

Deakin University

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Carillon

Abstract:

This creative presentation will respond to the words of Martin Edmond:

The act of writing something down is thus an opportunity to make something more – more particular, more complete, more expansive, more real – than whatever its basis in experience might have been. Writing is not a transcription of some pre-existent reality.

On 26 April 1970, the British government presented the National Carillon to the Australian people. The Carillon sits on Aspen Island, a manufactured island within a manufactured lake, beneath which sleeps the land of the Nggunawal people. When within 100 metres, the fifty-five bells of the great organ-machine sound a recognisable metal chorus. When heard from greater distances, however, the concrete and brass sing only distortion and discordance.

This creative presentation involves a re-telling of the song of the Carillon – a story of the drowning sounds that feel their way through cold water looking for small and quiet places in which to breathe and become.

My creative practice is influenced by Surrealist writing techniques – unleashing the marvellous. The Surrealists paid homage to the voice of the unconscious which sings silently beneath automatic pictures and prose, the ghost of desire occupying a space where the real and unreal are one.

Biographical note:

Rina Bruinsma is completing a PhD in Creative Writing at Deakin University. Rina's research and accompanying creative work considers the marvellous over time, reaching for an understanding of contemporary Surrealist poetics against dominant theoretical paradigms of the unconscious.

Keywords:

Unconscious – automatism – creative writing – short story – surrealism

It begins with no beginning.

*Instead, it reaches in all directions at all times –
no centre, no inside, no outside.*

We are, and we become, part of it – again and yet again.

26 April 2016

The girl above the water – who was a young woman most of the time – circled the Carillon.

She was white-haired, white-skinned and white-eyed. There was something translucent about her. When you looked at her, you couldn't quite focus. It was only when you looked to the side of her that the outline of her became clear.

Her name: *Toonin*.

For four days, she had walked the circumference of the lake, gliding over the footbridge to the island – an artificial island in an artificial lake.

Carillon. She considered the bell-organ's pale and angular arms. They held aloft the great organ-machine and its fifty five bells.

Plains that yearn to be planes.

She smiled.

Aeroplane arms reaching up to the sky.

Beneath the surface, waterlogged dark fingertips touched gently the sleeping things at the bottom of the lake.

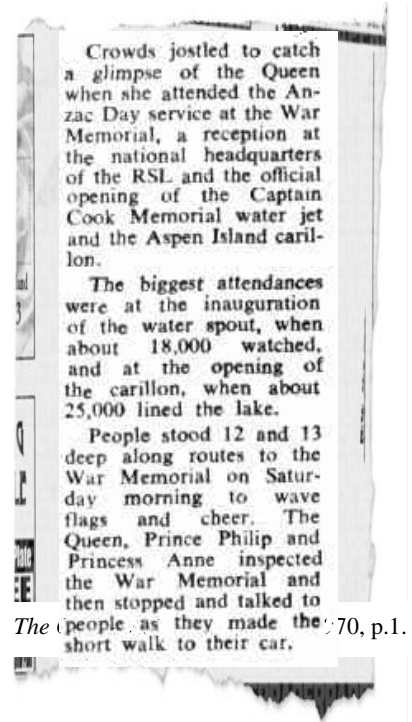
The water-arms of Aunty Agnes were reaching out. They covered the underwater ground, at all times and in all directions.

*The sleeping things heard Aunty singing softly, 'Nangi, nangi.'*¹

The beneath-the-water sounds moved against objects and felt them, understood their dimensions.

Above the water, Toonin considered the breath of winter-coming; it clung to the Carillon's white cement. Its damp vapour breathed softly on and around tower's base. She mouthed words without sound. A small song...

Sometimes the inside of me is a depth in which to swim, or drown – but in drowning not to die, just to sink without breathing in the watery slowness of the deep.



The inside of me is a place where I am not required to breathe and, in not breathing, I may simply observe, and wonder.

When there is no breath, the world is still and quiet. There is no demand to inhale, exhale. That relentless pump that can never stop is allowed to stop.

Toonin rested her cheek against one the Carillon's long humerus bones for a few cold moments. She looked along the plain of this tower, which pointed to (yearned for!) the sky beyond.

Carillon, you reach, but can never dislodge yourself from this place. The island is your shoulder. Your arms reach up and keep this island from sinking.

Toonin's silent contemplation of the Carillon was shared by another.

A man – who was an ancient man most of the time – walked the island. It was a place for him to remember, and a place for him to forget.

Gerald Hocroft, carillonist.

His wife had passed away the previous year. He mouthed words without sound. A small song...

The 'her' was there. And then, it wasn't. And nobody on earth can tell me where it went.

I hypothesise that she is energy. A 'something'. A 'consciousness'.

The amount of energy in the universe is constant. So maybe, the 'her' has been redistributed, unthinking, across life and the planet.

Or maybe, the 'her' is still thinking but without an interpretative brain or receptor. And so she wanders.

Or maybe the 'her' fell through a black hole into a multiverse beyond – compressed without limit against the heart of a star. Joined forever to a spinning sphere of carbon. Infinite density. A single point. Waiting for the time when the rules of this system will no longer apply. And she will find me again...

The girl of white-ness interrupted these thoughts. Gerald's greying tongue formed greying words: 'Are you alright, my dear?'

Well-worn words before they were spoken. Drying words, with dust between them.

The girl, in contrast, was frail translucence.

She returned to him a vaporous smile – 'I've lost someone,' she said.

He couldn't quite focus. She moved slowly. She looked into his eyes. White pupils. He couldn't quite focus. She seemed to look toward the water. The eyes that had no colour reflected the grey-ness and brown-ness of the lake.

The spirit fingers beneath the water found.

Aunty Agnes reached through the elderly teeth that joined the two halves of a small suitcase together. Within the case was a grey-ness that was not weed or stone. Aunty lingered around this new thing, considering its dimensions.

She felt and she saw.

In the out-of-water world, the girl and the man noticed Aunty's ripples on the surface of the water. The girl heard – without quite hearing – Aunty's gasp, it filled the space around Toonin's head and feet. Toonin turned her head ever so slightly with her ear bending ground-ward.

There was a sound that was not voiced, but heard: 'Gulman!'²

She turned to the bell-musician: 'Did you hear that?'

He couldn't quite focus. He couldn't quite hear the words.

Aunty's hands fanned the water around her find – ever so gently. She did not want to wake this thing. So her fingers combed themselves around it, they covered it and surrounded it – a water-coat, cradling and rocking.

Her fingers dismissed the seething, swimming plankton that came to see this new thing. The plankton bloomed and waved, trembling their Flimmer Hairs to shift themselves, in obedience, away.

Gerald shook his head, no. I did not hear.

He repeated, 'Are you alright, my dear? Can I help you?'

'Thank you, no.'

Did her mouth move? Gerald could not quite see her lips.

'Alright then,' he said. He continued his wandering, and he wondered.

As he walked his hands practiced the order of today's song – hammering gently, but blindly, the bells within his mind. His mind heard them. His ears were not needed.

And so, he rehearsed.

Deciduous families gathered around the island's deciduous trees. The island sighed beneath the weight of their expectations. The Carillon's foundation stone, inscribed with a Governor-General's name, held its dermis high – willing to be read, to be seen.

When the time was right, Gerald climbed the stairs of the tower to sit himself at the clavier. Hands above the wooden batons, feet resting gently on its pedals, ready to bring forward the bell-chamber's metal chorus.

He closed his eyes. He could see the bronze octaves, sepia reaching toward gold. He could see the first A as it moved out from the bell's dome. He could see the Grisaille hover out over the lake and spread – audible ink drawing its sound across the sky.

One hand to one baton, a cable and wire, an iron clapper against a single bell. A single note, a brass voice.

The A was clear within three hundred metres of his hand.

A second bell.

The hue intensified.

The sound of the first overcome by the second and the third, but never quite fading until the fifth – a residual discordance.

The many.

The Sepia now deep and darkening.

Numerous. Legion.

Beyond three hundred metres the bell-sound lost its way. It dissipated. It fell and floated with free abandon forgetting its intended score.

And beneath the lake, each note became a drowning sound feeling its way through the cold, looking for small and quiet places in which to breathe and become.

*Aunty tried to keep the sound from her new treasure. She waved it away.
She sang her own soft lullaby. She called on Budjabulya.³ She was ginin-
ginin-derry,⁴ deflecting the bell-waves.*

Toonin, listening to the recital, observed Aunty's small liquid corrugations as they disrupted the surface-calm. The waterbirds rounded. The black swans turned their periscope necks, regarding the pale turbulence. Drops of grimy water were dislodged, up and out, onto the pavement.

Bulb of H₂O facing outward to the sky – reflecting, ever reflecting.

*A watery eye gazing into the waters above, while knowing, so acutely –
and being – the waters below.*

A tiny bulb of sight without breath.

A tiny orb of thought that is quenched.

Water-pupil, student of the sky.

Learning to be very still, without lungs.

'Aunty,' Toonin said aloud, 'I have lost someone.'

The recital ended and the water returned to pre-bell song calm.

Gerald rested, showered in the tower's facilities. His thoughts returned to the girl. He felt troubled. He should call someone. He should make sure that the transparent girl with the transparent skin is not homeless, that she is safe.

He called the local police.

‘It’s probably nothing,’ he said. His voice was tired; the magnificent sepia that he spoke through the bells had crawled back into his faded memories.

The girl, below, was still not quite in focus.

Aunty’s hands touched and understood the minds of things without minds. Aunty heard the voices of things without mouths.

She felt fear.

She felt smallness.

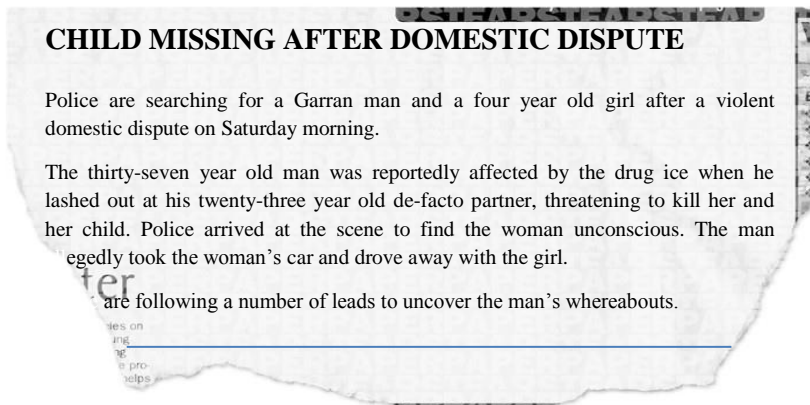
Such small sounds.

Such smallness!

Toonin’s mind reached out in response to the small sounds of Aunty’s comprehension.

‘Where are you?’ she said. ‘I can’t find you.’

Gerald spoke into the phone: ‘It’s probably nothing...but please do hurry.’



c A few hours later, the police had arrived. The girl with the carillon-skin pointed.

There is something in the water. I’ve lost something.

They asked her name.

They asked what it was.

It’s in the water. It’s lost.

A man with black boots waded into the lake.

His gloves reached down and Aunty reached up to them. She felt their curiosity and felt their goodness. So she spoke to them. She handed them her treasure.

The smallness within its mindless mind is important. The smallness within its mouthless voice is important.

He lifted out of the water the small suitcase. It shed water. The last remaining phytoplankton lay on the pavement, invisible to the human eye, flapping their useless flagellum.

Too late, said Aunty. I warned you to propel yourselves away...

The Inspector opened the small lunch container, he wiped the thin layer of green and brown algae that had started to re-colour its surface. Inside were two small china tea cups. He turned them over in his hand.

In black pen on the underside of each:

E L L A

...and

T O O N I N

The Inspector handed it to twenty-three year old woman who stood nearby. Her pain was visible. It overtook her and drowned her. Tears were unable to find eyes. The mind-image of the child Ella had no way of coming to the surface right now. That small face could not find its way. So it dissolved and regrouped. Ella's small eyes became swans. Her small smile became a bell. Her cotton dress became the world. And the inside of her became everything.

'We were going to have a picnic by the lake,' the woman said. 'The second tea-cup was for Toonin.'

'This tells us they were here. It will help us find her,' the inspector said.

Gerald approached the woman, 'Toonin. Her sister?'

She smiled, 'No, her imaginary friend'.

Gerald's mind went looking for that white girl-who-faded. And he knew that Ella was alive.

The 'her' was there. She was energy.

A 'something'.

A 'consciousness'.

The 'her' was creating and thinking, across life and the planet.

The 'her' wandered.

He thought he saw the girl on the footbridge, running. But he couldn't quite see her. She faded.

Aunty heard her song:

Ella!

And she replied:

Peace child. We are part of this. Again and again.

Sometimes, there is a small panic that comes into my throat and I swallow it. It reaches the place behind my eyes and it stays and it stares. And I can't make it go away. I try to tell it. But it is un-tellable. I speak the words but I can't find the person who can hear the untellable within them.

So the pictures tell. The stories tell. And I send them out looking for the one who hears the untellable.

That person never speaks. They sigh and say, 'I know'.

And then all is calm for a moment.

*Until the next wave comes into my throat and I reach out and out.
In all directions and at all times.*

Research statement

Research Background

The Marvellous, as conceived by the Surrealists during the first and second World Wars, emerges when we allow the creative imagination to surrender to the unconscious. Investigations into the relationship between Surrealism and the unconscious abound – traversing the well-mapped territory of Freudian and Lacanian psychology.

Investigations into how Surrealism is evidenced and reinterpreted in contemporary Australian writing, and how it might be considered through alternative paradigms of the unconscious, however, are rare.

Research Contribution

The creative work experiments with what Surrealist writing might be in this current age, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of unconscious desire as 'lack'. The creative work seeks a new subjectivity where the 'real' and the 'unreal' merge, and experiments with acts of reading and writing as acts of 'becoming'.

Research Significance

The creative piece seeks to establish a 'new Surrealism' – a contemporary Australian interpretation of the Surrealist's productive force, also known as the 'Marvellous'.

Endnotes

¹ To see or look (Ngunnawal language)

² Younger sister (Ngunnawal language)

³ Ngunnawal creator – a water spirit (Ngunnawal language)

⁴ Sparkling, throwing out little rays of light (Ngunnawal language)