sensed in Singapore has in turn given momentum to my novel manuscript.

One of my very first impressions of Singapore as I flew towards Changi Airport was of the mammoth convoys of container ships occupying the harbour. I remember finding something strangely evocative about this sight; I described the ships as being like 'giant pods of surfacing whales' in the notes I was furiously scribbling at the time. (I would later write a description, in an early draft of 'Hungry Ghosts', involving the bow of the furthermost container ship 'being eviscerated in pale gold light, making it seem to be ascending into a kind of ship heaven, leading the burdened convoy upwards to a final resting place'. Fortunately I was gently encouraged to tone down the purpleness of this passage for subsequent drafts.)

These fleets of ships fascinated me because of the perpetual movement they seemed to signify: a relentless transitory quality that I have come to associate with Singapore as a whole. I am tempted to think Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun was inspired by the omnipresent sight of the ships on the Singapore horizon when he wrote *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*. In this text, which explores links between a famous Chinese admiral and his contemporary Singaporean 'descendants', the protagonist Zheng He describes himself as a figure for whom 'Departing is my arriving / Wandering is my residence'(Eunuch 66). Literary critics C.J.W.-L. Wee and Lee Chee Keng have suggested that these lines point to the 'crisis' Kuo sees the 'modernising process [in Singapore] as initiating', a crisis that

raises the question of ‘how one [can] find one’s “self” or “home” in a terrain that is physically and culturally changing (23)’. I came to see in the convoys of container ships and in other signifiers of Singapore’s ‘changing’ landscape, the building projects throwing white dust over every street and the utes loaded with men in orange vests being ferried from site to site, both a resilience and a vulnerability that somehow married with the themes I was meditating on: ideas of how quickly and seemingly completely the ‘past’ can be erased or altered, its physical signifiers reduced to dust. Singaporean author Chan Ziqian writes in her short story ‘The Bodies’ of workers ‘getting out of the back of a lorry’ for another nightshift at a construction site where ‘the grey concrete stems [of the piling] rise like tombstones’ (par. 38). This being said, the building sites I witnessed also seemed to have an animated quality to them; the scaffolds and thrumming drills and billboards sporting images of futuristic edifices all pointed to a kind of regeneration, albeit a constructed one. As Cherian George has written, with a hint of frustration, ‘Singapore will never be finished. The bulldozers and jackhammers, the rubble and dust, are here to stay, and not the temporary inconveniences people like to think they are’ (190). I think I came to see in the constantly ‘evolving’ terrain of Singapore a kind of affirmation of life, or at least a metaphor for it; a suggestion that landscapes, like individual existences, cannot remain stationary, and that change, while not always welcome, somehow needs to be accepted as inevitable.

I derived similarly ‘mixed’ impressions from Singapore’s famed sites of trade, its colossal shopping centres. These are signifiers of global culture that I, rather guiltily, consumed with some relish, if only because within these great arenas of trade I found fascinating exemplars of modern ‘Asia’: funky delis selling chocolate mooncakes and traditional medicine centres promoting weight loss solutions for the woman wanting to get down to the ‘ideal’ modern dress size of zero. (I suspect these centres, with their high-tech

waiting rooms and opulent furnishings, challenged my 'western' notions of what a 'Chinese' medical centre should look like. This is something I have tried to explore in 'Hungry Ghosts' through Sarah's observations that the traditional medicine centre she visits seems 'very modern' (HG 122), and its waiting room 'strangely' like the one at her doctor's surgery in Adelaide [HG 123].) Perhaps, as design theorist Stephen Bayley has suggested, it is true to say shopping has become one of the 'great cultural experiences' of modern times, replacing the museum as a 'place where you go and look at values and ideas' (in Urry 120).[xi] If so, this would go some way to explaining the strong yet problematic link that seemingly exists between modern culture and market forces. (As, indeed, between market forces and other types of idea 'exchange': Paul's IT conference, with its combination of information seminars and 'networking' opportunities, is modelled on the programmes of numerous business and higher education conventions I have read about and / or attended.) Market forces drive Zheng He in Kuo's *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* from port to port, leaving him to pronounce himself 'rootless', his 'home' in 'alien countries, on faraway waters' (Eunuch 66); this is an observation that seems to reflect Kuo's vision, as Wee and Lee have suggested it to be, of a modern world that 'fragments, re-engineers and homogenises culture, cultures and historical memory for the purpose of pragmatic economic development (14)'. However, it is through the markets that moments of 'transcendence' occur in *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*, as Wee and Lee suggest (27): moments such as a 'gentlemanly exchange' of goods between 'Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Taoists' that 'becomes more a festival, a celebration, a meeting of friends thirsting for each other's goods and each other's company and the great coming together' (Eunuch 59). Wee and Lee suggest scenes such as this signals Kuo's thoughts on the potential of 'markets' to become 'cosmopolitan contact zones for an expansive Asian globalism', zones where 'the potential for cultural exchange [is] still alive' (27).

I was mindful of Kuo's thoughts on sites of 'cultural exchange' when I was writing about the global book chain Sarah visits. International book chains strike me as prime examples of the problematic relationship between modern culture and commerce. The texts that fill their well-stocked shelves tend to have an extremely limited shelf life. Age is not allowed to weary their 'fresh faced covers' in the same way as it has 'the tin racks of books' at Sarah's library (HG 138); if store books fail to sell within a limited period they are removed to make way for a newer title (the space on the bookshelf renewed, like much of the land in Singapore, with the text that previously occupied it sent away to be 'regenerated', or pulped).

Markets enforce their own kind of censorship; I was astonished when I visited the largest international book chain in Singapore to be told that it currently didn't have any fiction titles by Singaporean authors in stock.[xii] And in the 'globalised' world of the contemporary bookstore consumers perhaps have access to such a bewildering array of competing narratives, the ability to 'browse through' so many philosophies and traditions that they find themselves at a loss to know which experiences to invest in, which ideas to *purchase*. Even texts like Sogyal Rinpoche's *The Tibetan Book of Living Dying* have fallen victim to the 'necessary evils' of modern book marketing. The cover of my copy promotes it as a '10th Anniversary Edition' (which also points to the seeming international trend towards the marking and marketing of anniversaries that I shall discuss in my next essay) and has blurbs from figures such as Richard Gere printed on the back cover. Despite this, the winds of book-trade can 'blow' texts around the world, carry them across boundaries, make them available for mass-market consumption in a way that would have would have once been unimaginable (I suspect the days of the libraries like the one Sarah views at Raffles, with its select collection of hardbacks under lock and key, are not that far gone). So in a bookstore in the middle of a site of modern consumerism, a Singaporean shopping

mall, Sarah is able to access a work of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy with more ease, probably, than if she were in Tibet. I see Sarah, like the two bookstore clerks who confusedly try to explain the origins of the 'hungry ghosts' tradition, as citizens of wealthy and 'globalized' societies, inheritors of a wealth of knowledge and opportunities that places them almost in the 'realm of the gods', as Sogyal Rinpoche describes it, given them almost 'godlike' access to multitudinous 'ways of improving themselves' (117). But living in this 'realm' can cause a sense of disembodiment from an individual's 'past'. Singaporean author Christine Tan Siew Eng writes of the difficulty of understanding her dad's childhood, of how he was repairing bicycles to earn a living at the same age she was asking for one as a gift (139). She expresses a desire to 'make a new life' for herself, one that is 'apart from the past', but admits she can't think about her 'dad's story' without her conscience making 'noise'; although this story also causes her to make a point of wearing her 'really expensive Christian Dior mascara' (despite feeling she should 'economise' by using her Revlon one) to ensure that, unlike her father, she does not end up 'sav[ing] up [her] precious things to rot'(139-140). Likewise my character Sarah is mindful of 'the perfume box standing dusty sentinel' on her mother's dressing table, the bottle still half-full of scent 'saved for special occasions' (HG 164). Amongst the great bounty of options Sarah has for her future, I think what she really 'needs' is something that will help her make peace with the past and understand her heritage and the role her mum's 'story' will continue to play in her own life.

THE PAST PRESERVED: RAFFLES AND FORT CANNING PARK

Choosing to write about two colonial 'relics' in my novel manuscript, Raffles Hotel and the nineteenth-century Christian graveyard in Fort Canning Park, could be seen as reflecting my identification with 'western' cultural origins. But I have also placed these two sites in my novel because they strike me as fascinating, and in many ways

contradictory, examples of the past 'existing' physically in the present. Both are 'artefacts' of Singapore's colonial history, but they represent different aspects of this history, tell different 'truths'. Raffles Hotel, in its luxury and grandeur, speaks of the 'belle époque' of the Empire (Bangert and Riewoldt 9); the Christian Cemetery tells of early death and bitterness. The different 'stories' these monuments seem to tell about European colonial life, the dichotomy of grandeur and arduousness they suggest, complement what I see as being one of the central themes of my novel: that of the impossibility of ever 'knowing' the past, of being able to read it in a single narrative or monument. I shall explore this theme further in my next essay, when I look at the tenuous relationship of war commemoration to memory in 'Hungry Ghosts'. For the moment I want to look at how Sarah reacts to these two different historical 'monuments', and how I have tried to use her reactions to reflect her own development.

The desire Lowenthal suggests many modern visitors to Raffles have to experience 'turn-of-the-[20th]century ... club life', and to be served by people whose 'dress and demeanour' accords with that of the colonial servant (50), seems a strange and rather dangerous one. I have tried to demonstrate both the allure of such 'role-playing', and the danger of it, in Sarah's mixed reaction to the hotel environment. Upon arriving at Raffles she feels uncomfortable about being inappropriately dressed: of being unable, as it were, to play the 'role' of the arriving wealthy 'club member'. Seeing a doorman dressed in full ceremonial uniform, she asks the taxi driver to drop her at a different entrance (HG 33). As she moves into the main foyer of Raffles, however, she finds herself enchanted by the other-worldly luxury of the setting; her gaze is 'irresistibly drawn' to the sunlight flooding the ceiling like 'an incandescent river bursting its banks', the 'rings of creamy lanterns drop[ping] like lustrous-footed spiders on thin golden threads' (HG 37). Through this subtle shift in attitude I wanted to express something of the dilemma I think places such as

Raffles present the ‘modern’ traveller. Sarah, like most contemporary western ‘tourists’, wants to think of herself as being removed from the tradition of European travel in Asia, the excesses and abuses of the ‘belle époque’ embodied in establishments such as Raffles. Despite this, she still finds herself ‘irresistibly’ attracted to aspects of this environment. Of course, it is a world that cannot be returned to, a realm consigned to the past; this is something I tried to reiterate through the rasping of Sarah’s thoroughly modern sneakers on the polished floor (HG 37).

I also intended to suggest that Raffles Hotel is in many ways a ‘museum’ as much as it is a hotel – a place where, as a journalist in the Singapore newspapers *The Straits Times* once commented, ‘one feels one might be reprimanded for moving the ashtray’(28 February 1992 in Chang 57). Like a modern museum, the past is ‘recreated’ at Raffles through a strange combination of ‘interactive’ set-pieces, such as the doorman in colonial Sikh uniform, and the display of dilapidated antiques, locked book-cases and slouching leather armchairs (HG 37), that I was indeed reluctant to touch for fear of reprimand. In many ways I see Raffles as an ‘environmental bubble’ akin to Sarah’s business hotel, a place removed from the greater world, deliberately separate from it. I try to convey this through Sarah’s impression of Raffles as a ‘fortress...designed to shut out the real world’ (HG 34).

I have also reflected (since a first visit that left me in a state of sensory overload) on the role of Raffles as a tourist destination; how such sites are marketed by their host country as a form of cultural trade. Like Singapore’s shopping centres, I think it could be argued Raffles Hotel offers heritage as a form of commodity: the tourist enters the enclave looking not just to purchase a room or a drink but an ‘historic’ cultural experience. I was interested to read that the seemingly authentic Raffles courtyard attached to the back of the hotel was only built late in the twentieth-century. This structure, described by Chang as

identical in architectural style to the hotel's original building (57), has a gallery of shops, cafes and museums designed to ensure 'almost everybody can have a Raffles experience' as the *Singaporean Business Times* has phrased it (17 September 1991 in Chang 58). So many visitors, presumably, are hungry for such an 'experience', eager to buy in to the Raffles tradition through the purchase of a drink or a designer scarf. This speaks to me again of the strange relationship between culture and trade. Tourists and consumers apparently feel the need to visit sites such as Raffles (the developers of the new Raffles courtyard have apparently been keen to ensure that the 'heritage project' attracts locals as well as tourists, if only because 'tourists like to go where locals go' [Chang 58]); this need to 'experience' the 'grander' world of the past, signals to me a crisis of 'modern' living. It suggests that we seem to seek in other places, both geographical and temporal, experiences we feel to be absent in our own lives. This mirrors the experience of 'grief', the sense of something being profoundly 'absent' that attends a grieving individual.

If Raffles is an example of the past 'preserved' as heritage, then I have tried to represent the Christian graveyard in Fort Canning Park as an image of the past in decomposition. At least this was the impression I had of the site when I visited it in 2005. Located in the colonial district of Singapore, an area seemingly bursting with luxuriously restored exemplars of colonial architecture, the dilapidation of the graveyard was striking in comparison. In contrast to the manicured sweep of lawn that leads up to the imposing facade of the former Fort Canning Army Barracks ('redeveloped' as a privately owned 'town club' and culinary academy), the wall of headstones seemed remarkable for its lack of maintenance. 'Orange lichen' had 'burrowed into the lettering' on the stones (HG 58); ferns were pushing through cracks in the 'rotting mortar' (HG 58). Some of the gravestones had already been erased by the elements; more than one of the headstones was now a blank slab 'marked only with mould spreading up the porous stone like smoke from

a ghostly campfire (HG 57). The pathos of the blank stones seemed to me to reiterate that whoever's name was once on it was truly 'gone', vanished along with the era that he or she belonged to. 'Old graveyards' create a sense of 'collective' loss, Lowenthal suggests; they 'reinforce our reluctant recognition that [the past] is forever gone' (323-4).

I have since been interested to read Singaporean writer Robert Yeo's 'Christian Cemetery', a poem about a cemetery where 'tombstones have been uprooted' as the 'Urban Renewal Department...needed a plot for a park' (1985: 488). The irony here seems to be that such an act has been carried out in the name of renewal, an act of demolition necessary for 'renewal' to occur. 'Christian Cemetery' seems to explore both the nature of Urban Renewal in Singapore, a force that threatens even 'stones that have been here so long / it seems the land was theirs for good' (Yeo 1985: 488), and the inevitable erosion of monuments (and the past they signify) in the name of progress. Yeo speculates his Catholic 'granny' may have been cremated as she had 'heard all about urbanization, / how her stone, had she been buried, / would wear away or be dislodged' (1985:488). He suggests what she has left him instead is something 'that cannot be lost in stone / and therefore fears no renewal' (1985: 488). In the same way that the sight of an 'uprooted' graveyard leads Yeo to reflect on his 'granny', I suspect the sense of sorrow I felt at the Fort Canning cemetery was as much to do with my own sense of personal loss as a reaction to the collective loss embodied in the site. This perhaps reinforces Gilles Delueze and Felix Guattari's suggestion that 'a monument does not commemorate...something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event' (176).

I think the individual tragedies that the headstones at Fort Canning speak of can now only be comprehended in the most 'abstract' sense; the agony of the nameless 'bereaved mother' of James Wilson can only be read *between* the sparing lines of prose on her son's headstone. Yet perhaps this pain is communicated more powerfully through its

sparseness of expression; to refer again to Clenddinen's idea of the 'vivid the inchoate' emotions embodied in the 'shadows' of a text (2007: par. 17), perhaps the 'shadowy' grief of James Wilson's mother is made more fearsome for our barely being able to 'see' it.

From a narrative point of view, I meant Sarah's reflection on these stones to suggest a 'progress' of a strange kind in her own 'grief journey'. In the fact that she is able to even look upon these stones and 'read' the message they convey, a message of mortality somehow made more apparent in the verdant surrounds of a 'living' park, I see a sign of her beginning to heal. Or at least to begin to accept that mortality, like all forms of change, is a necessary part in the cycle of renewal that shapes our lives, and perhaps must be 'faced' as such.

AND FINALLY, A WORD ON THE WEATHER

It's often been said that writers should consider 'weather' as one of the 'Six W's' of writing. Having a predilection for 'chamber' pieces set primarily indoors, I have often managed to get away with little more than one of the characters noticing it's cold when she opens the front door. When it came to writing 'Hungry Ghosts', however, I soon realised (pretty much from the moment I stepped out of Changi Airport into a wall of heat that didn't move) I wasn't going to be able to 'cheat' a description of Singapore's weather. There's no ignoring equatorial heat; as BBC travel writer James McConnachie puts it, the weather in the tropics always 'reminds you that it's there' (par. 3). A number of writers who have travelled from 'cooler' climes have been struck by the presence of Singapore's heat to the point of personifying it. Tom Keneally, for example, calls it 'the lout' in the 'lout-less' streets of Singapore that 'slap[s] your face aside' (56), while Hsu-Ming Teo refers to the 'sweating night' that perspires alongside her protagonist Grace in *Love and Vertigo* (1). My own experiences with the Singaporean climate led to my planning Sarah's

movements around the sapping omnipresence of heat and humidity, realising I simply couldn't have her be 'outside' too long, especially during the daytime. As McConnachie puts it 'there's no dashing from museum to gallery' when you're travelling through temperatures of thirty five degrees Celsius and ninety-four per cent humidity (par. 3). Heat was accordingly a significant force in my narrative, cancelling many of my fanciful imaginings regarding possible plot directions. Any thoughts of having Sarah making all-night explorations through the streets of Chinatown or across one of the more 'rural' islands off the coast of Singapore were quashed by the reality check of my own night-time treks; journeys that turned into 'crawls' between air-conditioned malls, downing litre bottles of water to the point where I could hear myself sloshing. Most of the population of metropolitan Singapore seemed to share my preference for internal spaces, with the crowds in the movie theatres and restaurants far greater than any I saw out on the streets; this confirms the truth of Robert Yeo's observation in the poem 'Raffles Shakes His Head' that Singaporeans have got used to substituting 'Air-con for sea breeze' (1995: 34). Cherian George, in his collection of essays entitled *The Air-Conditioned Nation* (a phrase I have frequently come across as a description of Singapore)[xiii] suggests the modern state of Singapore has come into being through its policies of 'comfort' combined with 'control' (15). George points out that the famed former leader of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, once nominated 'the air-conditioner' as the 'invention of the millennium', stating 'the humble air-conditioner has changed the lives of people in the tropical regions ... [making their] lifestyles ... comparable to those in temperate zones'(in George 14).[xiv]

Many of my 'key' scenes are spurred on by the heat. The heat is almost a third party in the argument between Sarah and Paul at Clarke Quay, a fracas I see as beginning with Sarah's thwarting of Paul's desire to sit inside. I have imagined, during Sarah and Paul's later and larger fight, that both parties would feel more empowered to speak their

minds on the empty beach away from the 'madding crowd' of Paragon employees at the club. The beach in 'Hungry Ghosts' is loosely modelled on Sentosa Beach, a beach that seemed to me when I visited to be crowded with 'activities' but remarkably devoid at humans, even at night-time. I was subsequently amazed to read Trevor Sofield's account of Sentosa Beach as an 'artificial' construction created to give 'visitors' something to 'gaze out over' as they 'enjoy "authentic oriental" meals', the white sand and coconut palms used to create the 'tropical lagoon' having apparently been imported (115). This speaks to me again of the strange relationship of tourism to place, how landscapes can be altered to suit the desires of the tourist gaze and tailored to act as cultural bubbles, allowing certain 'idealised' parts of a culture in (food, tropical lagoons) while filtering out other aspects. Sofield suggests a 'playful postmodernity' can be witnessed at Sentosa, where the 'global and local have become de-differentiated spatially in artful and artificial reconstruction of imagery'; guests, he points out, can travel from an 'Asian food court' to a 'formal European palace garden ... along the style of the gardens in the French Palace of Versailles' (115). This idea of 'de-differentiated' space has contributed to my imaging of the beachside salsa club in 'Hungry Ghosts', a location that is both seemingly anachronistic to Singapore and which 'sells' a rather generic form of Latin culture. It also reinforces my idea of my protagonist's sense of dislocation being reflected in her surroundings.

I tried to suggest the contrast of internal crowded and external 'deserted' settings by juxtaposing the menacing intensity of the distant salsa club, the 'cigarettes swirling like fireflies around the heads of mauve drinkers' (HG 159), with the quietude of the ocean, the 'water shimmering like mercury in the setting sun' (HG 158). My hope was that the 'final' argument between Sarah and Paul would have greater impact against a calm backdrop. After all the climactically-controlled internal settings of 'Hungry Ghosts' (the hotels, the

clinics, the restored buildings and clubs) I wanted to suggest revelation occurs on the natural environment of the beach. Sarah, wading out into the sea to get away from Paul, experiences the 'shock' of 'cool water' (HG 159). After a novel's worth of artificial chill she finally experiences a moment of cold that is not manufactured, providing a shock to her senses that mirrors the one she has just had to her mind.

If my narrative were to 'leave' Sarah here, submerged in the void of her own despair, my book would indeed end on a grim note. But there is one more scene that rounds out my discussion of the role of weather in 'Hungry Ghosts'. In the scene following that of the break-up Sarah is still on the beach, lying alone and prostrate by the shore. In this state of mental and physical torpor, felled by emotional stupor and 'tropical lassitude' (a state McConnachie suggests it is best to give in to [par. 4],) she is 'rescued' by a woman and her dog. The emptiness of the beach is an important factor in this rescue, something that makes her stand out to both the dog and its owner, a woman who notices immediately that Sarah is both alone and 'soaked' (HG 163). Assuring Sarah she won't dry off as the air is 'too humid' (HG 163) (a feature of tropical heat I hadn't understood prior to visiting Singapore) the woman proceeds to towel dry Sarah's head. This nurturing act sees Sarah become momentarily like a surrogate child, another one of the many children and dogs the woman professes to have given 'lots of baths' to (HG 166). The Singaporean woman is one of the 'mother figures' I deliberately interspersed through my book, one of the 'living' presences I used to reflect the 'ghost' of Sarah's mother. This is a subject I shall explore in my final essay. For the moment, staying on the far more prosaic subject of the weather, the physical environment of the beach – its isolation, the peculiar nature of its 'non-drying' heat – facilitates an encounter that puts Sarah, in more ways than one, back on her feet. Urged by the woman to send a box of mooncakes to her mother, as a means by which her mother might know Sarah is still thinking about her, the scene ends with Sarah looking at

the horizon, imagining ‘a place she could send something where her mother would still get it’ (HG 168). Through this I hoped to suggest Sarah is beginning to take a different emotional ‘stance’; to move ‘beyond’ a predominantly self-centred focus on the absence of her mother, the inwards-looking sense of what she herself has *lost*, to a point where she can begin to imagine ‘searching’ for her mother, or at least the ghost of her mother, again.

In this essay I have explored the concept of place in ‘Hungry Ghosts’, looking at the role both the ‘physical’ sites of Singapore and the ‘shadowy’ landscape of Sarah’s mind play in her journey. Through exploring different settings, both based on my own memory and ‘constructed’, I have tried to show the interconnectivity of the actual and remembered worlds in ‘Hungry Ghosts’. I have tried to depict this ‘foreign country’ of the past as a place that is permanently gone and yet vital to Sarah’s ability to ‘move on’. It is only, paradoxically, when Sarah begins to truly search for her mother’s memory, the place where she now ‘is’, that she can be seen to be beginning to move forwards. Sarah is not the only person on such a ‘quest’ in ‘Hungry Ghosts’, however. There are characters in my novel manuscript who are seeking to make peace with their own ghosts of war: to find them, or to finally lay them to rest; and these individuals influence Sarah’s own search for her mother’s memory.

WAR MEMORY IN HUNGRY GHOSTS

THE HISTORICAL OCCASION

This essay is focussed around the actual 'historic occasion', as it was described by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB par. 1), that informs my novel: the 'Memorial Weekend' held in Singapore on September 10th-12th 2005, to mark the sixtieth anniversary of World War II ending in Asia, or at least the anniversary of one of the dates 'remembered' as marking the end of World War II. September 12th 1945 is the date when the Japanese generals, having already surrendered once to General MacArthur, were brought to Singapore by the British commanders to formally sign the documents of surrender at the City Hall. This event, historians Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn suggest, was probably engineered in an attempt to restore the 'British prestige' lost with the fall of Singapore, a loss which 'could not be undone by an American general accepting Japanese surrender upon an American ship' (Hack and Blackburn 149). I have reflected on this 'vignette' of history as I have written 'Hungry Ghosts'; it seems to speak of how history can be seen as a 'construct', given the ways in which its narratives can be manipulated, even consciously shaped, to tell certain 'stories'. It also suggests to me the murkiness of believing a conflict as huge as World War II could be 'ended' with a single action, on a single date, as well as the fallacy of the idea that such a huge conflict could be brought to such a swift and 'tidy' resolution for all involved.

In using the phrase 'historic occasion' to describe the 'Memorial Weekend' I am quoting from the document that first brought this event to my attention: a Media Release entitled 'Singapore Remembers the End of WWII in the Asia Pacific', published online by the Singapore Tourism Board [STB] on February 14th of 2005 (STB). I must admit my own printout of this document, dating from the middle of the same year, now feels slightly

'historical' itself, if only to me. Not only is it one of the 'oldest' documents in my PhD research folder, with accordingly musty smelling pages and notes written in fading biro, but it is a piece I remember first reading with a sense of having stumbled on something, a feeling I might have just hit on a 'story', or at least an aspect of one. I now see this relatively brief document as having set me on a path of research that would lead to the development of a major strand of my novel; I also sense this 'path' has deviated substantially from what I then envisioned it to be.

If the STB document feels historical then I, strangely enough, feel like a historian re-reading it. Looking at the marked pages, noting which passages seem to have triggered the most excitement in me in 2005, something I judge by the number of exclamation marks in the margin, I almost feel as though I am looking at the work of another, more junior, researcher. I am mindful of Inge Clendinnen's comments, in her lecture on the 'Impossible Art of Biography', that there is a point when even 'our self when young[er]' can feel like 'a stranger to us'. Clendinnen suggests our attempts to reconstruct our 'pasts' become 'no longer a retrieval from the inside – auto-biography – but a construction from the outside – biography' (2007: par. 33.) The 'marked' pages now make it obvious to me (the 'older' me) what my research intentions initially were, what 'form' I (the younger 'I') saw the story of the Memorial Weekend taking. The passages I originally highlighted include those that list the 'customized WWII travel packages' the STB would be marketing to veterans and interested parties (STB par. 7). Others discuss the 'September WWII specials' that would be launched to encourage visitation of Singapore's 'historic sites', with 'one-to-one promotions' and, rather intriguingly, 'redemption offers', to be made available (par. 8). Mr Chang Chee Pey, the STB's 'Director for Sightseeing and Cruise', was quoted as saying, 'This series of commemorative activities will not only pay tribute to those who fought in the war, but will also raise awareness and appreciation of Singapore's war-time history and

its lesser-known heritage offerings among locals and visitors' (pars. 9-10). Basically I think I saw, in the STB's mission statement for its Memorial Weekend, a proposed event that spoke of the strange nature of modern war commemoration, and in particular its potential to become 'commodified'. This concept is suggested by historian Kevin Blackburn in his article 'Commemorating and Commodifying the Prisoner of War Experience in South-East Asia'. Blackburn suggests that 'historic sites of human tragedy' can 'become commodified by being turned into atrocity exhibitions which are meant to pander to the preconceptions of tourists' (2000: par. 3). The influence of this idea of 'commodification' on my research project is something I shall refer to throughout the course of this essay. I was interested in how Singapore's 'heritage sites' were being referred to by the STB as 'heritage offerings' and 'attractions' (par. 10). Apparently the modern western traveller is eager to 'purchase' a version of the past diffused through the 'comforting' buffer of heritage tourism, to be 'guided' not just through geographical realms but historical ones. I was also interested in how 'memorial services' for the end of World War II were being marketed as part of a 'WWII travel package' to 'trade partners' in the United Kingdom and Australia (par. 7). The fact that this package was being promoted mainly to British and Australian tourists suggested a kind of 'modern' Grand Tour to me, where (post)colonials could revisit sites of former wartime glory, view the battlefields, or imagine them, in the places where they'd been replaced by parks and motorways. The keenness of these nations to 'purchase' their war heritage has had a strong influence on the development of my manuscript, as I shall discuss through this essay. I was also intrigued by the mode of 'remembering' being advocated through the idea of such a 'Memorial Weekend'. It suggested that people might embrace this act of collective remembering, collective mourning, even, whilst presumably, for the most part, having little or no memory of the original calamity purportedly being 'remembered'. This idea of a

need for war ‘memory’ seemed to speak a great deal about the themes I was meditating on: the hunger we have to gain knowledge about our ‘past’ and the ways in which these narratives of the past are constructed and passed on to us. I think I was also beginning to meditate on the ways rituals connected with collective memory and mourning could be seen to ‘mirror’ personal grief, and how they perhaps differed radically from it.

TOURISTS, HISTORIANS AND PILGRIMS

I am aware that any historians reading this exegesis might suggest that the historical significance of the ‘Memorial Weekend’ of 2005 will prove to be minimal. Commemorative rituals may have become a source of specialist historical study themselves, as historian Kerwin Lee Klein suggests (128). This interest reflects what the editors of the recent collection of academic essays *Commemorating War*, cultural historians T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, call the ‘proliferation of public interest and concern throughout the world ... in the forms and practices of war commemoration ... during the last two decades’ (3). But what an historian might take issue with me about is that in the heady commemorative year of 2005 (a year of many ‘major’ military anniversaries, providing many opportunities for me to witness spectacles charged with colour and controversy, pomp and ceremony, legions of dignitaries and cavalcades of veterans) I chose to focus on such a ‘small-scale’ event as the Memorial Weekend in Singapore.

I might have travelled to join the crowds that would pack into Trafalgar Square to mark the sixtieth anniversary of VE Day (BBC Press Office) or into Times Square for the anniversary of VJ Day (CCTV par. 37): significant dates celebrated in iconic locations. Had I wanted to stay closer to home I might have chosen to observe – and later write about – one of the events that took place to mark the ninetieth anniversary of ANZAC Day,

Australia's 'most solemn day' as historian Robert Manne suggests it has become (15). I might have queued to join the reported 'record' number of spectators that attended the service at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, or stood in the eight-deep throng that lined the streets of Sydney for the Anzac Day March (AAP: par. 4). Had I truly had my historical druthers I might have even journeyed to Anzac Cove to witness the events of the Dawn Service that year. There I could have seen the spectacle that has since secured its place in the Australian history books, or at least the hall of infamy, for all the wrong reasons. *Age* columnist James Button likens the events of that morning, including a 'troubling' *son et lumiere* of flashing lights and amplified voiceovers read by radio announcer John Laws (par. 8), to the 'Big Day Out' (par. 2); his impression is strengthened by the fact that enough rubbish was dumped by departing 'pilgrims' to leave the 'North Beach site look[ing] ... like the aftermath of a rock concert [rather] than a historical commemoration' (par. 4). I could have attended any of these major commemorative events and used them in my novel. Instead I went to Singapore to witness the commemoration of an almost 'forgotten' date in history: the signing of the surrender documents in Singapore on September 12th 1945.

It seemed likely from the outset that this event, organised, as it was, to mark a relatively obscure and curiously bureaucratic date, could never hope to draw a crowd of spectators to rival those of Anzac or VE Day. Even the STB expected its World War II events to draw a total of about five thousand visitors for the year of 2005 (par. 7). Nearly 20,000, by way of comparison, would visit Gallipoli on Anzac Day alone (Button par. 3). I noted, as I was preparing to travel to Singapore for the commemorative events, that a far greater portion of the official tourist website of Singapore, *Uniquely Singapore*, seemed devoted to promoting other events taking place in the country at the same time: in particular, the month-long festivities surrounding the Mid-Autumn Festival. This has

informed one of the 'truths' I have tried to explore in my novel: that within a single place there can be so many different, and diverse, forms of 'remembering' and 'observing' occurring.

I did have hopes that a fair number of war 'tourists' would attend the Dawn Service at Kranji War Cemetery on September 12th, the event in which the STB suggested its weekend would 'culminate' (par. 2). This hope was partly fostered by the work I had read of Singapore-based historian Kevin Blackburn, who has suggested that in the past few decades Singapore has 'received an increasing number of visitors interested in seeing historic sites associated with the experience of the prisoners of war', with 'most visitors [being] tourists drawn to the locations by curiosity about Japanese atrocities committed against the POWs' (2000: par. 1). Blackburn's work on the relationship of 'commemoration and commodification' processes in Singapore was an early influence on my interest in the 'Memorial Weekend', as well as the subject of 'war remembrance' as a whole. I was fascinated by his work on specific historic sites in Singapore such as Changi Prison, a location he suggests was popular for its 'satisfyingly eerie atmosphere', something 'tourists wanted on a visit to what they imagined was a place of "unspeakable horrors"'(2000: par. 18).[xv] Blackburn suggests that 'for the tourists, the experience of being inside Changi was more important than having an accurate knowledge of the history of the site or even being aware that (because of major renovations) little remained as it had been during the war' (2000: par. 18). There was much in this observation and others like it that fascinated me. I was intrigued by the suggestion tourists would derive particular satisfaction from a visit to a site that suggested 'unspeakable horrors'. Blackburn reports that improvements to Changi Prison carried out in the 1980s left visitors 'unhappy' as they could no longer 'experience the atmosphere being inside Changi Prison [had once] evoked' (2000: par. 20). This made me reflect on the extent to which any of us, in proclaiming we

want to ‘know’ the past, actually want to know the most ‘eventful’ bits, the highlights and the ‘horrors’. I was uncomfortably aware of how comparisons could be made between a ‘war tourist’ and a fiction writer seeking to create an ‘eventful’ narrative. Blackburn suggests ‘modern re-creations of the past... produce a representation of history that is shaped by present-day concerns’ (2000: par. 3). This statement speaks not just of the problematic practice of war commemoration but of all kinds of ‘remembering’. We all have difficulty in ‘accurately’ recalling any event, or person, from our ‘pasts’ without altering them to fit our ‘present-day concerns’.

‘History’ will confirm that the STB didn’t get the figures of 5000 war tourists it was hoping to attract. The main event of the ‘Memorial Weekend’, the service at Kranji, reportedly only drew a crowd of about 2000 in total (Bose 116). Most of the members of that crowd, apart from dignitaries, sleepy-looking naval personnel and at least one ‘hungry’ writer, were another kind of ‘pilgrim’ altogether.

HISTORY AND FICTION

Historians, like war ‘tourists’, seemed thin on the ground at the memorial service at Kranji, regardless of any attempts on the part of the STB to attract them. (Its media release stated its aim to target historians and history students in various countries [STB par. 8].) The most I have been able to find written about the service in any ‘historical’ text is a couple of lines in a book by Singaporean historian Romen Bose entitled (appropriately enough) *Kranji*:

> The ceremony at Kranji to mark the 60th Anniversary of the End of the War on September 12, 2005, saw over 2000 veterans, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren attend the dawn service ... [T]he

> event was most likely the last big commemoration where large numbers of veterans will be present. (Bose 116)

Two lines in a book may be the most elaborate account that the Memorial Service at Kranji shall ever receive. And yet when I read Romen Bose's account of this ceremony I see so much more, remember so much more. I remember the frail forms of these veterans, these men and women who, as Bose suggests, 'most likely' will not be 'present' when the next major anniversary of the war comes around; in the pre-dawn haze their octogenarian and nonagenarian mortality seemed to cloak them like mist. I remember their pale cheeks and their stiff frames, the baggy 'best' suits hanging off thin arms and legs. I remember (guiltily) overtaking a number of them on the long path from the road to the Cemetery: pairs of gently tottering men and their best-dressed wives leaning against each other in the sooty dim, a caravan of aged bodies making a slow progress towards a slope covered in ashen graves. I remember seeing at least one 'casualty' of this arduous journey sitting by the road, being attended to by a young naval doctor, her leg bleeding copiously from where she had stumbled into a stormwater drain. I remember being devastated but also moved by this sight. I remember the 'bleeding' woman, shaking with apparent shock, still holding herself quite erect and attempting to dab at the gash in her knee herself. Such examples of pride were apparent repeatedly in the actions of these slow and awkward pilgrims, most of whom seemed to want no help in their journey, either along the road or up the final steep slope to the shrine where the service was to be held. Witnessing the procession I could not help but feel that these focused marches the pilgrims were making, their arms swaying by their sides as though paddling through the humid air, were motivated by the landscape around them; they seemed to be responding to this hill of stone. For me, the sight of this fledgling band of men and women moving between the tombs, the contrast (and yet strange

sympathy) of these hunched and wizened individuals with the straight rows signifying collective (and early) mortality, was enough to move me to tears.

I have just given a highly subjective, highly romanticised version of an event (or, rather, the prelude to an event) based almost purely on my own (biased) perceptions, arranged around the things *I* saw that moved and shocked *me*: an account coloured with emotion, metaphor and personal bias. I am not an historian. In contrast, Bose's account, while brief, is a 'truly' historical one, written with an understanding of the event's 'greater' significance. His account provides empirical facts, dates and figures, and suggests why, from a 'collective' point of view, this gathering was historically noteworthy (as the last major commemoration where large numbers of veterans will be present). His brevity reflects precisely how 'important' this event is in the scheme of things: which is, not very. His is a dazzlingly clear, balanced and unbiased summary, an exemplary piece of empirical historical writing. His way is that of the historian, at least the empirical historian; and mine, for better or worse, is that of the fiction writer.

I think there are at least some advantages to being a fiction writer, however. I have been able, in this case, to set down my impressions of the Memorial Service in a way that history perhaps cannot, bound as it is to record 'the noise and chatter of events' as David Malouf puts it (284). (In *The Great World*, a novel that follows the lives of two Australian POW's, Malouf suggests there is an 'other history' that 'goes on in a quiet way' (284) under the recorded one, one that consists of all the 'unique and repeatable events...of daily existence' (283); he also suggests it is only through a medium such as poetry that this 'other history', usually 'unseen, and unspoken too', can be made to 'glow with significance' [284].) I began to wonder, that morning at Kranji, if I could use my fictional voice to capture something of what I was witnessing, to make the paths of quiet remembrance these 'pilgrims' were treading 'glow with significance'.

THE VETERANS' FORUM

In early September 2005 I found myself sitting, nervous and cold, in a midsized, frostily air-conditioned lecture theatre at the Singapore History Museum. The first session of the 'Open Public Forum with Veterans and the Wartime Generation' was about to commence, and an assembled crowd of historians and war 'enthusiasts' was accordingly taking its seats. I use the word 'enthusiasts', but it seemed to me a good percentage of the turn-out fell under the 'obliged to attend' umbrella: local politicians, embassy officials and military personnel. It seems we cannot 'remember' any war unless some government official is there to tell us *how* we should remember it, and what 'instructive parables of national virtue', as Mark McKenna puts it (14), can be gleaned from it.

The military historians from the National Institute of Education [NIE], the organisers of the forum, and representatives from numerous other international institutions were also there in force, although it would be a stretch of the imagination to describe any of these stern-faced men and women as 'enthused'. They were definitely unnerving though, dotted in their learned clusters about the amphitheatre, the solitary bespectacled greybeards flanked by circles of graduate students murmuring like shushing water around rocky pinnacles; the Australians were up the back and suitably boisterous (by academic standards at least); the Japanese along the left aisle, silently and apologetically smiling at every passer-by who alighted on the steps.

I would see the same painfully strained smiles flicker again and again on their faces in the coming days, during the sessions of the NIE's Japanese Occupation conference that was to follow the forum. These Japanese men and women would be verbally torn apart by all other historical 'camps' over the role of Japan in the war and the constant 'refusal' of this nation to acknowledge this role. There may have been accuracy in the charge; major

controversies over the Japanese Prime-Minister's visit to the Japanese War Shrine,[xvi] and the release of a Japanese High School textbook allegedly distorting Japanese military aggression,[xvii] would rage throughout 2005. I still found the vehemence with which the Australian contingent in particular pursued Japan's 'refusal to say sorry' decidedly ironic. So was the fact that it was only on this single point, the absolute guilt of Japan, that historians of other countries stood united, arriving at a ceasefire in the debate over the degrees of guilt their nations should accept. This all demonstrated to me again the way in which history, like fiction and political rhetoric, is a narrative that must be constructed; and that, like all forms of narrative, it can only ever be, at best, an *interpretation* of what has 'happened', one that often sits in direct opposition to other accounts. The fact that these issues were continuing to generate such feeling sixty years after the events of World War II also demonstrated to me how old wounds, like old memories, continue to linger. This is something Kuo Pao Kun's *The Spirits Play* has explored through its depiction of the plight of five Japanese war dead whose 'lingering spirits' have remained trapped where their bodies died and decomposed (*Spirits* 75), leaving them unable to return to the home of 'fruits and orchards' they long to see again (79).

Creative writers can be caught in the crossfire of historical debate, even as they are congratulating themselves on seemingly having avoided the stoush. Kate Grenville, during an interview with Ramona Koval on Radio National in early 2006 (following the release of her novel *The Secret River*, which explores race relations between Indigenous and early white settler populations in New South Wales), commented that historians, especially those involved in the 'history wars' in Australia, can get into 'polarised positions' (in Clendinnen 2006: 19). Grenville suggested that in contrast 'a novelist can stand up on a stepladder and look down at...the fray and say there is another way to understand it' (in Clendinnen 2006: 19). Inga Clendinnen, in the lengthy section of her *Quarterly Essay* piece devoted to *The*

Secret River, suggests this comment 'must have annoyed every historian who read [or heard] it' (2006: 19). In the same year historian Mark McKenna commented on the tendency of 'certain novelists' to 'willfully "play the historian"', something he saw as being due to a 'sense' that 'historians have let the nation down,... they have descended into snarling bands, and it is fiction that must now save the day' (in Sullivan 3). This comment, referred to by book reviewer Jane Sullivan in her *Age* piece exploring the *Secret River* debate, was seen by numerous commentators as being targeted directly at Kate Grenville and triggered by her 'stepladder' comment. Critic Stella Clarke, for example, wrote in the *Australian Literary Review* that McKenna's accusing Grenville 'of getting above herself, of thinking she was doing history better than the professionals...was due mainly to a metaphor she used, in an interview, about being on a stepladder and looking down on the history wars waged between academics.' (3)

Perhaps this is why I felt slightly nervous at the Veterans' Forum. If an historian had asked me what I was doing there, I would have struggled to explain that I was a student of Creative Writing, and that my interest was not, primarily, to review regional controversies over war memory, or hierarchies in Allied POW camps: it was to write a novel. I was not there to buy into the arguments surrounding the event of World War II in the Asia-Pacific; I was there to try and get a sense of what it might have meant to have been involved in the conflict, to understand how it might have *felt*.

I don't know precisely how I would have explained to a historian that my primary 'narrative' was actually about a girl holidaying in Singapore coming to terms with the (non-military) death of her own (non-military) mother, trying to deal with her mother's 'absence' from both her physical and mental 'reality' . The 'story' of World War II veterans returning to Singapore after sixty years had started to appeal to me as a fantastic 'complementary' narrative: a means by which I could compare and contrast different ways

of remembering, the relationship of place to memory, the way in which the memory of a departed loved one can either dissolve into the ether or persevere through a lifetime. To paraphrase Inga Clendinnen's verbal attack on Kate Grenville, novelists are potentially people willing to 'unleash' their 'dramatic imagination[s] on wilfully selected historical material', to use facts and figures as 'grist' for their 'mills' (in Sullivan 2). At worst, my plan to draw 'parallels' between the suffering of Sarah and her deceased mother and that of the POWs, living and dead, of Changi, might have struck some historians as extremely unsavoury. How could I compare the death of a fifty-something woman from cancer (an awful event, of course, but at least 'mitigated' by the factors of twenty-first century medical care, the presence of loved ones, the 'comfort' of a lengthy life) to that of a desperately young man dying in horrific conditions a thousand miles from home? My mentor, Tom Keneally, reading the first draft of my manuscript some time later, commented that a different writer might have had Sarah's mother crucified by Tamil Tigers. I began to wonder how I could hope to link Sarah's suffering, even loosely, with that of the elderly veterans of Changi who undoubtedly relived the nightmare of war, of loss and suffering and horror, every day of their waking lives.

Fortunately, all the attention at the conference was directed towards the stage when the first veteran, an Australian Lieutenant and former POW, was helped up from his chair by the two younger women sitting on either side of him. Both women were dressed in black, as though trying to remain unnoticeable, like stage-hands during a scene change. My many encounters with such facilitating women throughout the next few weeks would have a formative influence on my novel. Daughters and granddaughters seemed to operate like finely tuned personal assistants or PR agents, steering journalists towards their fathers, steering their fathers towards lunch tables and taxis.

THE SILENCED VETERANS

Kevin Blackburn, one of the academics from the NIE who had organised the Veterans' Forum (and whose research, as previously mentioned, had had such a formative effect on my interest in war commemoration in Singapore), told me in a personal interview after the event that he had wanted to create a space where these men could speak for 'themselves', to ensure they were heard as well as seen. I have since found I am unable to watch a televised memorial service (the Last Post played over shots of veterans in slouch hats, their bowed heads flanked by flickering flags and flames) or look at a glossy magazine spread of Anzac Day photos (veterans, flags, flames) without wondering at the lack of veteran 'voice' in the piece. Why are veterans always arranged in a decorative border up the front where they can be more easily gazed at? Why are the opportunities to make speeches given to the dignitaries who seem to use the occasion to praise their own war-making as much as the dead of past wars? Mark McKenna points out, for example, how previous Prime Minister John Howard frequently cited the Anzac tradition 'since the invasion of Iraq' to make 'the continuation of the campaign appear as a patriotic duty' (15). Why, if the veterans get the chance to speak at all, it is only ever to repeat existing texts? To utter short odes like Binyon's 'For the Fallen' (a stanza culled from a much larger poem). This rite has become so familiar that its words have all but lost their meaning. Why is this ode's quavery-voiced reader, whose *story* we never are told, presented to us as some anonymous 'steward of the sacred,' as historian Ken Inglis describes members of veterans' groups such as the RSL (Inglis 425); this steward's voice trembles on cue like a finely-tuned mnemonic device, like the ringing of altar bells, an audio prompt inviting us to reflect on the mysteries of sacrifice but not to wonder about (the greater mystery of) the individual on the stage.

AGE AND THE AGED IN 'HUNGRY GHOSTS'

My first impressions of the ancient Lieutenant (originally scrawled in the column of my Veterans' Forum brochure) are cruel:

> The man appears almost unearthly in his agedness. A loose pocket of purplish skin hangs from his cheek: blotched with veins like a fungus feeding on grey flesh. A fold of flesh sags like melting ice-cream over his collar. He turns to face us; his eyes and mouth look like sagging holes poked in a lump of dough. A face created for a laugh by a bored baker. He gapes around; the defiance of gravity required to produce a smile seems too much of an effort. He gapes at the microphone as he picks it up, his open mouth forming a semi-perfect circle around the metal ball, as though he intends to plug the gap with it.

Ageing is cruel, and so are writers, perhaps necessarily so. But in retrospect I wonder, was this man really such a shocking example of the tyranny of the years? I *think* this is how I remember him, but cannot honestly say I have not embellished my 'memories' for literary purpose. Can I rely on the accuracy of memory? If, as Harold Pinter puts it, our pasts are made up of 'what we remember, imagine we remember, convince [ourselves we] remember, or pretend to remember' (in Lowenthal 193),[xviii] what am I remembering when I remember the Lieutenant? Perhaps what this description more accurately reflects is how shocked *I* was by this man's appearance. World War II may have ended sixty years ago, but I somehow hadn't taken into account how 'elderly' its veterans would now appear to be. I think I still expected World War II Veterans to appear as they did in the mid-eighties, when, as a child, I was dragged to ANZAC Day marches: grizzle-haired columns of stern-faced men marching behind the few last surviving World War I veterans. Ken Inglis, commenting on what he sees as a 'resurgence' of interest in Anzac Day among 'young people' in Australia (436), suggests the 'sheer ageing' and the 'unthreateningly mortal' appearance of the once 'husky' veterans of World War II inspires 'compassion' and

'curiosity' in observers (438). That my curiosity was excited by the sight of the Lieutenant is obvious: my compassion, less so. Some might consider cruel my character Sarah's first impressions of the Major in 'Hungry Ghosts'. His 'agape mouth' reminds her of a 'sideshow clown' (HG 2); she is struck by the way his voice cracks 'as though escaping through a flaw in his windpipe' (HG 1). What I was trying to do, through using such strong imagery, was convey an impact the 'agedness' of veterans now has on 'young' viewers such as Sarah (and myself). As Ken Inglis would have it, our 'curiosity' is irresistibly piqued.

Along with curiosity and compassion, I think it is also possible to view veterans as being inhabitants of another 'time', visitors from that 'foreign country' of the past. I have tried to avoid falling into the trap of making the Major seem too 'otherworldly' by attempting to give him his share of moments of earthiness and insensitivity. I do, however, think it is true to say the veterans *represent* another time. British journalist Brian MacArthur, writing of the last 'Fepow' (Far East Prisoners of War) Remembrance Service in London, suggests that 'the Fepows are from an age when men wore suits and ties and held themselves erect whatever their infirmities and had no embarrassment in singing the National Anthem' (402). The strictness with which such behaviour is adhered to becomes even more apparent during an outdoor service in the tropics. Many veterans convey a sense of being of another 'age'; they seem to embody values of a world that has irrevocably changed. Accordingly we can view these men with a sense of nostalgia that often tends towards reverence. But I think it also means we see them, gazing, as we do, through the distancing filters of 'curiosity' and 'compassion', as being somehow 'Other'.

THE PHOTO

As the old Lieutenant was about to speak a wartime photo of him was projected onto a large screen above his head: a (presumably) pre-captivity image of him as a young man, fresh faced and bright-eyed in his army jacket and cap. Why is there such a proliferation of these photos, so many images of young men about to be scarred or killed in the theatre of war? And why are their subjects always smiling and beauteous, always so beautifully posed and lit, and so accordingly evocative of the great spirit and potential about to be irrevocably lost? In retrospect it seems as though army photographers had been instructed to pose these 'doomed youth' in a way that would emphasise the tragedy of what is to come for them: the horrors of war that would alter them forever. But it is possibly truer to say that, knowing that the subject we view in each image is either dead or soon to die, we experience the unsettling sense of seeing what Roland Barthes calls the 'anterior future'; we know that a 'catastrophe' will occur, and 'has already occurred', for the subject of the photo (96). For Nick in *Another World*, a novel by English author Pat Barker (who has been acclaimed for her *Regeneration Trilogy* which examines 'shell shocked' soldiers in World War I), 'the shadow of what's to come' seems to 'lie over' the photo he has of the great-uncle who died in World War I; the image 'tinted sepia ... as if the mud's already reaching out to claim [him]' (71). Writer and academic Leong Liew Geok writes in her poem 'First Aunt's Solitudes' of the 'photos of the dead' she keeps, images in which 'innocents speak in sepia...of absence, longing, grief: what they knew / And did not know' (180). These sentiments have influenced the scene in 'Hungry Ghosts' where Sarah, having been told by Bradley that his grandfather was in Changi, sees a pre-war photo of him and notices his 'shining sad eyes' (HG 96). I have myself had this reaction repeatedly throughout my research, especially when reading such texts as *Legacies of our Fathers*, a collection of essays written about Australian POWs by their sons and daughters. Almost every entry begins with a black and white image of whichever 'father' the essay is about;

young whole men I can't look at without 'knowing' their terrible (past) futures. As Barthes says of looking at childhood photos of his recently deceased mother (and as I feel looking at 'old' photos of my 'younger' mum), he/I can't escape the 'horror' of the sense they are 'going to die' (96). We invest in the images of the war dead a sense of tragedy they probably never attached to their own lives; and we probably 'view' the surviving war veterans, and imagine the 'tragedy' of their pasts, in a similarly inaccurate way.

THE MOMENT

I found it very hard to understand the Lieutenant. I don't mean I found it hard to comprehend what he was saying. In fact, I was amazed at the clarity of his voice, as well as the pace at which he spoke. After a single amplified gasp, he embarked on his subject, his incarceration during World War II, at the speed of an announcer calling a race.

What I could not understand was the *way* he spoke about his terrible experiences: how he recounted his life as a POW with seemingly so little emotion. He barely paused, or even slowed to the point where some kind of modulation, some shift in tone or emphasis, could enter his voice. It was almost impossible to get a grip on his narrative about his 'life' at Changi and on the Burma Railway. His delivery (if not his subject matter) was just too monotonous. It was like watching an actor mumble his way through lines while waiting to go on stage. (Or, as I have put it in 'Hungry Ghosts', in the scene where Major Willard talks of his war days, as if he was 'reciting by rote' [HG 20].) The sense of alienation that I felt from this man, already heightened by the larger-than-life spectre of his earlier and seemingly livelier self hanging above him on the wall, was further increased by his lack of eye contact. Not once did he look around to gauge the reaction to the increasingly desperate tale he was telling. I began to get the uncomfortable feeling he was not entirely aware of our presence. His impassive gaze did not seem to shift from the centre of an

invisible row of seats in front of the actual (dignitary-stacked) front row. It was to this invisible audience he, seemingly impassively, delivered his tale of horror.

I can't help but wonder now if some of what the Lieutenant told us that day had remained unspoken for a long time, and if this in turn had affected the way he (finally) spoke of it; his delivery suggested a 'tapping into' of something that had been at least partially submerged. Historian Bernice Archer suggests the encouragement former internees have increasingly received since the 1990s to 'relate and record their ordeals', coupled with the growing public interest in commemorating the major anniversaries of World War II, have led to 'the retrieval of repressed memories' in many veterans (16). The fact that these 'repressed' memories can so suddenly return seems to reiterate one of the themes of my novel: that of the unpredictable nature of memory; how what seems lost can suddenly return, sometimes so vividly that it is almost relived. I was unnerved at the time, though, by the non-enunciating, non-eye contact making Lieutenant; the 'retrieval' of his memories, if that was what was taking place, seemed to involve his going into a trance. I began to wonder how I could comprehend, let alone portray, such a 'different' kind of person in my novel. And I began to wonder if the premise behind my studying and hoping to portray men like 'this', my wanting to explore parallels between their experiences of grief and memory with Sarah's, was essentially flawed. I wondered whether these men, products of a time characterised by war and privations and 'getting on with it', were accordingly too tough to be understood by people like me. Di Elliott writes in her article about her POW father, heartbreakingly titled 'If Only I Had Understood', that returning Australian POW's 'were told to forget what had happened to them and their mates and get on with their lives. [Likewise] their families were told when [the POW's] did come home not to ask them any questions about what might have happened to them' (33). Could I ever empathise with these men and all they had endured?

The Lieutenant came to what seemed the end of his monologue with a stern, if still mechanically delivered, statement about how history should 'remember' the Japanese. My mood sunk lower. *Truly another age,* I thought gloomily.

He paused, swallowed, wetting his cracked lips with his coated tongue. I thought it was time for questions, but he went on to tell us of how he had returned home to Australia to find his mother had died of cancer six months earlier.

I think I remember his eyes, at that point, becoming glazed. But this could be the embellishment of memory. The Lieutenant could have just been clearing his throat; this final statement may have made no more impact on him than his revelations about bugs and burning bodies seemingly had. Perhaps I just 'want to remember' the comment affecting him as profoundly as it did me. I could not help but feel as I stared at that man's ashen face, watched his eyelids flutter across liquid pupils (which I hope I observed with more compassion than curiosity), that I had somehow just been given, well, a sign.

Kevin Blackburn would comment, in our later interview, that he too had been 'surprised' by the Lieutenant's comments about his mother. He had spent many hours taking the former officer's oral history but never heard him refer to her before. Blackburn would suggest that the emotion of the occasion, the return to Singapore, the opportunity to speak to a large group of people, may have caused this memory to 'resurface' for the Lieutenant: to slip out almost inadvertently, suggesting that some grief does not dissipate and can never truly be 'suppressed'. I am still not sure if I am grateful for that knowledge.

DON'T MENTION THE WAR

My experiences with the veterans in Singapore impressed upon me the inaccessibility of these men: the extent to which I could not hope to understand their pasts or to access their

stories, at least not in the way that I predominantly 'encountered' them: gazing on them from afar at official ceremonies like the one at the (reconstructed) Changi Chapel. There was a strange irony in this open-air service being held in a 'reconstructed' courtyard of a prison, with the row of former veterans standing 'erect' while their bare scalps turned puce. It was like some staged re-enactment of a POW punishment session. The rest of us watched the 'show' like the worst kind of grief tourists, guiltily huddled in the corners of the courtyard under umbrellas emblazoned with STB logos.

I managed to 'integrate' a little more with the veterans at the social occasions following the ceremonies: the High Teas and the gunpowder breakfasts. The 'colonial' overtones of these events were offset by the fact the food tended to be specified as *halal*: one of the many important reminders I would receive of the diversity, and conflict, of traditions in Singapore. On such occasions the veterans tended to be ringed by a protective buffer of watchful relatives, looking on as their uncle/father/grandfather was pecked at by journalists and biographers and pesky creative writers. Relations were certainly not always good between researcher and subject of research. One of the liveliest and most expletive-filled conversations I had in Singapore was with members of a British group I shared a taxi with returning from Kranji War Memorial after the service. We had to wave down the cab on the roaring expressway beside the cemetery. The enraged son-in-law-of-veteran spent most of the twenty minute journey back to central Singapore talking about the British journalist who had 'tailed' the group for the whole Memorial Weekend: 'ruined it for them', as his teary-eyed wife/veteran-daughter would interject. I still remember the look on her face and I suspect the memory has informed the 'wounded' face Carol returns from her High Tea with (HG 111). The journalist had (allegedly) followed this party around, asking probing questions, making their father/father-in-law pose for photos at what should have been 'a private time', only to 'abandon them' as soon as he had his story. What I find

strange, however, is that I cannot remember the actual veteran who was presumably somewhere in the cab while his next-of-kin raged on his behalf; I literally have no memory of him at all. This is proof again, perhaps, of the fallibility of memory. But it also reflects, for me, a truth about these silent, age-wearied men: they seem to disappear even while they are still in the room, to get swallowed up by the noise and vigour of their younger, fitter, more *coherent* next-of-kin. If I have 'painted' Carol's ire in a particularly animated way perhaps it is because these next-of-kin groups inevitably struck me as so animated, so charged with righteous indignation and heightened emotions beside their subdued elders.

Even if I managed to 'steal' a moment alone with a veteran, without their watchful entourage, the conversation we had was always slight. I suppose a person cannot just weigh in with a question like: 'Can I ask you, what is the memory that haunts you the most? The image of war that you'll never forget?' I held off, I suspect, not just because of the potential upset it would cause the veteran but because of the upset it would cause *me*, the questioner. It's a lot easier to regard these men with simple, uncomplicated affection, without ever trying to picture them as soldiers, men who fought or brutalised or killed. (Sarah finds it hard to imagine the Major's hands scrubbing out bloodstains [HG 21].)

I left the 'serious' questions to the war tourists, those anticipated individuals who did pop up in small clusters at the events, and did prove, as I had hoped, to be rather interesting specimens in themselves. It was impossible not to be intrigued by these men who had spent small fortunes accruing war souvenirs and faux badges to pin on their non-uniformed chests, on taking duty-free tours of duty across the battlefields of Asia. These were men of the 'peace generation' who were trying to connect with some kind of war 'heritage'. To these strange products 'of much wealth and peace' (as Hamlet describes the soldiers of Fortinbras' army who are going to fight for a piece of worthless land [IV.iv.27]) a word and a photo with a 'real' soldier seemed to be worth its weight in replica dog-tags.

A New Zealander calmly told me about his upcoming trip to Guam, where he would be involved in a re-enactment of the taking of Iwo Jima. This man's eyes would light up at when he and I were introduced to a 'real-life' veteran of the conflict, someone who had actually *been there*. This reflects John Urry's description of the tourist as a 'contemporary pilgrim' who seeks 'authenticity in other times and other places', who 'show[s] a fascination in the "real lives" of others' as possessing 'a reality hard to discover in [his or her] own experience' (9). I can see this description of the tourist could just as easily be applied to a writer.

What I noticed about the encounters between enthusiast and veteran was that so many of the 'conversations' that 'enthusiasts' would initiate with the veterans would effectively involve the younger party telling the older one all about the war. Or at least about the books they had read about it, the amazing films they had seen, the tours they had taken: all different examples of the 'imaginative responses of the grandchild generation' to 'war and its meanings' that Ashplant, Dawson and Roper suggest have proliferated in the past two decades (3).

Some of these 'responses' struck me as straying rather far from the original 'meanings' of war. One of the articles I took the most grim pleasure reading during my research was a story in *Wish*, *The Australian*'s travel magazine, of a young woman from Sydney's North Shore who had decided hiking the Kokoda Track would be 'the ultimate holiday': 'Who needs five stars when you can sleep under the stars?' (in Apelgren 36). I was interested to note in the same article that the coordinator of an Australian company running treks along Kokoda was quoted as saying they were popular with 'corporate groups', stating 'Kokoda has great value in teaching [these groups] our [Australian] history' (in Apelgren 36). The boundaries of business and history again seem to blur in the most alarming of ways. Perhaps this is why so many veterans' stories, especially the POW

stories that kick back against our 'dominant' understanding of war heroism and battles, have struggled to emerge. It is a lot harder to write a 'ripping yarn' about life as a prisoner, or to sell adventure tours for it; it is far more difficult to make this part of our 'history' palatable for audiences seeking tales of past glory and adventure. I now wonder how many ex-POWs like those who were in Singapore, having to sit through endless 'grandchild generation' narratives as to what the war was 'like', sometimes meet these 'responses' with silences that are deliberate.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

I have already noted my admiration for the 'children' of the veterans, those who came to Singapore with the express purpose of caring for their aged parents, keeping them fed and rested and generally ensuring that their 'heroic return' went as smoothly as possible. Many British veterans and their companions actually received funding from a programme called the 'Heroes Return' scheme, an initiative with the aim, according to the government press release, of allowing 'UK veterans to commemorate the battles they fought and the comrades they lost 60 years ago by travelling to areas including Europe, North Africa and the Far East' (Prime Minister's Office, United Kingdom: par. 2). I think such a scheme would have been far more appropriate *twenty* years earlier, when veterans were more numerous and in better shape to make such a 'return'. Brian MacArthur reports that the members of the London Fepow Association had decided to hold 'their final service of remembrance' three years earlier in 2002, the decision being made on the grounds that the members were 'becoming frail' and that it was 'better to end [the] tradition while [they could] still act with dignity' (401). And this for a remembrance service that only required the 'Fepows' to travel to St.Martin-in-the-Fields. The 'Heroes Return' programme seems to reflect the current 'global trend' towards 'public commemoration of past military conflicts' historians such as Mark McKenna have observed (14); but these commemorative

acts sometimes seem to overlook the needs of those who are purportedly being 'commemorated'. The press release for the Heroes Return scheme stated another of the programme's aims was to allow 'young people to mark the courage and sacrifice of Britain's wartime generation ... [and to] ensure that new generations can learn from [the veterans'] experiences' (Prime Minister's Office, United Kingdom: par. 7); a lofty sentiment in which I think McKenna's idea of a government passing on 'instructive parables of national virtue' to its next generation of soldiers can again be seen (14).

The representatives of the 'new generations' that I saw at the Memorial Weekend in Singapore struck me as being well worth their airfare. The 'children' of the veterans seemed to act as their parents' interpreters as well as their caregivers, translating their obscure dialects of age (long, rambling accounts that included every last detail or short, puzzling statements that shed no light on the past at all) into the *lingua franca* of 'youth'. In a crowded corner at one of the many official functions I attended I overheard the beginning of an interview between a British journalist and a veteran.

The conversation ran something like this:

> British Journalist [*Notepad open, pen poised at right-angle*]: So, um, Captain [*having glanced at the stick-pin on the veteran's lapel and ascertained his rank accordingly*] it must bring back some painful memories for you, being here? [*Statement ending in Journalist Question Intonation: a 'probing' comment, designed to encourage the subject to reveal 'painful memories'.*]
>
> Captain: <Unintelligible Reply> [*Captain's softly-spoken response drowned out by hubbub of conversation and air-conditioning roaring like*

duelling winds around the room. Also muffled by his looking away at the wall, seemingly addressing someone only he can see.]

Journalist [*nodding, brow creased, pen motionless*]: Right, right...um...

Daughter: You had an allotment, didn't you dad? [*Resting a hand on dad's padded shoulder and smiling inscrutably at journalist. Is she being protective of father? Embarrassed by him? Does she want to signal to journalist she knows how slow and embarrassing her dad is? Or hope to keep him around to record her dad's story, no matter how much sucking up to the smarmy young toad it takes?]* You were part of that gardening group. You used to grow vegetables, didn't you?

Journalist: Oh right? [*Pen still motionless but Question Intonation returned – perhaps seeing new 'painful memories' angle.*] Well, you guys would have been starving, wouldn't you?

Daughter *[Squeezing Dad's shoulder]:* Dad, you used to grow spinach, and...beans ...

Captain [*To wall*]: <Unintelligible Reply>

This 'brief encounter' seemed to reflect so much of what I had been meditating on in regards to my project. The journalist seemed to be seeking a 'horror' story, regardless of the complexity of POW life at Changi. How interesting, for example, that some POWs were allowed by the Japanese the space and time to create food gardens in the first place; this is verified by historian R.P.W. Havers' study of Changi Prison Camp, which includes an exploration of how the POW's became 'successful' at cultivating their own foodstuffs within a few months of having been interned (45). Havers actually suggests the treatment

of POWs at Changi 'was comparatively moderate', something which 'flies in the face of the accepted picture of Japanese behaviour in the Second World War'; he also suggests the fact that Changi is now 'considered in far darker terms than the reality' has 'much to say about the nature of myths and collective memory' (174). I have been mindful of this suggestion as I have written my novel, even while feeling there is probably no way to introduce such a complex debate to the narrative, at least not a narrative which is supposed, after all, to be a 'secondary' one, more concerned with the nature of 'contemporary war memory' than war itself. Nevertheless I think the suggestion that popular conceptions of Changi may stem from myth as much as historical fact reflects the role narrative plays in our understanding of 'the past'. It also reflects how, as Havers suggests, we sometimes prefer 'to conceive of the past in terms of black and white', without allowing 'the ambiguous' to 'blur the otherwise clear picture' (175).

What particularly interested me about the exchange I overheard was the role the daughter played in it. I have described her as a 'translator', someone supplying a journalist with a shorthand version of her father's story, but her 'role' was actually more complex than that. The details she was supplying the journalist with seemed to have been *learned* at an earlier point, probably through her own long and patient interviews with her father, her slow and careful extraction of these details of his life. Perhaps she had supplanted what she had gleaned from him, what he could recall and what he was willing to tell her, with her own research: the work she needed to do to 'fill in the blanks' as Fran de Groen writes of her research on her own POW father's story (144).

It does seem to be primarily women who are working to keep the POW story alive, to document the 'history' of their parents and the units they were interned with. Arguably the largest organisation supporting the children of 'Far East' POW's, COFEPOW (Children of Far-East Prisoners of War), was founded and is coordinated by a woman,

Carol Cooper; and researchers such as Carolyn Newman and Di Elliott seem to be at the forefront of 'individual' POW research in Australia. The aforementioned anthology of POW stories *Legacies of our Fathers* is comprised mainly of accounts (eighteen out of twenty-four) by 'daughters'. Carolyn Newman, who both edited and contributed to the collection, comments on the 'particularly strong link' between female descendants of POWs (Newman 'No Complaints' 182). Without ostensibly referring in my novel to the active role that women seem to have taken in the memorialisation of this area of predominantly 'masculine' experience, I nevertheless suggest it through making both of my 'next-of-kin' characters, Neve and Carol, female. Carolyn Newman introduces each account in *Legacies of our Fathers* with a brief biographical note on its author: a series of introductions perhaps meant to ensure these daughters also receive their memorial 'due'; and to compensate for the fact that, for the most part, they seem barely visible in the accounts they give of their fathers' experiences.

***

I now wish I had pursued the woman attending her veteran father in Singapore. I might have told her about the novel I intended to write: the 'memorial' I wanted to carve out with written words. The person whose name I wanted to ensure lived on forever through its prose. This wise and gracious woman might have told me that I was doing the right thing. That my motives were obviously pure as snow and that I was, beyond a shadow of a doubt, a good and faithful daughter.

'Oh,' I might have said in response, 'but I haven't done that much. Nothing compared to you, or some of the other POW daughters I have read about. I haven't spent 'incalculable hours in the Research Centre at the War Memorial' like Di Elliott (Newman *Legacies* 35), or founded an organisation and raised funds for a commemorative long-hut

to be built like Carol Cooper (Newman *Legacies* 16). I haven't let an 'intense preoccupation with [a] father's POW experiences' cause me to 'neglect [my] health', as Joan Kwek did (Newman *Legacies* 117).

'Don't worry,' the woman might have replied, 'those women make me feel profoundly inadequate too. To tell you the truth' (here she might have glanced over her shoulder, searching furtively for anyone who might put her comments irretrievably on record) 'my dad's driving me nuts. I can't wait for the old bugger to go to sleep so I can get some peace and bloody quiet. He won't shut up about the war.'

'You'll want to know more, when you can't ask him about it or anything else,' I might have told her. 'It'll be like Fran de Groen says. Like she writes in her letter to her dead dad, "Now that it's too late to ask, I want to find out more about you"' (138).

THE GHOST IN HUNGRY GHOSTS

WHAT I SEE AND WHAT I WILL SHOW

It's something of a relief to read Roland Barthes' admission in *Camera Lucida* that he has 'always suffered from the uneasiness of being ... torn between [the use of] two languages, one expressive, one critical'(8). I take comfort from this statement (a comfort I suspect is laced with *schadenfreude*) as I have found myself similarly 'torn' throughout the drafting process of this essay. I have wanted, indeed felt compelled, to write of the 'real' grief, the *personal* grief, that has influenced the creation of 'Hungry Ghosts.' But I have struggled to find the 'correct' way to narrate this grief: the proper 'language' that I suspect lies somewhere between the 'expressive' and the 'critical' forms Barthes refers to.

Early drafts of this essay erred on the emotive side as I attempted to express myself, and in particular to express my emotions regarding the death of my mum. My writing became 'over expressive'. Derrida's suggestion in *Circumfession* of a pen fashioned like a 'syringe' (10), where painful emotions are expressed by accessing 'the right vein'(12), comes to mind; through 'expressing' a good deal of 'venal' emotion in my early drafts I think I obscured a good deal of rational truth about my novel manuscript, even to myself. Derrida's violent metaphor itself perhaps points to his producing *Circumfession* in emotion-charged circumstances; he states he is writing 'at the moment when my mother no longer recognizes me, and at which, though still capable of speaking or articulating, a little, she no longer calls me and for her and therefore for the rest of her life, I no longer have a name (22)'.

A certain degree of emotional truth may exist in my early drafts: but I suspect the price of such expression was a loss of balance. It seems remarkable to me that I can see

this now with such clarity. I suppose this demonstrates the strangeness of the process of creating a narrative. Each retelling, each redrafting, of a narrative, even a 'personal' narrative, can liberate that narrative from the constraints of personal experience. As Inga Clendinnen says, a work can become less a work of 'auto-biography', a piece that relies on 'retrieval from the inside', and more a work of 'biography', the re-examination of the work of another (2007: par. 33). To tell the 'story' of my novel manuscript, I need somehow to sublimate the emotions that originally informed 'Hungry Ghosts'.

My work is no longer a work of personal 'mourning', if ever it was that alone. The extent to which I imagined 'Hungry Ghosts' as being a 'grief narrative' is something I must address. 'Hungry Ghosts' has grown to include humour: its comedic element puzzles even me, its author. The humour seems to have arisen almost in defiance of the manuscript's 'dark' inception, and in spite of the more 'serious' tone I originally intended it to have. I have come to believe that the humour has somehow been informed by the darkness, has been thrown into sharper effect by it. This reflects the mystery of the relationship I see as existing between tragedy and comedy, the way bathos and pathos seem to exist as complementary halves of the same 'whole'. Much that is light and buoyant in my novel has a 'debt' to its dark 'beginnings': a grief that runs through my work like a ghost.

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes examines how images, and in particular photographs, are generally or 'culturally', looked at, suggesting viewers comprehend the photos by 'participat[ing] in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions' (26). This is something he calls the *studium*, or the 'study', of the photo (26). He suggests, however, that some photos also contain something he calls a *punctum*; an element that has the power to 'sting' a particular viewer, makes that image particularly 'poignant' and even gives it the power to 'bruise' (27). He suggests that this *punctum* exists in an image as 'a cast of

the dice'(27), that it is something only select viewers, perhaps even a single viewer, may be able to discern. One of the images he writes of in regards to this idea of the *punctum* is a photograph of his deceased mother as a child posing in a Winter Garden. Barthes calls this photo his 'Ariadne', the 'sole picture' he would find at the 'centre of [a] Labyrinth' formed by 'all the world's photographs'; but at the same time it is an image he 'cannot reproduce' (73). (It is the only photograph discussed in *Camera Lucida* that isn't reprinted in the book). The reason Barthes gives is that for the reader, the Winter Garden photograph would be 'nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary"'. It might interest the reader's studium, he concedes, but there would be 'no wound...in it' (73).

I see in this statement an expression of the great dilemma of trying to analytically discuss the 'personal': to lay items precious to the author alone on the slab of reason, knowing that viewers will respond to them, for the most part, indifferently. What I can also see, though, is that Barthes, through not showing his precious Winter Garden photo, refusing to 'reproduce' it in his text, somehow increases its power and its fascination. Unseen and unseeable, the Winter Garden photo assumes a 'shadowy' presence in *Camera Lucida*. Maurice Blanchot suggests 'the essence of (any) image is to be altogether outside ... yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; ... unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and fascination of the Sirens'(in Barthes 106). I think this idea of 'absence-as-presence' has informed both my novel and my exegesis.

UNDESIRED MOMENTS OF LIGHTNESS

I think the moments of lightness that come during a period of mourning are some of the most intense that a person can experience. These moments are heightened, perhaps, by the

fact that they are so unanticipated. Virginia Woolf has written of the moments of 'great beauty' and 'astonishing intensity' she experienced in the days following her mother's death; she suggests this death 'unveiled and intensified' things, making her 'suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant'(92-93). There are memories I still relive with 'astonishing intensity' from the time following my own mum's death. I remember for example, on the day after her passing, taking a bushwalk up a gorge and being awestruck by the beauty of the scenery. The image I have of the dazzling azure canopy, magnificent between the ghostly gums, above the mural of sandstone rocks, comes back to me almost as a hallucination, as a moment of incredible, unworldly release. I have kept such images in mind as I have written both Sarah's responses to her own physical 'landscape', her responses to the scenery 'around' her, and to her recalled 'landscape' of the recent past. I have also been mindful of how these 'intensified' perceptions might affect her general emotion state: contribute to her sense of being slightly dislocated, uncertain even of her own level of 'normality'.

The moments of general lightness that followed mum's death are relatively easy to relate, if not necessarily to comprehend. A little harder to divulge is my remembered desire to laugh. Indeed, one of my most disconcerting memories of grief has been how much I wanted to laugh, and how frequently I did so. At the funeral I giggled at moments when I should not have been giggling: made 'humorous' comments at the wake that nobody else laughed at, or at least comfortably so. I struggle to think even now of how much I enjoyed the wake, what joy I experienced from being surrounded by sympathetic family and friends with food. I was not hungry in the 'normal' way, but I remember feeling, like never before, the desire to *stuff* myself with 'life-affirming' food, to prove to myself that I was still *alive*. In my novel I have tried to translate this remembered hunger into a 'hunger' of a different kind, by showing, in a fairly physical sex scene, Sarah mentally repeating the phrase

'Alive' (HG 75). I wanted to suggest Sarah's 'heightened' desire for contact: a need for sensation to envelop her 'like a hot blanket' (HG 75). I am unable to elaborate upon most of my moments of levity here; I do not have the courage of Virginia Woolf who has written of how, standing at her deceased mother's bedside, she saw a nurse crying and had 'a desire to laugh' (92). But I see in these moments the origins of some of the humour of 'Hungry Ghosts'. This humour is born partly of restlessness, a maddening desire to do something that breaks the 'vague sense of wrongness' spread over everything that the bereaved narrator of *A Grief Observed* refers to (30). Peter Handke writes in *Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, a memoir about his mother's suicide that he commenced just after her death, that if he wasn't writing about her his need for 'kinetic therapy' would have compelled him to 'take a trip' or 'sit at [his] typewriter pounding out the same letters over and over again (3)'. I also remember a restlessness setting in during the days after my mum's death: the way I frantically planned to take a trip *somewhere*, a short trip to Bali, a long drive along the Great Ocean Road. This remembered restlessness has come to inform a basic premise of my novel; Sarah needs to be somewhere 'else', to escape not just the physical terrain of Adelaide but the pain she has come to associate with it.

My levity was, I suspect, also partly an example of what is known as 'gallows humour'; a lightness created from being so close to death that mania, at least temporarily, seems to set in. Gallows humour in my case eased, or perhaps sharpened, in the weeks and months that followed mum's death into a sense of how acts of 'commemoration' can so easily fall short of the mark they are meant to hit; and that the more ambitious the aim, the more profane, and profoundly funny, the 'miss' can prove to be. We were sent a dying rosebush with the bill from the funeral home, something I later wrote as being one of Sarah's experiences (HG 108). I remember the undertaker, when we went to fix the bill (and thank him for the rosebush), telling me about a ceremony he had recently overseen

where a group of mourners had released white doves over a coffin as it was being lowered into the ground. One of the doves, unfortunately, had been gripped too hard by the small child holding it, and landed, stone dead, on the descending coffin with a loud thud. I laughed like a drain. (I have been interested to since read of the 'relief' Peter Handke experienced in the weeks after his mother's death through hearing 'jokes about dying and death', his assertion being that they made him 'feel good'(4). Rightly or wrongly I suspect I have kept laughing, perhaps inappropriately, at acts of commemoration gone wrong. I may have always done this, but I suspect the laughter has become louder since my mum's death. I still chuckle to think about the way the STB arranged to have the veterans at the Changi Memorial Service showered from on high in white petals. I can still see the veterans standing resolute through a blizzard of petals, the ceremony only coming to an (unceremonious) halt when the petal machine began to smoke. The more sacred the ritual, the more room there is for comedy.

THE DARKER SIDE

Of course there was a darker side to my bereavement. If I only lightly touch on it now, it is partly because this is something I have learned about the nature of bereavement; it can be very hard to narrate in depth.

A 'representation' of my memory of grief might read as follows:

> *After mum died, I went to ground. When I look back at that time, look at myself in that time, I see myself as* ***grounded****, motionless in a variety of different rooms in my house as if posing for a series of still life portraits. And the 'portraits' I see are so dull, in composition as well as colouring: grey lifeless 'shots' that I suspect are not so much 'individual' recollections as multiple memories of repeated actions (or inactions) that I have*

compressed into a single frame. I see myself lying on my bed, arms folded across my chest. I see myself sitting motionless in front of a television screen showing the boldly coloured set of a daytime talk show. I see myself turning my head from the set to the trapezoid of blue sky in my window, suspended like a guillotine blade over the roof of the neighbouring house, and the 'emotion' attached to this image is of how removed I am from life, how submerged I am in the dusty bubble of my 'living' room.

Even as I have been writing this passage several of the major 'difficulties' posed by the piece have been buzzing in my head. There is nothing here on which I can 'hang' a narrative. There is no way that these images will move, as a story must. I can now see what Robin Gerster means when he suggests that 'passive suffering is notoriously hard to convey' (138). In Gerster's statement, made in response to the question of why more POW 'narratives' aren't in existence, I see another link between the pain of physical incarceration and that of bereavement. Both are profoundly isolating experiences made even more so by the fact that they are so hard to *convey*.

This, I suspect, is one of the reasons I was so keen to 'put' Sarah in Singapore: to relocate her to somewhere where she was almost compelled to keep moving and couldn't fall into a trap of passivity. I also suspect now that my own memory of passivity is only partly accurate: that it is informed at least partly by my desire to want to remember myself as a girl who almost perpetually mourned her mother. I have also been challenged in various ways by this inadvertent misremembering. In the first draft of 'Hungry Ghosts' Sarah is accused by Paul of neglecting her friends, studies and future and only leaving the house to 'see' her mum, whose grave she visits almost daily. Tom Keneally responded to this scene by revealing that he himself had been unable to visit his father's grave for some time. I realised my experience was much the same; my visiting record to mum's grave was

worse than it had been to her house when she was alive. It was actually about six months before mum's ashes were interred at all. It was far less painful to not deal with the question for as long as possible, to avoid reopening the wound that was just beginning to close over. This idea of Sarah visiting her mum's grave daily was not something that reflected my own experience, but I had somehow incorporated it into a generalised understanding of my bereavement process. As strange as it sounds, it had not occurred to me that I had effectively 'imagined' this experience.

So I have tried to resist the urge to make Sarah too 'obvious' in her mourning; to ensure that she does not refer too many times to her mum's death, or reflect on it too frequently. In my attempts to make her grief, and diversions from her grief, 'accurate', I have had to reassess my own early responses to grief. I have had to remind myself, in particular, that it was not a perpetually passive state for me at all.

THE STORY I 'ACTIVELY' CHOSE TO TELL

It was quite early after mum's death, within about a month of losing her, that I began *actively* working on the book that would become 'Hungry Ghosts'. I scoured the newspapers and 'scouted' for suitable locations in which I could tell the story forming in my head: that of a girl in a 'strange' land, recently grief-struck, trying to engage with her physical landscape and her physical boyfriend while at the same time trying to come to terms with her private grief.

I knew straight away that my book would be a work of fiction. Even though it would take as its central narrative a story that in many ways 'mirrored' my own, and would, accordingly, be informed by my own experience of grief, both the female protagonist of the novel, and the 'absent' mother she mourned, would be fictitious. Only now do I wonder why I did not consider for a moment writing something commemorative,

such as so many children of POWs are undertaking for the sake of a precious parent. Perhaps I was afraid to discover what Marisha Pessl suggests to be true, that people only want to read the life stories of individuals with names 'along the lines of Mozart, Matisse, Churchill, Che Guevara or Bond - James Bond' (5). Maybe the thing I feared the most was writing the story of the central person in my life and then watching it go on to be *not read* by others, *not received* with the great interest it deserved. I did not want this story to be 'unvisited', as George Eliot has written of the 'unvisited tombs' in *Middlemarch* (838): for the literary world to deem insignificant the life of a person I *knew* mattered 'incalculably', as Eliot suggests of the tombs' residents (838). Again, like Barthes withholding his Winter Garden photo, I wanted to protect my mother from being received as 'one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary"' (73).

When I look at my decision to write a fiction rather than a memoir I must acknowledge there was a great deal of ego mixed in with any lofty sentiments of protecting my mum's 'image'. I wanted to write the kind of novel that perhaps every 'first time' author wants to write: one that, while informed by what I 'knew', would still be wide enough in scope, relevant enough to general experience, to be of interest of others, to make people want to keep *turning the pages*. I wanted to write the kind of book that might get *published*. And in acknowledging this I feel I have traded one fear, that of having the 'ordinariness' of my experience demonstrated to me, for another. I now fear it could be said I have committed heresy for the sake of narrative; like a grave-robber I have broken into the most sacred of tombs with the intention of stealing whatever I thought I could sell.

I counter that fear (swiftly) with the suggestion that I felt, after mum's death, that I had experienced something I needed to write about. To put it another way, I felt that there was nothing else I could write about, nothing else that it would make *sense* to write about. After mum died nothing else, in the same way, seemed to matter. It was if a bomb had

fallen silently into the centre of my life. I felt that what had just happened needed to be told in *fiction,* if only because I couldn't talk about it as it had 'happened'. I wanted to 'steer close' to it, to talk about grief and death (*a* grief, *a* death) in a way others could understand (and perhaps also in a way that *I* could understand). Like Walter Benjamin's 'archaic' figure of the 'storyteller' who goes 'on a trip' and returns with 'something to tell' (84), I hoped to find my way back to 'normalcy' through a retelling of my own strange journey, re-shaping the monsters I had battled with into comprehensible forms. I also wanted to 'affirm', if only to myself, the great calamity that I *knew* had taken place.

I suspect the actual 'truth' about why I started to write my book lies somewhere between these two narratives, preferred and feared, and probably contains elements of both. Inga Clendinnen suggests we all have 'a preferred story, and also a feared story, about the kind of person we are', a draft autobiography' that we 'keep adjusting' to suit 'changing circumstances' (2007: par. 37). I think the sense of 'moral' uncertainty that has accompanied aspects of my creating 'Hungry Ghosts' perhaps also provides a possible explanation for the humorous tone I have adopted writing it. Humour, the safeguard of the court 'fool', the last recourse of the scoundrel approaching the gallows, has been my companion as well. I don't know exactly why I have chosen to rely so heavily on humour in 'Hungry Ghosts': whether it is to seek absolution from my sins, or to make points I consider too serious to be spoken seriously. Maybe it's just that death animates us in a way most things cannot. D.J. Enright suggests in his introduction to the anthology *The Oxford Book of Death* that 'on no theme have writers shown themselves more lively' (xii).

I think I can now see in my decision to write a work of fiction rather than of memoir an early sense of what Barthes might call the *studium* of my manuscript. I was from the outset concerned with my novel's form and structure, and with its 'readability' as a piece of writing. I wanted to create a piece of writing people could engage with

'culturally', again referring to Barthes' concept of the *studium*, a study in which people could engage with the 'figures', 'settings' and 'actions' (26). I can see this interest in the structures of my work evinced in even the earliest pieces of writing I produced. The edifices of *studium* are so heavily contrived that any *punctum*, any essence, seems absent. Or nearly so.

THE UNEXPECTED FIND

First drafts are always hard to read: I suspect this has a lot to do with the 'gift' of hindsight, the knowledge of how your book 'works' in the present. When I recently reread my aborted attempt at an opening scene, a piece which had Sarah and Paul 'hurtling' in a mini-bus towards their hotel with a number of other guests, I was painfully aware of the over-descriptiveness of the piece. I had obviously already decided, at the time of the piece's creation, on the importance of a hotel as my 'primary' setting, and had accordingly described in great detail the appearance of the 'approaching' hotel, the fountains, the statues, the cement of the illuminated facade: something I think I was doing to convey the 'otherness' of the place Sarah and Paul were approaching. However I can now see the description actually made the hotel somehow appear more ordinary, the detailing of its features highlighting its *limits*. I have since consciously limited all external descriptions of the hotel to Sarah's immediate surroundings, giving a 'focused' account of the driveway, for example, or the rooftop garden, and deliberately refrained from stating details such as how many floors there are. As with other aspects of my novel, I have gained a sense that the less you describe of an environment, the more potentially 'large' and 'other' it can seem to a reader. Undefined spaces are better habitats for ghosts to 'lurk' in.

I also seemed to be intending, in my first scene, to give my characters 'snappy' and light dialogue and to create, in Sarah, the impression of a sharp wit. What I can now see

through this scene, as from my first draft as a whole, is why comments came back from my mentor suggesting Sarah came across as something of a 'smart-arse', that certain one-liners I had given her are just too 'sitcom-like' to be palatable. I still lament the loss of some the early 'cuts' to my work, if only because of the extent to which I toiled over them. A carefully set up piece where Sarah tells Paul about her 'eccentric' friend who swears she's seen her mum in the frozen food aisle at Coles, and Paul's response he's not surprised as Sarah's mum was a lousy cook, was an early excision, cut after being politely described as being too 'contrived'. I had put the structures of 'humour' carefully into place, and the essence of the joke, such as it was, was entirely crushed by them.

The 'pre-history' of 'Hungry Ghosts' did become a little clearer through the presence of the 'characters' surrounding Sarah and Paul on the bus. I could see the distant ancestors of the Major, Neve, Carol and Bradley in these since-abandoned 'figures': the dead but well-preserved 'experimental' forms of mums with bratty children; a quiet British couple; a scruffy young backpacker making sarcastic asides. But the writing seemed lifeless until I reached the second to last page. There Sarah looked out of the trembling bus window and 'remembered' her mum alive, carving up a mini cheesecake with a breadknife. She didn't regard this 'visitation' as remarkable, but for me, it was like seeing a ghost.

Sarah's 'vision' was a small one, only about two paragraphs in total, but it struck me in retrospect because it showed me the 'power' of forgetting; it is possible to completely forget something you have written, as well as lose the memory that has informed it. I had forgotten *ever* being able to remember my mum, the person who informed the 'fictitious' mum in this piece of writing, with this kind of clarity. The confidence with which this piece (and I as its 'freshly bereaved' author) 'recalled' the 'recently deceased' mum took my breath away. I had become used to thinking that I had

never been able to remember mum this 'accurately'; that if anything, my ability to remember her had improved over the years from an original point of almost total non-remembering. This discovery presented me with quite a profound challenge to my confidence in the 'value' of my work. I found myself wondering if, through the process of creating an absent mother in 'Hungry Ghosts', someone I'd made a point of *not showing* in the novel, I had affected my own memory. It was a while before I found I was able to reconsider philosophically, find a more 'positive' way to look at the situation.

Now I think it is true that my recollections of mum were 'sharper', in some ways, in the months following her death. But they were also very much slanted towards her *death,* distorted by her death. I seemed only able to remember mum as being in the 'grip' of late-stages cancer. (What a euphemism 'grip' is: one of the many euphemisms we use to discuss the subject of dying, a topic that seems to be 'the last taboo in an otherwise uninhibited world', as Enright suggests [xii].) I could only see mum as dying. The images of her death and the lead-up to it had simply obliterated all that had come before it. This is reflected in my very first piece of writing, in Sarah's recollection of her mother carving up the cheesecake: she sees the 'creased bandana slipping across her scalp, the bruised hand trembling against the handle of the knife, the swollen tongue clicking in the roof of her desiccated mouth.' A similar sentiment is reflected in another early piece of writing: a cut scene from my first draft where Sarah stands in front of the hotel powder room mirror and is reminded of a formative experience of her childhood, a visit to the 'otherworldly' powder room at David Jones with her mum; she suddenly realises she can only remember her mum's image as resembling 'a waxwork, her cheeks and jaw yellow as a candle in the glow of the bulbs ... her eyes black and white and ringed with arcs of grey shadow'.

Re-reading early scenes of my first draft I sense that I was waiting to write a great many more unsettling images of this kind; I remember that I had planned a future 'climax'

of emotional torment for Sarah, a great moment of 'reckoning' where she would mentally 'relive' the 'worst' parts of her mum's death, the moments of greatest suffering. My feared narrative might, gloomily, surmise that my plan was to rewrite my mum's death through the course of my book: to bring her back to fictive life only to take life away again for the sake of catharsis. There was probably a kind of egotism in this intended tale of 'horror' of how I had suffered watching mum die.

My preferred narrative would be that I think it was more a case, once again, of being unable to write anything else other than the 'immediate' story presenting itself to me: the 'story' of mum dying. Whether I wanted to write it out in a bid to rid myself of it, or whether I was simply mad as hell that it had happened and wanted the world to know about it (and I suspect both possibilities have some truth in them), the only way I could think of mum was as someone who had *died*, who was, in my mind, in my 'life story' always *dying*. I have since come to see this limiting narrative as totally 'unrepresentative' of her life, as it is of any person's life. It is only other people who think of a person, usually posthumously, as having been 'dying' at a certain point in their life. So, as Walter Benjamin suggests, a man 'who dies at the age of thirty-five will appear to remembrance at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five' (100). One of the reasons I have taken out of my book the images that point to Sarah's mum as dying is because I don't want her just to be 'read' as 'ill', 're-membered' by all who read my story as a woman who died of cancer (and distanced from the reader, somehow, by this fact). I want her to be understood as someone who *lived*: for the 'tragedy' of her death to be conveyed through the sense of a *life* that has ended. My own 'altered' perspective has radically altered the course and outlook of my novel.

SARAH'S PROGRESS

One of the challenges I faced in the production of 'Hungry Ghosts' was keeping Sarah's grief in a 'fixed' place while mine changed with the passing of months and years. Something I was aware of was that I was not able directly to show the 'healing' I came to realise Sarah would experience in the years to come. I instead tried to hint at it, to reflect it in 'clues' that I worked into the manuscript. Knowing that Sarah is still a long way off being able to reflect on her mum's 'life', to think about the things her mother did and the person she *was*, I instead tried to point to this future phase of 'recollection' through placing a series of 'maternal' figures in the narrative. In Sarah's varying reactions to these figures, I tried to show some of the reactions I thought she would have towards her own mum's memory in the future. I also wanted to suggest that she catches glimpses of this 'ghost' in the other women she meets. These glimpses act like a series of *puncta*, bruising as well as comforting Sarah; the two halves of the same experience are perhaps undividable. (In the smile of a grandmother holding her grandchild as she shows him the fish, I catch a glimpse of my mum and, simultaneously, the person my mum should have lived to be).

In the pairs of 'mothers and adult children' that Sarah encounters, Bradley and Carol and the two women at Raffles, I tried to suggest something of the less nostalgic, more 'clear-sighted' phase that will come as she remembers a 'reality' of such a relationship: the struggles that can occur between mother and growing 'child'. I tried to point to this through Carol and Bradley's relentless bickering, and through the teasing (light-hearted but with the potential to become less so) between the mother and daughter at Raffles as they discuss each other's clothes and spending habits (HG 35-6). I still wanted to point to the yearning that these witnessed encounters bring Sarah, how the gestures of affection and closeness strike her: the way, for example, the mother and daughter remind Sarah 'of Piglet and Pooh walking side by side across a field', especially when 'the elder woman [reaches] out and [takes] her daughter by the arm' (HG 36).

Through her encounter with the woman on the beach I wanted to hint at something of a 'turning' point in Sarah's remembering, a point where she can begin to be *surprised* by the 'memory' of her mum: to unexpectedly catch a 'glimpse' of her in the mannerisms and kindnesses of others; to see her without looking for her. I tried to reflect this in Sarah's response to the instruction the woman gives her to brush her hair so it doesn't get 'tangled'; almost without thinking Sarah observes that the woman 'sounds just like her mother' (HG 168). Such moments of recognition, which I imagined occurring more frequently in Sarah's 'future', would often be painful for her; but they would also help her to begin to comprehend her mother as she *was*. Or, more importantly, they would help her to comprehend that her mum was *more* than just what Sarah might hope to 'reconstruct' her as being: a figure far greater and more complex than any image Sarah could ever hope to 'reproduce' in her head or on a page. Through the many seemingly independent moments of memory that appear, like 'ghosts', to Sarah, often when she is least expecting them, I imagined she would begin to realise that her mum, with 'all her resistances, all her faults, all her unexpectedness', would 'incessantly triumph' over any 'mere idea of her' Sarah can form. This realisation is something that comes to the narrator of *A Grief Observed* in regards to his memory of his deceased wife (52). In Sarah's case, only when she begins to grapple with this concept that her mum will always defy definition, defy any 'mere idea' Sarah can form of her, will she be able, paradoxically, to 'see' something of her mum again.

In the final scene of the novel I tried to suggest that Sarah, in hearing her mother's voice (or a voice that sounds like her mother's, coming as it does 'through the landscape of a dream' [HG 179]) is somehow becoming (or at least will one day become) more confident in remembering her mum's voice: more able to hear it, if not to summon it. Through this moment of 'visitation' I wanted to give Sarah a glimpse of a way forward, an

understanding of how she might begin to make peace with the ‘past’ and learn to live with her mum’s absence in the future. I wanted to offer her a way in which she might, like Virginia Woolf, come to recognise her mother as one of the ‘invisible presences who...play so important a part in every life’ (80): a remembered spirit that may one day comfort as well as haunt her.

WORKS CITED

AAP. ‘Anzac legend captures hearts’. *Sydney Morning Herald Online* 25 April 2005. 35 pars. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/National/Anzac-legend-captures-hearts/2005/04/25/1114281480059.html>. 5 June 2007.

Apelgren, Janne. ‘Track Record.’ *Wish: The Australian Travel Magazine.* November 2005. 34-36.

Archer, Bernice. *The Internment of Western Civilians Under the Japanese 1941-1945 : A Patchwork of Internment.* London; Portland: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

Ashplant, T. G., Graham Dawson and Michael Roper. ‘The Study of War Memory and Commemoration’. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration.* Ed. T G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2000. 3-16.

Bangert, Albrecht and Otto Riewoldt. *New Hotel Design.* London: Laurence King, 1993.

Barker, Pat. *Another World.* 1998. London: Penguin, 1999.

—. *The Regeneration Trilogy*. London: Viking-Penguin, 1996. Originally published by Viking-Penguin as three separate novels: *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye In The Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995).

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: The Noonday Press-Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981.

BBC Press Office. ‘A Party to Remember Live from Trafalgar Square: VE Day 60th Press Release’. *BBC Online.* 5 April 2005. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/04_april/05/ve.shtml>. 2 June 2006.

Benjamin, Walter. ‘The Storyteller’. *Illuminations.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Helen and Kurt Wolff-Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968. 83-109.

Binyon, Laurence. ‘For the Fallen’. *Australian War Memorial Online.* <http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/customs/poems.asp>. 1 November 2008.

Blackburn, Kevin. ‘Commemorating and Commodifying the Prisoner of War Experience in South-East Asia’. *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 33 (2000): 36 pars. <http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j33/blackburn.asp>. 11 May 2005.

—. Personal Interview. 20 September 2005.

Bose, Romen. *Kranji: The Commonwealth War Cemetery and the Politics of the Dead*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2006.

Button, James. ‘Spectacle Risks Ruining the Commemoration’. Opinion. *The Age Online* 27 April 2005. 11pars. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Opinion/Spectacle-risks-ruining-the-commemoration/2005/04/26/1114462039439.html>. 5 June 2007.

CCTV International. ‘60 Years On War Remembered’. *Dialogue* 15 August 2005. Transcript. 61 pars. <http://www.cctv.com/program/e_dialogue/20050815/101743.shtml>. 17 August 2006.

Chan, Ziqian. ‘The Bodies.’ *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 3.2 (January 2004): 68 pars. <http://www.qlrs.com/story.asp?id=106>. 3 November 2008.

Chang, T.C. ‘Heritage as a Tourist Commodity: Traversing the Tourist-Local Divide’. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 18.1 (1997): 46-68.

Clarke, Stella. ‘Still not settled’. *Australian Literary Review* 3.10 (2008): 3.

Clendinnen, Inga. ‘Biography - The Impossible Art?: The National Biography Award Lecture 2007’. *State Library of Victoria Website.* Transcript. 48 pars. <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/programs/events/2007/nat_bio_lecture.html>. 12 February 2008.

—. ‘The History Question: Who Owns the Past?’ *Quarterly Essay* 23 (2006): 1-72.

Copeland, Peter and Rebecca Scollen. ‘Of training, tokenism and productive misinterpretation: reflections on the *After China* project’. *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia.* Special joint issue of *Journal of Australian Studies* and *Australian Cultural History* 65/19 (2000): 35-43, 228.

Curtis, Eleanor. *Hotel: Interior Structures.* 2001. Chichester: Wiley Academy-John Wiley, 2003.

de Groen, Fran. ‘Letter to My Father’. *Legacies of our Fathers.* Ed. Carolyn Newman. Melbourne: Lothian, 2005. 133-144.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. ‘Circumfession’. *Jacques Derrida.* Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993. 3-315.

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch.* 1871-2. Ed. Rosemary Ashton. London: Penguin, 1994.

Elliott, Di. ‘If Only I Had Understood’. *Legacies of our Fathers*. Ed. Carolyn Newman. Melbourne: Lothian, 2005. 35-42.

Enright, D.J. Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Death.* Ed. D.J. Enright. 1983. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. xi-xiii.

Escobar, Pepe. ‘Singapore: Too much air-con’. *Asia Times Online.* 19 May 2001. <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/CD19Ae03.html>. 3 June 2006

George, Cherian. *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation.* Singapore: Landmark, 2000.

Gerster, Robin. 'Coming to Terms: Fear, Loathing, Revenge and Reconciliation in Australian Stories of Japanese Occupation'. *Proceedings and Papers of the Japanese Occupation: Sixty Years after the End of the War Conference.* 5-6 September 2005, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Compiled by Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn. 133-146.

Goldsworthy, Kerryn. 'Of handwriting and memory'. *Pavlov's Cat Blog Site*. 12 December 2005. 5 pars. <http://pavlovblog.blogspot.com/2005/12/of-handwriting-and-memory.html>. 18 October 2007.

Grenville, Kate. *The Secret River*. Melbourne: Text, 2005.

Hack, Karl and Kevin Blackburn. *Did Singapore have to Fall?: Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress.* 2003. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge-Taylor and Francis, 2005.

Handke, Peter. *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams.* Trans. Ralph Mannheim. 1974. London: Condor-Souvenir Press, 1976.

Harvey, Sophie Siddique. 'Mapping spectral tropicality in *The Maid* and *Return to Pontianak*'. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*. 29.1 (2008): 24-33.

Havers, R.P.W. *Reassessing the Japanese Prisoner of War Experience: The Changi POW Camp, Singapore, 1942-5*. London: RoutledgeCurzon-Taylor and Francis, 2003.

Ho, Poh Fun. 'in the proximity of humans (the case for bird space)'. *More than Half the Sky: Creative Writings by Thirty Singaporean Women*. Ed. Leong Liew Geok. Singapore: Times Books International-Times Editions, 1998. 215-216.

'Hungry Ghosts'. Unpublished Manuscript. 2009.

Inglis, Ken. *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape.* Rev. ed. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 2005.

Keneally, Tom. *The Widow and Her Hero.* Sydney: Doubleday, 2007.

Klein, Kerwin Lee. 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse'. *Grounds for Remembering.* Special Issue of *Representations*. (2000): 127-150.

Krauss, Nicole. *The History of Love.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

Kuo, Pao Kun. 'Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral'. *Two Plays by Kuo Pao Kun.* Ed. C.J.W-L. Wee and Lee Chee Keng. Singapore: SNP Editions, 2003. 38-67.

—. 'The Spirits Play'. *Two Plays by Kuo Pao Kun.* Ed. C. J. W-L. Wee and Lee Chee Keng. Singapore: SNP Editions, 2003. 69-119.

Leong, Liew Geok. ‘First Aunt’s Solitudes’. *More than Half the Sky: Creative Writings by Thirty Singaporean Women.* Ed. Leong Liew Geok. Singapore: Times Books International-Times Editions, 1998. 178-180.

Lewis, Clive Staples. *A Grief Observed by N.W.Clerk.* London: Faber, 1961.

Lost in Translation. Dir. Sofia Coppola. With Scarlett Johansson and Bill Murray. UIP, 2003.

Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.

MacArthur, Brian. *Surviving the Sword.* New York: Random House, 2005.

Malouf, David. *The Great World.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1990.

Manne, Robert. ‘The War Myth that Made Us’. Opinion. *The Age* 25 April 2007: 15.

McConnachie, James. ‘Hot and Humid: BBC Weather Site Feature’. *BBC Online*. 6 pars. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/features/hotandhumid.shtml>. 18 November 2007.

McEwan, Ian. *The Comfort of Strangers.* 1981. London: Picador-Pan, 1982.

McKenna, Mark. ‘Patriot Act a Political Double Bill’. *The Australian Literary Review* 2.5 (2007): 3, 14-16.

Newman, Carolyn, ed. *Legacies of our fathers: WWII prisoners of the Japanese; their sons and daughters tell their stories.* Melbourne: Lothian, 2005.

—. ‘No Complaints’. *Legacies of our Fathers.* Ed. Carolyn Newman. Melbourne: Lothian, 2005. 174-184.

Patke, Rajeev S. *Postcolonial Poetry in English.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Pessl, Marisha. *Special Topics in Calamity Physics*. New York: Viking-Penguin, 2006.

Portman, John C., Jr. Introduction. *John Portman and Associates: Selected and Current Works.* Ed. Steve Womersley. Mulgrave: The Images Publishing Group, 2002. 6-13.

Prime Minister’s Office, United Kingdom. ‘Lottery to Fund “Heroes Return”’. Number10.gov.uk: The official site of the Prime Minister's Office. 8 pars. 9 February 2004. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page5332>. 12 November 2006.

Rinpoche, Sogyal. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying.* Ed. Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey. Revised edition. London: Rider-Random House, 2002.

Sa’at, Alfian. ‘Singapore You Are Not My Country (For Noora)’. *One Fierce Hour*. Singapore: Landmark Books, 1998. 37-41.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. London: Methuen, 1982.

Sofield, Trevor H. B. ‘Globalisation, Tourism and Culture in Southeast Asia’. *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia.* Ed. Peggy Teo, T. C. Chang and K. C. Ho. Oxford: Pergamon-Elsevier Science, 2001. 103-120.

Stallybrass, Peter. ‘Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things’. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity.* Ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1999. 27-44.

STB. ‘Singapore Remembers The End Of WWII In The Asia Pacific’. 14 February 2005. *Singapore Tourism Board.* 11 pars. <http://app.stb.gov.sg/asp/new/new03a.asp?id=2603>. 21 April 2005.

Sullivan, Jane. ‘Making a fiction of history’. *The Age Online* 21 October 2006: 7 web pages. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/books/making-a-fiction-of-history/2006/10/19/1160851069362.html>. May 5 2008.

Tan Siew Eng, Christine. ‘I’m Putting On My Mascara Now’. *Journeys: Words, Home and Nation; Anthology of Singapore Poetry 1984-1995.* Ed. Edwin Thumboo et al. Singapore: UniPress, 1995. 139-40.

Teo, Hsu-Ming. *Love and Vertigo.* St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 2000.

Tyler, Anne. *The Accidental Tourist.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1985.

Uniquely Singapore: The official website for tourist information on Singapore. Singapore Tourism Board. <http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/index.html>. 10 August 2005.

Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze.* 2nd Edition. London: SAGE, 2002.

Wee, C.J.W.-L. and Lee Chee Keng. Introduction. *Two Plays by Kuo Pao Kun*. Ed. C.J.W.-L. Wee and Lee Chee Keng. Singapore: SNP Editions, 2003. 13-34.

Womersley, Steve, ed. *John Portman and Associates: Selected and Current Works.* Master Architect Series VI. Mulgrave, Vic: The Images Publishing Group, 2002.

Woolf, Virginia. ‘A Sketch of the Past’. *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd Edition. Orlando, FL: Harvest-Harcourt Brace, 1985. 61-159.

Yap, Arthur. ‘old house at ang siang hill’. *The Poetry of Singapore*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo et al. Singapore: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1985. 495.

Yeo, Robert. ‘Christian Cemetery’. *The Poetry of Singapore.* Ed. Edwin Thumboo et al. Singapore: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1985. 488.

—. ‘Raffles Shakes His Head’. *Journeys: Words, Home and Nation; Anthology of Singapore Poetry 1984-1995.* Ed. Edwin Thumboo et al. Singapore: UniPress, 1995. 34.

Yeoh, Brenda and Lily Kong. ‘The Notion of Place in the Construction of History, Nostalgia and Heritage in Singapore’. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17.1 (1996): 52-65.

SELECT LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

Aw, Tash. *The Harmony Silk Factory.* London: Fourth Estate, 2005.

Ballard, J.G. *Empire of the Sun.* London: Victor Gollancz, 1984.

Barker, Pat. *Border Crossing*. London: Viking-Penguin, 2001.

Bennett, Bruce and Dennis Haskell, eds. *Myths, Heroes and Anti-Heroes: Essays on the Literature and Culture of the Asia-Pacific Region.* Nedlands, Western Australia: Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1992.

Blackburn, Kevin. 'Changi: A Place of Personal Pilgrimages and Collective Histories'. Australian Historical Studies 30.112 (April 1999): 152-171.

Blasi, Anthony J. 'Visitation to Disaster Sites'. *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety.* Ed. William H. Swatos Jr. and Luigi Tomasi. Westport, CT: Praeger-Greenwood, 2002. 159-180.

Bose, Romen. *Secrets of the Battlebox: The History and Role of Britain's Command HQ in the Malayan Campaign.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions-Marshall Cavendish International, 2005.

—. *The End of the War: Singapore's Liberation and the Aftermath of the Second World War.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions-Marshall Cavendish International, 2005.

Bourke, Roger. *Prisoners of the Japanese: Literary Imagination and the Prisoner-of-War Experience.* Brisbane: UQP, 2006.

Bowden, Tim. *Changi Photographer: George Aspinall's record of captivity*. Sydney: ABC Enterprises and W.Collins for the ABC, 1984.

Burgess, Anthony. *The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan trilogy.* London: Heinemann, 1984. Originally published by Heinemann as three separate novels: *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959).

Castro, Brian. *After China.* North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992.

—. *Shanghai Dancin*g. Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2003.

Caterson, Simon. 'All memoirs are verily unreliable'. *The Weekend Australian* 12-13 April 2008: 28.

Chang, T.C. and K. Raguraman. 'Singapore Tourism: Capital Ambitions and Regional Connections'. *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia.* Ed. Peggy Teo, T.C. Chang and K.C. Ho. Oxford: Pergamon-Elsevier Science, 2001. 47-63.

Chew Chee Wai, Christopher, ed. *Contemporary Vernacular: Conceptions and Perceptions.* Proc. of the AA Asia Contemporar Vernacular Seminar, Sept. 27-30, 1997, School of Architecture at Tsinghua University, Beijing. Singapore: AA Asia, 1998.

Chia Meng Tat, Jack. 'Ah Ma and Her Beliefs: The Migrant Experience and Religious Practices of a Chinese Immigrant Woman in Twentieth Century Singapore'. *Marburg Journal of Religion* 12.1 (May 2007). <http://web.unimarburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/mjr/art_chia_2007.html>. 8 November 2007.

Collis, Maurice. *Marco Polo.* London: Faber and Faber, 1951.

Cooper, Carol. 'My Father's Diary'. *Legacies of our Fathers.* Newman 15-26.

Derrida, Jacques. *Memoires: for Paul de Man*. Ed. Avital Ronell and Eduardo Cadava. Trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.

—. *The Work of Mourning*. Ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001.

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca.* 1938. London: Pan, 1975.

Elangovan. 'Romusha (Slave Labourer)'. *1915.* Singapore: Published by the author, 2005. 65-93.

Faulks, Sebastian. *Birdsong.* London: Hutchinson, 1993.

Goh, Sin Tub. *The Angel of Changi and Other Short Stories.* Singapore: Angsana-Flame of the Forest, 2005.

Grant, Lachlan. 'The Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial and the incorporation of prisoners of war in Anzac'. Hack and Blackburn 147-158.

Hack, Karl and Kevin Blackburn, eds. *Proceedings and Papers of the Japanese Occupation: Sixty Years after the End of the War Conference.* 5-6 September 2005, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Hamilton, Paula. 'Memory Studies and Cultural History'. *Cultural History in Australia*. Ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003. 81-97.

Hansen, Eric. *Orchid Fever: A Horticultural Tale of Love, Lust and Lunacy.* London: Methuen, 2000.

Hearder, Rosalind. "Memory, methodology and myth: some of the challenges of writing Australian prisoner of war history." *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 40 (February 2007). <http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j40/hearder.asp>. 14 November 2007.

Hirst, John. 'Let Us Rejoice'. *A2: The Age* 7 July 2007: 12-13.

Huang, Lynn. '*Grave of the Fireflies*, and Two Views of Japan'. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 5.2 (2006). <http://www.qlrs.com/essay.asp?id=504>. 9 April 2008.

Hutchinson, Garrie. *Pilgrimage: A Traveller's Guide to Australia's Battlefields.* Camberwell, VIC: Penguin, 2006.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *An Artist of the Floating World.* London: Faber, 1986.

—. *The Remains of the Day.* London: Faber, 1989.

—. *When We Were Orphans.* London: Faber, 2000.

Jose, Nicholas. *Paper Nautilus*. 1987. Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006.

—. *The Red Thread.* South Yarra, Vic: Hardie Grant, 2000.

Kelly, Kristin. *The Extraordinary Museums of Southeast Asia.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Kwek, Joan. 'Honto Ni Honto Ni Setsunai Ne (Truly, Truly A Pitiful Sight)'. Newman 117-132.

Kyriacos, Nicholas. *Billy's Tree.* Melbourne: Scribe, 2006.

Leong, Liew Geok. 'Fugitives and Prisoners: Narratives of Escape'. Bennett and Haskell 155-167.

—. 'The Japanese Occupation in Performance: Four Selected Plays'. Working paper for *The Japanese Occupation: Sixty Years after the End of the War Conference*. 5-6 September 2005, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Lim, Catherine. *Following the Wrong God Home*. London: Orion, 2001.

Lim, Jonathan. *Between Gods and Ghosts. Our Supernatural Skyline Ser*. 1. Singapore: Times Editions-Marshall Cavendish, 2005.

Lo, Jacqueline. 'Tracing *Emily of Emerald Hill*: Subject Positioning in Performance'. Bennett and Haskell 120-131.

McKernan, Michael. *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return.* Brisbane: UQP, 2001.

Meng, Tan Kok. 'The Rise of Style: Singapore Architecture and Media'. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 6.1 (2006). <http://www.qlrs.com/essay.asp?id=563>. 9 July 2007.

Muzaini, Hamzah and Brenda S.A. Yeoh. 'Contesting "Local" Commemoration of the Second World War: the case of the Changi Chapel and Museum in Singapore'. *Australian Geographer* 36.1 (2005): 1-17.

—. 'Reading representations of women's war experiences in the Changi Chapel and Museum, Singapore'. *Geoforum* 36.4 (2005): 465-76.

National Institue of Education. *The Japanese Occupation: An Eve of Conference Free Event; Open Public Forum with Veterans and the Wartime Generation.* Program. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2005.

Nettelbeck, Amanda. ‘Myths of a Nation: History as Narrative Invention in David Malouf's *The Great World*’. Bennett and Haskell 132-141.

Newman, Carolyn, ed. *Legacies of our fathers: WWII prisoners of the Japanese; their sons and daughters tell their stories*. Melbourne: Lothian, 2005.

Ng, Leonard. ‘The Enchanted Island’. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 5.3 (2006). <http://www.qlrs.com/essay.asp?id=524>. 8 August 2008.

‘No Prisoners’. *Four Corners*. ABC, Australia. 11 March 2002.

Phillips, H.E.I. ‘Letter to *The Times* of Friday 10th October [no year] from H. E. I. Phillips of the 18th Infantry Division on the misuse of the 18th Division in the battle for Singapore’. *Children (and Families) of the Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW) Web Site.* <http://www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/armedforces_r_18th_division_times.htm>. 12 May 2008.

Poon, Wena. ‘On the familiar made exotic: The Japanese Occupation comes to vivid life; a review of *Life and Death in Changi* by Thomas Kitching’. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* 2.3 (April 2003). <http://www.qlrs.com/critique.asp?id=310> 9 September 2007.

Proulx, Annie. ‘Brokeback Mountain’. *Close Range: Brokeback Mountain and Other Stories.* 1999 (Published as *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*). London: Harper Perennial-HarperCollins, 2006. 281-318.

‘Remembering *Syonan-to*’. Channel News Asia, Singapore. 10 September 2005.

Romeril, John. *The Floating World.* Sydney: Currency Press, 1975.

Sa'at, Alfian. *Corridor: Twelve Short Stories.* Singapore: Raffles-SNP Editions, 1999.

Sayonara Changi. Dir. Lian Pek. Journey Pictures, 2004.

Schlunke, Katrina. ‘Dumb Places’. *Balayi* 6 (2004): 72-81.

Sebald, W.G. *The Rings of Saturn.* Trans. Michael Hulse. London: The Harvill Press, 1998.

Seymour, Alan. *The One Day of the Year*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962.

Singh, Kirpal, ed. *Poetry*. Singapore: Ethos Books, 1999. Vol. 2 of *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature.* 7 vols. 1998-2008.

Singh, Kirpal, and Wong Yoon Wah, chief eds. *Rhythms: A Singapore Millennial Anthology of Poetry.* Singapore: National Arts Council, 2000.

Tan, Hock Beng. *Asian Resorts.* Singapore: Page One, 2003.

Tsiolkas, Christos. *Dead Europe*. Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage, 2005.

Tumarkin, Maria. *Courage: guts, grit, spine, heart, balls, verve...* Carlton, Vic: Melbourne UP, 2007.

Twomey, Christina. *Australia's Forgotten Prisoners: Civilians Interned by the Japanese in World War Tw*o. Port Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 2007.

—. 'Remembering war and forgetting civilians: the ambiguous position of civilian internees in commemorations of the Pacific war'. Hack and Blackburn 434-444.

Vivian Bullwinkel: An Australian Heroine. Dir. Nicholas Bird and Eleanor Sharpe. Waterbyrd Filmz, 2007.

Wong, Kim Hoh. 'Water under the Bridge'. *Sunday Times,* Singapore, 11 September 2005: L8.

Woods, Claire. 'The Traces Left'. Newman 212-221.

Yeo, Robert. *The Singapore Trilogy.* Singapore: Landmark Books, 2001.

Zable, Arnold. *Cafe Scheherazade*. Melbourne: Text, 2001.

NOTES

[i] Wee and Lee quote from Kuo Pao Kun's 'Foreword', *Images at The Margins: A Collection of Kuo Pao Kun's Plays* (Singapore: Times Books International, 2000) 8.

[ii] Plans and Images of the hotel can be found in Womersley. 152-55.

[iii] Plans and Images of the hotel complex can be found in Womersley. 54-57.

[iv] I shall use the initials HG to reference my novel manuscript, 'Hungry Ghosts', from this point forth.

[v] Stallybrass quotes Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974; New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 73.

[vi] Urry cites Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper, 1964) Page not specified.

[vii] Plans, images and design specifications of Marina Square can be found in Womersley 54-9.

[viii] *A Grief Observed* was originally published under the pseudonym of N.W. Clerk, suggesting Lewis may have intended the work and its protagonist to be treated as fictitious.

[ix] Chang cites the Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry's *Report of the Tourism Task Force* (Singapore: MTI, 1984) 15.

[x] Copeland cites Trevor Hay 'Yellow lady meets black stump: An obscene postmodern heroine in Australia'. *Real Time* 10 (1996): 12.

[xi] Urry cites Bayley in Hewison, R. *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen, 1987) 139.

[xii] I was informed of this by a staff member at Borders Singapore during a visit to the store on September 15, 2005.

[xiii] For example, Harvey writes 'Singapore has become, in...Cherian George's prescient phrase: 'the air-conditioned nation' (24); see also Escobar.

[xiv] George quotes Lee Kuan Yew in the article 'Air-con gets my vote, says SM Lee' from *The Straits Times*. Singapore: January 19 1999. 1.

[xv] Blackburn states Singapore Tourism Promotion Board members Pamelia Lee and Bajintar Singh suggested in an interview that tourists associate Changi Prison with 'unspeakable horrors'. Blackburn, endnote 27.

[xvi] See for example 'Koizumi defies critics to visit War Shrine', *International Herald Tribune Online* 17 October 2005, 1 December 2007< http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/17/asia/web.1017koizumi.php>

[xvii] See for example 'Japanese textbook distorts history, stirs fury', *China Daily Online* 6 April 2005, 12 April 2008 <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/06/content_431575.htm>

[xviii] Lowenthal cites Pinter in Adler, Thomas P. 'Pinter's *Night*: A Stroll down Memory Lane' *Modern Drama* 17 (1974): 462.