

Gay Lynch

Metaphor as New Knowledge

Abstract:

This paper argues that metaphors can be more than evocation and more than rhetoric, that they can signify deep thinking and the creation of new knowledge.

What does this mean for writing, teaching and reviewing? If Aristotle was right and metaphor can't be taught—at least beyond elementary emulation and experimentation—how can creative writing schools encourage the thinking which creates them? Meta-texts vital to creative writing research can be well served by metaphor? The notion of so-called 'pared-down prose' praised and privileged by some book reviewers needs teasing out.

Increasingly, Australian publishers market literary fiction in B format, luxury or up-market hardback books—more common in the United States—and a tribute to the branding power of certain authors. Surely, the authors of these short novels, if anyone, in the interests of economy, must have been tempted to forgo complex figurative language. This paper argues that metaphors in *Sophie and Stanley* (2008) by Kate Jennings, *The Spare Room* (2008) by Helen Garner, *Disquiet* (2008) by Julia Leigh and *The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers* (2005) by Delia Falconer, should be deemed new knowledge.

Biographical note:

Gay Lynch is an Adelaide writer and teacher. In 2004, she completed a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide and, in 2005, commenced a doctorate at Flinders University. Her Ph D research involves an Irish-settler novel, and Irish apocryphal stories. In 2008, she taught Creative Writing, 'Irish and Scottish Literature', and 'Fiction for Young Readers'. *Intent* a young-adult novel was short-listed for the Adelaide Festival of Arts/Wakefield Press Unpublished Manuscript Award in 2002. *Cleanskin*, an adult novel, was published by Wakefield Press in 2006.

Keywords:

Metaphor—creative writing—'pared down prose'.

Metaphor as Meme

Sophie Cunningham's novel, *Bird* (2008), begins with an editor working on a manuscript and a wonderful metaphor for editing: 'it moved so slowly you would think the words were heavy things and my ruler a net: that I was a rescue worker dredging a mud-thickened dam. Ignoring the lotuses that grew around me, their beauty a distraction from a task, I waited instead for the catch and pull of a body...' (Cunningham 2008: 4). In comparing the incomparable—mud and overwriting—Cunningham has captured the stoicism of teachers, reviewers and editors looking for original ideas. But then the supply of complex metaphors in *Bird* dried up. I crawled long distances from one to the next. Perhaps I found eight in the entire novel. Had someone dredged her work? Was her style of writing personal preference or was she influenced by market and genre?

Aristotle taught that 'the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor [literally: to be metaphorical, to *metaphorikon einai*]. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius [*euphuias*], since a good metaphor [literally: to metaphorise well, *eu metapherein*] implies an intuitive perception of the similarity [*to to homoion theorein*] in dissimilars' (*Poetics* 1459 a 3-8) (Ricoeur 1978: 23).

This paper argues that metaphors can be more than evocation and more than rhetoric, that they can signify deep thinking and the creation of new knowledge. Meta-texts vital to creative writing research can be well served by metaphor? If Aristotle was right and metaphor can't be taught—at least beyond elementary modelling and experimentation—how can creative writing schools encourage the thinking which creates them?

Metaphor is, on the whole, safe within the citadel of literary awards — that would make another paper—but many recent literary novels seem flat, their few metaphors simple and curiously dissatisfying: *she smiled; her eyes were green; we're drifting*. The notion of so-called pared-down prose praised and privileged by some book reviewers is gaining favour. How should I test this hypothesis? Why not begin with the most apparently reduced short literary novels?

Increasingly, Australian publishers market literary fiction in B format, luxury or up-market hardback books—more common in the United States—and a tribute to the branding power of certain authors. Small-sized, beribboned, bevel-edged, extravagantly puffed these beautiful artifacts of twenty or thirty thousand words telegraph 'important book' and, indeed, must be coveted by dedicated readers, at ten or fifteen dollars per reading hour. If anyone, the authors of these short novels, in the interests of economy, must have been tempted to forgo complex figurative language.

Before lifting metaphors from four texts selected from this group, let us consider these three questions: metaphor's importance as new knowledge; its place in creative writing schools; and reviewers' attitudes.

Metaphor as New Knowledge

Discourse on metaphor has been going on for centuries. In *The Rule of Metaphor* (1978), Paul Ricoeur examines metaphor in great detail in relation to rhetoric, poetics, logical grammar, literary criticism, semantics and semiotics, ontology and philosophy. This paper is not about those things, nor is it a history of metaphor. My interest lies with metaphor's literary rather than literal purpose, its power to illuminate rather than simply evoke.

According to Terry Hawkes, the word metaphor comes from the Greek word *metaphora* derived from *meta*, meaning 'over', and *pherein*, 'to carry' (Hawkes 1972: 1). I. A. Richards coined the terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle', the former being the subject of the writing, the latter being the word it transfers into (Richards 1936). Ricoeur borrows from Aristotle: *phora*, change, *epiphora*, a kind of displacement (1978: 17). Suffice to say metaphors involve the purposeful shifting of meaning from one word to another which occurs in context, within sentences rather than single words. They create new meaning. Metaphors can not be found in dictionaries.

Metaphors, similes, synecdoche and metonymy are commonly described as tropes, or figures of speech. Simile is well accepted as an expansive, more explicit, form of metaphor: 'Metaphor is the more powerful: the direct attribution causes surprise, whereas simile dissipates this surprise' argues Ricoeur (1978: 47). He believes in 'metaphor's superiority over simile, that it is more elegant' but that it is more than this: a new idea, new knowledge is produced (Ricoeur 1976: 26). This meaning creates a useful nexus with creative writing ideas about praxis as research. By creating a relationship between previously unconnected ideas and images, metaphor creates meaning. Readers bring their own cultural understandings to this new material, which is complex but unstable.

Amongst Aristotle's "virtues" of *lexus*, Ricoeur suggests, are several that directly apply to metaphor: 'clarity', 'not stylistically frigid', 'facility', 'appropriateness', 'urbane style' and "instructive" value ('the pleasure of understanding that follows surprise') (Ricoeur 1978: 32-4, 173). Is not the last virtue—instruction—the most exciting and difficult to produce. New ideas materialise in metaphor. "Ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh" (Aristotle cited in Ricoeur 1978: 33-4). Universities should value original metaphors as new knowledge. What implications arise from this idea for teachers of creative writing?

Creative Writing Schools

Metaphor's role in the delivery of ideas, particularly via meta-fiction, surely cannot be ignored by creative writing classes. Metaphor is the fiction writer's attempt to create a truthful unity between reality and description. It can provide another strategy for 'show, don't tell', organizing and expanding the reader's understanding, offering language in a state of flux, offering meaning on a number of levels. Figurative writing uses 'mood', playing with language to suggest wholly intelligible and coherent secondary solutions to questions raised in creative writing.

Reviewing pieces in a 2007 university anthology, Tricia Barton comments that ‘the vast majority...while certainly never unreadable, ultimately suffers from the worst of afflictions: a paucity of ideas’ (Barton 2007: 63). Does she consider metaphors ideas?

Ricoeur argues that the ‘metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the *heuristic* power wielded by *fiction*’ (Ricoeur 1978: 6). He saw the invention of metaphor as a talent for thinking (1978: 80). As sites of knowledge, universities should consider newly created metaphors, as well as the analysis of old ones, core business. How much emphasis should be placed on experiential research and how much on understanding literary antecedents and pedagogy has recently been the subject of debate between creative writing academics, Paul Dawson and Camilla Nelson (Dawson, 2008; Nelson, 2008).

Metaphors demonstrate how robust language can be, how it continues to innovate and renovate: yesterday’s new metaphor becomes today’s cliché. Perhaps creative writing workshops *should* continue to edit out superfluous dialogue attributions, adjectives and adverbs—now passé—and clichéd metaphors. But a case can always be made for metaphors in dialogue reflecting and satirising complex and diverse Australian voices. Working with and against conventions of genre-fiction does not preclude fresh metaphors and original ideas.

Nam Le, most recently a member of the Iowa Creative Writing community, parodies creative writing schools’ ideas about metaphor, in the first story of his anthology, *The Boat* (2008) by employing a meta-fictive conversation between an ‘ethnic creative writer’ and his friend. One remarks: “It’s full of description...”, and “as long as there’s an interesting image or metaphor once in every *this* much text...” He held out his thumb and forefinger to indicate half a page...(Le 2008: 8, 9). Does he imply that postgraduate creative writers see metaphors as anachronisms, offered only as tokens to their teachers; that their teachers don’t have time to develop their work shoppers’ metaphorising skills; or have time to edit them out?

His character makes wry comment that ‘you can’t tell if the language is spare because the author intended it that way, or because he didn’t have the vocab’ (Le 2008: 8). Does Le suggest that creative writing postgraduates don’t have ‘the vocab’ because they haven’t read widely enough? Is rationing metaphors a measure of candidates’ determination to systematise creative writing products for outcome based knowledge production? Of course, we must not make the mistake of confusing Le’s character with him for, every half page or not, he is a master-metaphoriser.

Perhaps his character reflects market influence on new writers. Can the metaphors of contemporary creative writers act in harmony if they carry too much responsibility—aesthetics, information and ideas? What do Australian reviewers have to say about metaphor?

Reviewer Preference

It is possible to read reviews which make no reference to language at all (Pierce 2008: 29). But an author’s literary style usually merits a throw away last line, a glancing

summation in the final paragraph. And reviewers often cite virtuoso similes and metaphors, for example, ‘Condon is equally deft with similes’ (Pierce 2008: 24). They pay attention to extended metaphors, the conceits of contemporary novels—‘the lake and the submerged town become metaphors for all that is lost but forever retained in the psyches of the characters’—especially those linked with title (Hill 2007: 45). But, warns Tim Howard while praising metaphors in Louis Nowra’s *Ice*, ‘a carefully spun web of affinities might intrigue at first, but how easily it can degenerate into laboured contrivance...the conceit comes to mean everything, therefore it means nothing’ (Howard 2008: 14). It is my conjecture that reviews focus on the plot and character of novels, much more than on the poetics of their writing.

A hundred examples could be offered of reviewers praising economical prose—‘pared down’ and ‘pared back’ have become clichés. Writer-broadcaster, Susan Mitchell praises Tim Winton, seeing the clarity and precision of his writing as peculiarly Australian: ‘the language is strong, muscular, pared down... our language is simple, spare, lean, tough but that does not mean it is not poetic’ (Elford Lecture 2008). It is interesting to note that a Ph D report written by Nicholas Jose cites a novel’s ‘pared down’ style as a quality of excellence (Nelson 2008).

Jason Steger paraphrases publisher, Hilary McPhee: ‘Garner has become an impeccable stylist whose writing is so spare and shapely it leaves room for profundities to surface of their own accord; (Steger 2008: 24); Richard Flanagan ‘was very much trying to write a much cleaner, sparer prose ... [*The Unknown Terrorist* (2007) was admittedly, a thriller] I wanted it to be sold out of the discount department stores’ (Steger 2008: 26); Michael Williams wrote about Flanagan’s *Wanting* (2008): ‘the tale is more pared back than his early novels’ (2008: 23). Christos Tsiolkas’s *The Slap* (2008), Louise Swinn’s review claims, succeeds ‘by painting an Australia we can recognize in language so good you don’t notice it...’ (2008: 23). James Ley’s review argues that ‘you will search long and hard for a finely tuned phrase or even a metaphor in his writing...’ (2008: 10).

Peter Rose, editor of the *Australian Book Review (ABR)* suggests that there is an attitudinal trend towards spare writing but, he reminds me, this doesn’t directly translate to an absence of metaphor (Rose 2008). Then, as if switching from left to right brain, he praises the brilliant complexity of novels by Marcel Proust and Henry James, which contain page-long sentences and complex metaphoric ideas.

There is nothing new about enthusiasm for muscular prose: Ernest Hemingway favoured simple transparent writing: ‘The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The sharks are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know’ (Hemingway 1952). Perhaps, ‘pared-down’ simply denotes the removal of linguistic excess, until only the merest of metaphors remain. In any event, ‘pared down’ implies peeling away by self-editing or by teachers, peers and market professionals.

Reviewers have always criticised author’s metaphorical *excess*—trying too hard, over-polishing, straining credibility, inconsistency, and the clashing of images and ideas. ‘This is what Nabokov never comprehended about Dostoevsky’s often

ungainly style — how those clumsy, often graceless sentences can gather rhetorical force and fictional conviction that outweigh perfect metaphors’ argues reviewer Adam Rivett (reviewing Mireille Juchau in 2008: 19). Juchau’s novel is ‘full of detachable gems, but fails to gather its effects as it moves along’ he says, a criticism sometimes made of novels by creative writing students (Rivett 2008: 19).

Metaphors may be of public interest but, excess rather than absence tends to be remarked upon. Terri Hawkes lists seventeenth and eighteenth century complaints about the use of metaphor, including his citation for Samuel Parker who, in 1670, ‘advocated an Act of Parliament forbidding the use of “fulsome and luscious” metaphors (Hawkes 1972: 31).

Florid style is more maligned than ever by critics and reviewers. Brian McFarlane favourably reviews Malcolm Knox’s novel *Jamaica* (2007) but makes fun of some of its figurative language: ‘let Knox near a sunset or dawn and the style founders drunkenly’ (*ABR* 2007: 24). While Knox’s three or four sunsets may be flashy, his novel shows no shortage of surprising metaphors. ‘The narrative and pacing suffers from this surfeit of pretty words...’ chastises reviewer Thuy On, about academic, Sophie Gee’s novel, *The Scandal of the Season* (On 2007: 49)

Geordie Williamson, reviewing *Deception* (October 2008), a novel by Melbourne academic and writer, Michael Meehan, insists that ‘what divides a brilliant performance from a magisterial one is nerve enough to embrace simplicity’ and concludes that Meehan’s ‘climax is lost in a swirling cloud of purple prose’ (Williamson 2008: 11). Has ‘lack’ become a virtue, or is the presence and absence of metaphor simply a question of fashion and style?

B Format, Luxury or, Up-Market Hardback Books

While an argument about ‘pared-down writing’ and metaphors creating new knowledge might be better served by looking at a range of texts, this paper’s selection of novellas by four writers who know their craft, may provide a beginning for a longer discussion. Writer-reviewer, Kerryn Goldsworthy, argues that ‘the novella is a risky form, in some ways even more exposed than the short story, where every word likewise counts...’ (2008 *ABR*: 27).

Let us move on to the novels of: *The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers* (2005) by Delia Falconer; *The Spare Room* (2008) by Helen Garner; *Sophie and Stanley* (2008) by Kate Jennings; and *Disquiet* (2008) by Julia Leigh.

Julia Leigh: *Disquiet* (2008)

Disquiet divided the critics. The success of Leigh’s first novel, *The Hunter* (1999), which resulted in a Rolex mentorship with Tony Morrison, augmented excitement about *this* novel.

‘This is a book,’ said reviewer, Sophie Gee, ‘that carries no fat at all... the book must work through the power of spare, precise prose’ (Gee 2008: 25).

Stella Clarke, however, did not admire Leigh's 'narrative parsimony'. She uses metaphor and simile to describe it: 'It is clipped to within an inch of its life, like the topiary in the chateau grounds', and she concludes '*Disquiet* may come across for you as stylish, poised or minimalist, but for me it simply does not hold together' (Clarke 2008: 11). Some of her criticisms relate to emotional terrain. The book is narrated at a distance, not quite direct camera technique, employing many simple metaphors to convey the gothic undertones, for example, 'used a fingernail to worry off a chip of the craquelure', 'marooned with her doll on her own giant bed', 'took her mother's left hand, ferrying it over to the animal, a limp offering', 'a long dark scratch against the sky turned to cloudbank', and 'the boy raked a pattern through the dust' (Leigh 2008: 9, 10, 114, 51, 53).

I count at least half a dozen similes, throughout the book, including, 'the girl pulled at her hair and then began to batter her shoulders like a Swiss masseuse' and 'he stayed slumped in his chair as if his limbs had separated from his torso' (Leigh 2008: 79, 84). The cliché he "chased skirt" is quoted in conversation. 'The boy' makes a jarring pun: "Grandmother, can I stroke your pussy?" (Leigh 2008: 50). Leigh's similes offer stylistic flourishes, her metaphors sharp moments of recognition in an otherwise diffident narration: 'though she scrabbled and pawed she wore on her face a small serene smile' (Leigh 2008: 109).

Most of the language is plain: 'The flowers, mostly bright orange and purple birds-of-paradise, were garish and Ida accepted them without comment. One of the twins said, "How pretty"' (Leigh 2008: 63). Leigh uses metaphor to construct her gothic funeral scene: 'ancient men and women; the women were all in hats and some wore veils of black lace, black lace or rotten leaves. These were the blood relatives, the revolution refuseniks, death's attendants' (Leigh 2008:72).

On calculation, the novella can be no more than 22,000 words. I would like to know Leigh's methodology: did she 'pare back' her narrative, until only the most precise of metaphors remained?

Does she intend her final sentence to retrospectively act as extended metaphor? 'But no mountain is a boy and lake and knowing this – knowing that mountain is rock and lake is water, that even rock sheds fine grains and water shapeshifts, knowing it impossible to be rock and water, and knowing the disappointment she had visited upon herself—she made a wish for him. *Hold, hold*' (Leigh 2008: 121). Throughout the narrative I waited for the main protagonist to abandon her children and commit suicide, as Leigh foreshadows; her *holding* an anticlimax; after the stillborn baby's burial. The 'holding' metaphor must be new knowledge, allowing the reader to reenter the puzzling narrative.

I embarked on Leigh's literary quest, seeking ideas bound up in metaphor. I felt at home in the chateau but in the end I didn't know 'the woman' or understand her reconciliation with her past. Would more complex metaphoric language have made things clearer, or does Leigh's 'pared down prose' *set out* on purpose to puzzle? *Disquiet*'s new knowledge is intriguing but difficult to grasp.

Kate Jennings: *Stanley and Sophie*

Jennings' warm and boisterous narrative reminds me of the dogs which are its subject. She uses a mix of well-worn and new-hewn language as colourful and eclectic as that used by the people of New York, the city in which she sets her memoir.

The first burst of metaphor is original and thought-provoking: 'our lives were a rhubarb of noisy emotion: a devils' chorus of fear, blating rage, birring anxiety, tweedling incredulity, roudy sorrow' (Jennings 2008:5); has she invented new words? Jennings makes connections because she thinks deeply; she pays attention and writes with generosity. 'Loving and caring' traits in terriers come 'with more subparagraphs and provisional clauses than a government contract'; she makes similar the dissimilar (Jennings 2008: 22).

Clichéd metaphors litter the text: 'bleeding-heart liberals'; 'attitude...in spades'; 'pissing into the wind'; 'shoot the breeze, chew the fat'; 'sleeve or teacup dogs...handbags with a heartbeat'; "dog-tired", "dog-legged", "to lie doggo" and so on (Jennings 2008: 8, 13, 15, 181, 44). Perhaps she wanted to depict the free-wheeling consciousness of a narrator at ease with metaphorical language, borrowed and made up?

She uses dogs to introduce sly meta-narrative: 'their stone honesty forces us to cut the postmodern nonsense...Meta-anything bores them. As for signifiers, a rawhide bone is a rawhide bone' (Jennings 2008: 42). Metaphor links daily life with global politics in new ways. As an Australian in New York, she re-conceptualises the United States we learn about from CNN. Jennings treatment of 'the black dog' of depression brings new insight: 'that lounging, implacable, thick-limbed, yellow-eyed beast. Loathsome cur...' and adds '[T]o our everlasting shame, dogs were used to intimidate prisoners at Abu Ghraib' (Jennings 2008: 46-7). Metaphor becomes polemic: 'the same scummy soup of geopolitical and mercantile imperatives is again boiling over, giving off a sulfurous stink, leaving us knee-deep in muck'; 'Chinese brides in ratty rented satin, a seemingly exhaustible supply, like seeding dandelions...'; 'No matter the event, it was sung. America keeping its pecker up' (Jennings 2008: 53- 54, 60).

Dexterous similes abound: an 'Italian expatriate who, shrunk by his years in the tropics, looked like a dessicated faun' (Jennings 2008:111).

Memoir, not fiction, *Stanley and Sophie's* metaphors depict Jennings' pain: 'I marvel at the skeins of friendship formed around dogs' (Jennings 2008:155, 187). Her similes allude intertextually to *Moral Hazard*, her earlier memoir in which she deals with her husband's dementia and her perceived betrayal of him in placing him in care: 'when he walked into the lobby of the home and realized where he was and what was happening, he howled his betrayal, his disbelieving hurt, just like Stanley in the park' (Jennings 2008: 192). In this book she gives up her *dogs*. 'And I can make as much or as little of the fishhooks in my heart as I'm inclined' (Jennings 2008: 192). Metaphors underline the bald truths Jennings shares with us, making us — struggling humans — feel less alone.

Delia Falconer: *The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers* (2005)

An Australia Council grant enabled Falconer to write this twenty-something thousand-word book. Apparent slow production of the ensuing work prompted some critics to calculate its words per dollar. Not me; I held each exquisitely balanced sentence up to the light and marvelled at its beauty.

Inventive metaphors engage me from the beginning: her evocation of the grit and character of the south surpasses mere description: ‘the fronts of the houses here are blank, the real life centred around the muscle of the water’ (2005: 2). Metaphors capture the inner life of her main protagonist, truths about his character: ‘His life a set of dark rooms which he moves through’; ‘I have never had the grease to be a hero: the spring in the walk, the chest that moves beneath the weight of medals not yet won. I have always moved like this, the invisible dog snapping at my heels’ (2005: 5, 29). This is not a book to be hurried through.

Oscillating between sound and language, Falconer’s figurative language is visceral: ‘a hint of phlegm that reminds him of the floors of bars so rank with throat oysters...’; ‘inside the ice house again his heart beats slowly like a reptile’s’; ‘warm animal reflux hanging on for hours within the churned up air’ (2005: 6, 47, 74). And the narrative shocks as it enlightens: ‘Ambrose the Bilk stamped the woman’s pelvis. The bone broke with a low, sudden squeak’; ‘nature is a slut’ (2005: 101, 20). Even Falconer’s similes are economic and sharply realised: ‘she folds his hands together and unshucks his penis like a mollusc, wipes it briefly with the cloth’ (2005: 137).

Falconer’s meta-text is playful, clever: ‘I am a swiver for the sonnet, a dibbler for a ditty, a biter for a ballad ... Oh I’m a moaner for a metaphor,’ says Handsome Jack (2005: 24). In a previous life, Falconer worked as a cultural theorist, and this is evident in her narrative: ‘You will see how we carried the idea of the Indians within us always,’ narrates Handsome Jack. (2005: 78). And later, Star-Gazer muses, ‘out on the plains we were, for the time those wars lasted, linked by our grim geography of fire beds and bullets, in a terrible third nation of our own’ (2005: 121).

Falconer’s metaphorical language provides new perspectives on the place of ordinary soldiers in the grand sweep of large events — something Sir Walter Scott would approve of — about who has the right to ‘write’ history.

Helen Garner: *The Spare Room* (2008)

Spare or pared-down, at roughly 35,000 words, Garner’s book must be close to a novella. Helen, the book’s narrator, invites her dying friend to stay in her ‘spare room’, which works as the book’s pervading conceit. Garner uses this especially prepared room to create new knowledge about being good, friendship and reciprocity, and mortality: the main themes of her meta-narrative.

Spare rooms and spare prose suggest reduction and renovation; they compel further metaphorising. Consider Hilary McPhee’s cited mix, used to describe Garner’s contributions to knowledge about dying:

What they [critics] miss is the transforming power of her imagination. She takes things that ‘happen’ and transforms, reshapes, positions them so the light falls at an angle which pares them to the bone. And ‘Helen’ is stripped bare, of course. Maybe that’s what troubles them. She doesn’t let herself off the hook. The moral conundrums she’s trying to comprehend are hers and ours. Self-doubt is perhaps the key (McPhee in Steger 2008: 24).

McPhee’s falling light, transformations, positions, bones, hooks, and keys—Steger follows this with membranes, wafers and kernels—should reassure us that publishers and reviewers have not deserted metaphor! All writers use metaphors in their search for the essentials.

Garner uses metaphor to convey the managed process of living and dying, beginning with clean linen, delicious meals, a well run house, and ending with ‘it was the end of my watch and I handed her over’ (Garner 2008: 195). In the early pages, a crashing mirror foreshadows mood change and prescient thoughts. Metaphors depicting household and emotional management and control must resonate for readers juggling relationships, and domestic and paid work.

She uses energetic metaphors like ‘bashing’, ‘plunge’, ‘surging’, ‘banged’, and ‘racketed’, ‘tramped’ and ‘stumped’ (Garner 2008: 42, 49, 52, 53). Marvellous similes convey manner and mood, action and character: ‘Dr Tuckey listened with flowing gestures of comfort and sympathy, like an old lady hovering over the tea things’ and ‘she sat at the tiller, erect and handsome as a duchess’ (Garner 2008: 38, 62). Garner made me think, how true; how vivid.

But her metaphors do more than evoke images, they transport powerful ideas: ‘the room within was painted a strange yellow, the color of controlled panic’ (Garner 2008: 28). They convey the horror of ordinary people suffering extraordinary life events. Her descriptions [mostly similes] of Helen’s friend seem pitiless, informing the character of the narrator and the dying woman: ‘her neck straining as if under a heavy load’; ‘her head hung forward, as if a tiny fascinating scene were being enacted on her lap’ and ‘few garments...grubby and neglected, full of holes, like the possessions of a refugee’, (Garner 2008: 12, 13, 14). Garner has not held back.

The friend is swept along by foolish courage and false hope: ‘she bathed the man in her patrician smile’ (Garner 2008:24). Helen tries to care for her: ‘I swaddled her. I lay behind her spoonwise...shudders like electric shocks kept running down her body’ (Garner 2008:15). Metaphors elide the womens’ terror.

Helen struggles to remain sympathetic, in control: ‘my mind veered about, seeking something to grip’; ‘Death was in my house. Its rules pushed new life away with terrible force’, overwhelmed by righteous anger and repulsed by her friend’s absurd hope (Garner 2008: 34, 80). Garner uses metonyms for palliative care: “‘It’s not the angel of death,” I said. “It’s just some girls in a car”” (Garner 2008: 79). Garner’s Helen lets Doctor Tuckey have it, employing satire to underline her friend’s frailty: his belly ‘did not appear to be meaningfully attached to his frame. It swayed half a beat behind his movements; it trembled, it hung, a shapeless cargo of meat’ (Garner 2008: 37). He has, she implies, fattened on cancer’s profits, while his patients waste

away. And he patronises his patient with metaphors for illness: ‘You know how an octopus can break a big rock with its tentacles? Well that’s what a cancer cell’s like’ (Garner 2008: 34).

The Spare Room is packed to the ceiling with figurative language: more than enough to satisfy, some clichéd—‘drop all weapons and face death’ and “they would have made mincemeat of you”(Garner 2008: 46, 48). Wielding metaphor like mallet *and* scalpel, Garner keeps us from the patient’s consciousness, but uncomfortably close to Helen’s. She creates new knowledge: about self, and doubt and conviction.

Conclusion

I began by suggesting that bringing together disparate ideas in metaphor can signify new knowledge. If there is a market trend away from metaphor—I concede this needs more empirical research—then university creative writing pedagogy should resist it. Rereading these books settled my feelings that even when described as spare, the prose in these slim, small books was rich in metaphor. Metaphors effectively conveyed the memes of these narratives, in grand and humble, and uncomfortable and moving ways. In the case of Julia Leigh’s book some ‘disquiet’ remains.

Garner, Falconer, Leigh and Jennings offer new knowledge about twenty-first-century ‘us’, their meta-texts enlivened by rich and inventive metaphors that clarify our thinking. They emulate Aristotle’s metaphoric ‘virtues’—warmth, facility, appropriateness and urbanity. Cicero might find their imagery vivid.

Why did they create short texts? Perhaps they partly wrote these novels for themselves and publishers piggybacked them to the cash-register. Short fiction or novellas by esteemed literary figures have cache; Amanda Lohrey’s *Vertigo* (2008), a pastoral novella, weighs in at 26,000 words. ‘I’m having a love affair with short forms,’ she says, and ‘too much information and description obscures that [...art is about capturing and exploring the mystery of being]’ (Sullivan 2008: 25) *Indignation*, Phillip Roth’s latest novel is described as a ‘slim new novel’ and ‘an abbreviated tale’; perhaps this trend is global (Allington 2008: 10).

We will never run out of metaphors, inevitably, each new creation becomes relegated through mimesis to cliché. ‘There are probably no words so incomparable that some poet could not build a bridge between them. Attributions that appear to be absurd can make sense in an unexpected context,’ argues Ricoeur (1978: 95).

If my argument in this paper resembles ‘motherhood is good’, it is, nevertheless, worth restating. Using original metaphor—extended and simple—is essential to creative writing praxis and should, in universities, be deemed new knowledge.

List of works cited

Allington, Patrick., 2008. ‘Look Back in Anger’, *The Advertiser*, 11 October 2008.

Aristotle. *Rhetorique* Paris, Editions des Belles Lettres 1932, 5th edn. 1969, cited in Paul Ricoeur (1978). *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the*

- Creation of Meaning in Language*. London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan, trans., Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ. (Aristotle *Poetics* 1459 a 3-8; see also *Rhetoric* 1412 a 10).
- Barton, Tricia., 2007. *UTS Writers' Anthology: What You Do and Don't Want*. In *ABR*, No. 296, November 2007.
- Bogle., Deborah., 2008. 'Stanley and Sophie', review in *Advertiser Review* 5 Jul.
- Cicero., 1942. *De Oratore*. Trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (1942), 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library, London.
- Clarke, Stella., 2008. 'Ill at Ease in a Gothic Pile', review in *Weekend Australian Review*, 12-13 Apr.
- Cunningham, Sophie., 2008. *Bird*. Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing.
- Dawson, Paul., 2008. 'Creative Writing and Postmodern Interdisciplinarity', *Text* 12.1, www.textjournal.com.au/April08/dawson.htm
- Falconer, Delia., 2005. *The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan.
- Garner, Helen., 2008. *The Spare Room*. Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing.
- Gee, Sophie., 2008. 'The Shivers in Slivers', review in *The Age*, A2, 12 Apr.
- Hawkes, Terry., 1972. *Metaphor*. London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972.
- Hunt, Kathy., 2007. 'Poor Excuse for Art', review in *Weekend Australian*, Review, 16-17 June.
- Hemingway, Ernest., 1952, letter, Sept. 13, 1952, to the critic Bernard Berenson in *Selected Letters*, ed. Carlos Baker (1981) or, <http://www.enotes.com/famous-quotes/author/ernest-hemingway>. www.jfklibrary.org/NR/rdonlyres/E184947B-D828-4B79-8E60-48BD68A21B04/19103/hemingwayslibrary.pdf Accessed 14 November 2008.
- Howard, Tim., 2008. 'Iceman'ia', review of Louis Nowra, *Ice*, in *ABR*, 306 (November).
- Jennings, Kate., 2008. *Stanley and Sophie*. North Sydney: Knop, Random House.
- Jose, Nicholas., 2008. Ph D report, cited in conference paper, Camilla Nelson. 'A Practical Model for the Recognition of Work as Research, 'Creativity and Uncertainty', 28th November.
- Knox, Malcolm., 2006. 'Fiction as Reality Check,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January.
- Nam, Le., 2008. *The Boat*. Camberwell, Victoria: Hamish Hamilton, Penguin Books.
- Leigh, Julia., 2008. *Disquiet*. Hamish Hamilton: Penguin Books.
- Ley, James., 2008. 'A Furious Moral'ist', review of Christos Tsiolkas *The Slap* in *ABR*, 306 (November).
- Lohrey, Amanda., 2008. Images, Lorraine Biggs. *Vertigo: a Pastoral*. Melbourne, Victoria, Black Inc.

- McFarlane, Brian., 2007. 'Bad Bonding', review of Malcolm Knox, *Jamaica* in *ABR*, 295 (October).
- McPhee, Hilary., 2008, cited in Jason Steger, 'Its Fiction and That's a Fact', A2, *The Age*, 29 March 2008: 24-5.
- Mitchell, Susan., 2008. 'The Essential Australian Voice', Elford Lecture, Flinders University, 23 October.
- Nelson, Camilla., 2008. Camilla Nelson, 'Research Through Practice: a Reply to Paul Dawson', *TEXT* 12.2, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/October08/nelson.htm>.
- On, Thuy., 2007. 'Fluff and Faux Pas: Sophie Gee: *The Scandal of the Season*', *ABR*, June 2007.
- Pierce, Peter., 2008. 'Abridgment of Hope', review of Julienne van Loon's *Beneath the Bloodwood Tree* in *ABR*, 302, June.
- Pierce, Peter., 2008. 'Dark Path: Matthew Condon: *The Trout Opera*', *ABR*, December 2007 — January 2008.
- Marcel Proust., 1955-6. *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, III: 879, 139. Paris: Gallimard, cited in Gerard Genette (1982) *Figures of Discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press. Trans., Alan Sheridan, intro., Marie-Rose Logan, p. 204.
- Ricoeur, Paul., 1978. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan, trans., Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ.
- Richards, I. A., 1936. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford.
- Rivett, Adam., 2008. 'The Unthinkable', review of Mireille Juchau, 's *Burning In* in *ABR*, 298 (February).
- Rose, Peter., 2008. *ABR* office conversation, Flinders University, 14 October.
- Roth, Phillip., 2008. *Indignation*. Sydney, Random House Australia.
- Swinn, Louise., 2008. 'Eerie Knowing', review of Nam Le's *The Boat*, in *ABR*, 303 (Jul. –Aug.).
- Steger, Jason., 2008. 'It's Fiction and That's a Fact', A2, *The Age*, 29 March: 24-5.
- Steger, Jason., 2008. 'Flanagan's Book of Desire', A2, *The Age*, 1 November: 26.
- Sullivan Jane., 2008. 'The Fire of Fiction', A2, *The Age*, 15 November: 24.
- Swinn, Louise., 2008. 'The Hand That Wrecked the Barbie', A2, *The Age*, 8 November: 23.
- Walker, Shirly., 2007. 'Agamemnon's Edict: Alex Miller: *Landscape of Farewell*', *ABR*, No 296 (Nov.).
- Williams, Michael., 2008. 'Hard Times and Bleak Houses', A2, *The Age*, 15 November: 23.
- Williamson, Geordie., 2008. 'Crucible for Happenings', review of Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, in *ABR*, 306 (November).