

Flinders University

Gay Lynch

Towards Nailing Ghosts for Creative Purpose: the Suicide of Adam Lindsay Gordon

Abstract:

Appropriating historical characters can provoke criticism about authorial authority and the factual accuracy of their representation. Australia's horseman and iconic poet Adam Lindsay Gordon appears as a minor character in the first iteration of my novel. Including his suicide in a new version raises questions. In Melbourne, he belonged to a veritable frigate of Bohemian, literary ghosts – Marcus Clarke and Henry Kendall, for instance – who subsequently haunted several contemporary writers, including Andrew McCann, Michael Meehan and Michael Wilding. How dare I appropriate the Gordon embodied in Australia's literary and cultural memory? My ignoble reasons for crowding in on phantoms from his coterie also need addressing. How could I exorcise Gordon's ghost without extant accounts that once fed national myths, taking possession of my research? How, strictly for my own novelistic ends, could I respect Gordon's tragedy yet create it anew? I found ways to proceed: not perfect reasons, but workable ones. And sometimes that's all a writer gets. Gordon's suicide narrative resonates with subjects and themes of my novel. This paper demonstrates research by praxis. Walking Melbourne streets and employing experiential writing in situ served my story. Reading history and literature settled the novel's mood and voice, register and zeitgeist. Exegetical writing and thinking helped solve problems arising from the extended narrative time and challenged me to address potential criticism from Gordon scholars. Change of setting, better agency for my protagonist and the drama of violent death as inciting incident, helped progress my resubmission to a soliciting publisher.

Biographical note:

Gay Lynch is an honorary research fellow in creative writing and English at Flinders University. She has published short stories, most recently in *Best Australian Stories 2015* and *Sleepers Almanac: 10* (2015), *Apocryphal and Literary Influences on Galway Diasporic History* (2010) and *Cleanskin* (2006) a novel. She was Fiction and Life Writing editor at *Transnational Literature* from 2011-2015.

Keywords:

Historical Fiction – Adam Lindsay Gordon – Marcus Clarke – Writer Suicide – Creative Appropriation

Writing the Ghost Train: Refereed conference papers of the 20th Annual AAWP Conference, 2015

Introduction

Historical fiction is often defined by the presence of historical characters. This paper defends expanding the role of Australian poet, horse breaker, steeplechaser and parliamentarian Adam Lindsay Gordon in a new iteration of 'Unsettled' (Lynch 2009) a novel based on Lynch apocryphal stories. In November 2012, a publisher invited resubmission of the manuscript with additional chapters. Extending the narrative time to include Gordon's suicide offered me fresh material, new motivation and a more uplifting ending.

I am not the first person wanting to associate with controversial historical figures. In *Literary Influences on Galway Diasporic History* (2010), I canvass this argument in a small way, in relation to the unlikely number of people claiming to have sheltered Peter Lalor after the Eureka Stockade. Indeed, Brighton historian Weston Bate describes how Thomas Bent, member for the district...of Brighton:

...fabricated legends of the benefits he had conferred in and upon Brighton ... I paid Adam Lindsay Gordon's rates ... Although caught out on the Gordon [story]... by J.H. Taylor, who well knew that the poet was in lodgings in Brighton, he was not at all set aback. His excuse was that 'they liked it' (247).

Bent was a politician creating an association with Gordon to improve his social capital. I will discuss my reasons for association as this paper progresses.

As his life and poetry became better known, Gordon became part of our national lore in literature and horsemanship. After reading Gordon's collection *Bush Ballads, or Galloping Rhymes* (1870), Anthony Trollope was 'struck by their energy' enough to be convinced of 'the man's genius'... as a steeplechase rider he was well-known in Melbourne – but few seem to have heard of him as a poet' (219). Mainly published posthumously, Gordon's work gathered canonical status after his untimely death. Lines 7-8 from Henry Kendall's poem 'Adam Lindsay Gordon' assert: 'He sang the first great songs these lands can claim to be their own' (1920). The Gordon website adds that he paved 'the way for Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and William Ogilvie to create poetry that was uniquely Australian' (<http://adamlindsaygordon.org>). New books are still published about his life, most recently *Wild, Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: a Documentary* (2010) by Michael Wilding, winner of the 2015 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Non-fiction and the novel *The Profelist: The Notebooks of Ethan Dibble* (2015) by Adrian Mitchell. While the Gordon character in my novel draws on past literary representations, his representation is most contingent on the role he plays in developing my protagonist's agency as an independent woman.

Scope

The new version capitalises on enduring interest in Gordon as a tragic and romantic figure and speculates on an alternative Lynch history. His poverty, his failed literary dreams and the death of his child are emblematic of many national stories about exiled sons. I began a discussion of Lynch/Gordon symmetries in *Apocryphal and Literary Influences on Galway Diasporic History* (2010), an exegesis accompanying the manuscript 'Unsettled' (Lynch, 2009). Scenes in this version play out in South-east South Australia. According to official reports, Gordon committed suicide aged thirty-seven, on Brighton Beach, Melbourne on 24 June 1870. The historical record presents Gordon as troubled by class anxiety, bad eyesight, awkward posture on foot and mounted on a horse, chronic pain from racing injuries and opiate abuse and, frequently, as antisocial. While my novel does not stray from these descriptors, I have no space to consider them or the well-documented specifics of his failed careers. This paper focuses on his death and its place in the new draft of 'Unsettled'.

Appropriating Historical Characters in Fiction

Plenty of writers borrow historical characters to inform their own. Novelists are free to represent them as they wish. The literary construction of historical figures is sometimes determined by generic conventions and, increasingly, historical novels cross genre lines. I do not propose here to revisit the mountain of scholarship on conventions surrounding the treatment of fictional historical characters. Emily Sutherland concludes in an article in *TEXT* that 'if the historical character in a fictional text is to relate credibly to the person on whom it is based, the writer is constrained in particular ways in the use of knowledge and imagination' (Sutherland 2007: n.p.). While there are strong connections between the real person and fictional representations, general readers and critics expert in the field make their own distinctions between reasonable transformation and distortion.

Criticism of historical fiction relates most often to authority and factual accuracy. To construct Gordon I drew primarily on primary research. Apocryphal and hearsay stories have been maintained by memoirists and fiction writers and now function as tropes: for example, Gordon's 1850s riding exploits in Mt Gambier, and 1870s boyish japes carried out on Collins Street, with writing friends from the Yorick Club. I have chosen not to narrate them. New scenes, in which Gordon engages with fictional Lynch characters, could attract criticism from scholars because I have made them up, but Simon Leys argues that 'History (contrary to the common view) does not record events. It merely records echoes of events – which is a very different thing – and, in doing this, it must rely on imagination as much as on memory' (31). On the basis of these premises that historical characters must resemble their prototypes and that fictional events must merely echo those documented by scholars, and my own conviction that the creation of historical characters demands speculation as well as adherence to enduring common elements, I proceeded.

Historical Precedents: Exegetical Thinking

‘Unsettled’ is based on oral stories and set mainly in 1859 Mount Gambier on a pastoral station run by English squatters. The Lynch family migrated from Galway to take up jobs as boundary riders. Their names and Gordon’s appear in steeplechase histories of the South East (O’Connor 1995: 56). Therefore, a disquieting, shadowy Gordon appears in my original settler novel focalised through a Lynch brother and sister. He attempts to seduce my protagonist. His letters to Charlie Walker confessing dalliances with unnamed local girls make this feasible (Humphris & Sladen 1859: 417-418).

The historical figure on whom my protagonist is based came second in a picnic race, riding her brother’s stallion, and died young on an isolated station (O’Connor 1995: 56). Nothing else is known of her. Therefore, her life is entirely imagined in relation to the better-documented lives of men around her. The absence in historical records of traces of Irish spinster women living at home is not uncommon in settler history and does not mean the Lynch girl’s life was meaningless (Campbell 1997: 129). Early readers of the manuscript, nevertheless, felt let down by a perceivably unhappy ending whereby Rosanna, a single mother, the child’s father drowned on the wreck of the *Admella* (1859), dreams of returning home to Ireland as bats – motifs in the novel – instinctively return to old roosts. To address this criticism, I decided to ‘write beyond the ending’, a well-established feminist narrative strategy and have her follow Gordon to Melbourne (Blau Duplessis 1985). This decision offered rich historical material from which I drew a happier ending, as well as the onus of further research.

The new version begins in 1870, when Rosanna goes to Melbourne after enacting vengeance on a priest abusing her sickly, hemophiliac brother. Gordon’s death galvanises her into action to save her child. Extending the narrative facilitated the maturation of two protagonists. From the beginning, the symbolic doubling of Gordon with Lynches informs the novel. They share traits of wild energy and profound abjection. Contemporaneous friends and critics represented Gordon as an alienated, perhaps disgraced aristocratic son, with a family history of depression and mania; as brain-injured, a result of his many falls from horseback, particularly while steeplechasing; as a failed businessman, disappointed in his claim to a disputed inheritance; and as a struggling writer, one of a coterie of struggling writers, who never achieved the material success necessary to support his family in the colonies. The novel suggests that he shares Lynch preoccupations with pride, death and failure, which found expression in suicide ideation. They too suffered from mania and depression, debt and poverty, reckless accidents and early death. Gordon and Lynch narrative events symbolically fed off each other.

Mid-nineteenth-century Lynches might have thought Gordon’s death in penury a result of his disconnection from family and, therefore, prescient of their own. While not presented as a ghost with magical effects, fictional Gordon serves me, his creator, in Lois Zamora’s words as a ‘transcendental truth’, carrying ‘the burden of tradition and collective memory’ and as a reminder of ‘communal crimes, crises, cruelties’ whereby colonial men fail and die (1995: 497). Lynches and Gordon are

ostensibly economic migrants: fleeing famine and or family conflict. I use Gordon's character metaphorically to 'mirror, complement, recover, supplant, cancel, complete' the Lynches' potential to succumb to a similar atavistic fate (Zamora 1995: 497). Depression fuelled by migration, displacement and difficult colonial lives born out in family pathologies, influence my characters' actions, Gordon's, and those of his Bohemian literary peers in Melbourne. Displacement, alienation and exile from Europe are subjects of my research. For these reasons and several others that I will outline in this paper, I extend my novel plot to include his suicide and the events of the week leading up to it.

The ghosts and the writers who walk: research in situ

To represent Gordon's life during the years 1868-1870, through the prism of my protagonist's consciousness, I need to research his ghostly traces at commemorative sites in built-up and historical Melbourne and Brighton where he lived: on Collins and Spring Street; on Park and Church Streets, on the beach and at the Brighton Cemetery.

To compose at all and to rewrite, I need to walk through settings, observing people within them. Walking provides a metaphor for literary composition and also enacts it. Enza Gandolfo, Nigel Krauth and Tony Williams, describe the process when they, scarcely aware of the pre-conscious composition that occurs as they stride along, delighting in their roles as thinkers, observers and *flaneurs* (E. Gandolfo 2015; N. Krauth 2008; T. Williams 2015).

David Sornig demonstrates walking as praxis in his essay, 'Jubilee: a hymn for Elsie Williams on Dudley Flats' shortlisted as essay finalist for the Melbourne Literature Prize (2015). In the opening paragraphs he nervously sets out to walk the now further degraded setting in which his subject lived and died: 'I'M HERE ALREADY, in the bleak, awful hour on Dudley Flats in which the dreadful dereliction of Elsie Williams will come to pass... The sun is low over the Flats to the west; it picks out glints in the glass on the rubbish tip on the West Melbourne Swamp...' ¹

And so I too set off on foot around Brighton's strange elliptically shaped streets, each visit adding another layer to my understanding. I run along the sea path and foreshore at the end of Park Street, site of Gordon's suicide, where, despite clearings on both sides, the gnarly tea-tree scrub and seascape remains. Using Brighton Council brochures, an 1871 map, and notes from local history books, I traverse Brighton's historical and architectural trails. I spend several days reading at the Brighton Historical Society's archives, meeting ninety-six-year-old Weston Bate, author of the definitive history of Brighton, and visit 10 Lewis Street, the site of a cottage long demolished, where Gordon lodged and from where he set off to his death.

Gordon caught the Middle Brighton train to the city to meet and write with members of the Yorick Club and frequently walked home due to lack of funds. In taking my protagonist into his territory to enact her very human drama, my take on the world

needs merely to be credible. I travel by train to Melbourne city precincts relevant to Gordon's roaming: the Melbourne Museum, The Parliamentary and Treasury Gardens. I enter the city by road via the Princess Bridge or on foot after alighting, like Rosanna from a train at Flinders Railway Station, to measure the slope of Collins and Bourke Streets, where Gordon and his friends met at various places, including the Yorick Club and Café de Paris, and where scenes play out in my novel (Buckrich, Dunstan & Storey 2005). I linger before old buildings marked on my brown-paper map, hand-drawn from old photographs, paintings and maps, pausing before the statue of Galway man, Robert O'Hara Bourke to imagine its effect on Rosanna, the Galway girl in my novel, and of lines from Gordon's resonant poem, 'Gone', on the subject of the explorer's death:

With the pistol clenched in his failing hand,
With the death mist spread o'er his fading eyes...

Ho, pledge me a death drink, comrade mine!

To a brave man gone where we all must go

(Gordon 1918: 6:1-2; 8:7-8, in Rowlandson, 16-18).

On Spring Street, I nod to an equally tragic, granite Gordon, hunched in his chair below the Houses of Parliament, installed in 1831 (Mountford). Historical traces of Gordon abound in Melbourne city and in Brighton but in following his ghostly footsteps am I acting ghoulish?

Appropriating suicide: ghoulish reasons for taking on the ghost

I *am* a bit of a ghoul, a sentiment that sits well with the views of Michael Meehan's protagonist Martin Frobisher, in the novel *Below the Styx* (2010), a satirical, fabulist fictionalisation of the life of Marcus Clarke, one of Gordon's Bohemian cohort. Frobisher suggests that Clarke was, in at least one novel: '...actually more interested in what human misery could do for literature than what literature could do for misery' (Meehan 2010: 72). Truthfully, my motivations are not dissimilar. Gordon was a colourful character whose ghost didn't settle because he died young, curtailing his literary career. In extending his plotline in my narrative, I borrow him for effect.

The technical problem of how to write the suicide from a fresh perspective is solved in praxis. Rosanna's encounters with Gordon on the beach at the end of Park Street, site of Gordon's suicide, and their conversations ripe with meaning, lead me to imagine likely residents present at the tragic site. My fictionalised version of the tragedy is focalised through an unreliable observer, a homeless boy living at the bottom of Park Street. The fact that no-one was present offers me the dramatic possibility of writing the scene from a fresh angle.

It is well attested that the cumulative effect of family history, debilitating pain from racing injuries, the death of Annie his infant daughter, poverty and failure to make a creative mark contributed to Gordon's suicide, and that his last ditch efforts to secure a loan to settle his debts and the final rejection of his claim on the Esslemont estate, a family seat, made him desperate. He had staked several loans on this

inheritance to meet longstanding debts, including rent in arrears and the printing of his first collection published the day before his death.

Depiction of his suicide depends on the accounts of friends and writers in his cohort from 1868-1870, editors, biographers and critics who alternated between these roles – Marcus Clarke, Henry Kendall, Sir Frank Madden, George McCrae, Frank Maldon Robb, Douglas Sladen and Alfred Telo – and on more contemporary critics Andrew McCann and Michael Meehan. Letters reveal that squatter and patron, John Riddock's last-ditch attempt to lend Gordon money arrived too late (1870). I had read them all.

Michael Wilding's timely publication of *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: a Documentary* (2015) takes me into the world of the three writers in comprehensive detail. *ABR* reviewer Susan K Martin argues that it '... offers massive accumulation of fact and detail and record and letters and data will fill in all the gaps, will make a complete picture of this community of men...' (Martin 2015: 55). Paul De Serville claims in his review that Wilding 'combines the sympathetic imagination as a literary man (and one suspects its vicissitudes) with the attention to detail of the traditional historian' (2015). Wilding's book enables me to check that I have made no gross errors, nor missed anything new or pertinent. In addition, it offers me another chance to enter a world I had tried to imagine, but with a knowledgeable guide.

Reworking Gordon's last week in an original way, it seems doubly important to check facts. Apart from offering me creative licence, most extant accounts of his suicide and the circumstances leading up to it are consistent on important points, matter of fact, and largely drawn from the same sources: the police report and statements taken from Mrs Gordon, friends and neighbours, who met him the previous afternoon and evening. Variations in the recounts relate only to Gordon's alcohol intake. Some accounts suggest that no alcohol had been consumed and others demur claiming he was 'excitable and rather quarrelsome' (Hugh Kelly in Wilding 2015: 317). Gordon's wife disputes the latter on both counts. In an interview with the *Advertiser* in 1912, forty years after the event, she claims that she was unaware on the day that his latest crisis had overwhelmed him until she noticed the absence of his rifle.

Edith Hinton recounts Gordon's story in her *Recollections of the South-east* (1971), 100 years after the event, explicitly stating that mania developed in him after drinking: 'Excited by the spirits he had taken, Gordon returned home with a furious headache, and that evening determined to terminate his troublous existence' (Hinton 1971: 51).

To contrast, Frank Madden, who walked with Gordon late in the afternoon of the day before the suicide testifies:

Of one thing I am clear, that when I left him at St Kilda, he was absolutely sober, but very much depressed and melancholy. He told me that he had asked a friend to lend him £100 to enable him to get to England, but his friend had refused to make the advance and he was most down-hearted and despondent (Madden in Humphris & Sladen 1912: 442).

After so many years, the resolution of this issue seems unlikely. While I might like to materialise a tragic ghost that shares the same dark problems as my characters – for alcoholism blights historical Lynches – I take the lead from Michael Meehan’s protagonist: ‘My instinct is to defend the fellow. “Just stick to the sources, Martin. This is supposed to be history not advocacy.”’ (72). Leaving alcohol out of my account may be read as a kind of advocacy for Gordon, or a speculative construction of the endgame playing out between him and my protagonist.

Edith Humphris and Douglas Sladen dodge the suicide question in the preface of *Adam Lindsay Gordon and his Friends in England and Australia* (1912): ‘This book is written to prove that Gordon, whatever his faults, was a hero. The world has known for half a century how manful his poems are’ (xviii).

Geoffrey Hutton’s account of the death is matter of fact:

In the morning he went out early...At nine ‘clock, William Allen, a storekeeper, was looking for his cow in the thick tea-tree scrub, which lined the sand, when he came upon the body of a man with a rifle lying by his side, his head smashed open by a bullet. It was Gordon (1978: 181).

Bate spends scant space on Gordon giving only a brief account of the tragedy:

He lodged in Lewis Street with William Kelly, Judge Higginbotham’s gardener, and it was from there that he walked to the scrub at the end of Park Street, Middle Brighton, and shot himself on the morning of 24 June 1870 (289).

Michael Wilding thoroughly canvasses Gordon’s associates on the subject of the suicide. A travelling correspondent of the Melbourne *Leader* expresses disbelief:

When we heard the next day about his melancholy death on the evening after he had left us, both Dr Bleasdale and myself came to the conclusion that he must have been attacked with sudden mania through the injury to his head from which he suffered. We both felt certain when he parted from us three hours before the fatal deed he had no intention of shorting his life. And that was the general feeling of all who had seen him and conversed with him on that last day of his too short life (*The Press*, 1891 in Wilding 2015: 312).

Gordon, Clarke and Kendall had lost a child and suffered poverty as they struggled to establish themselves as writers. The latter pair had been injured falling from horses; not unusual at that time. All three abused alcohol and opiates (Wilding 2015: 87). They lived short, tragic lives, their fates closely linked with their sense of themselves as tortured, creative men of genius unfit for everyday work. Meehan describes them as ‘*genius manque*’ (Acknowledgements). The three mirror and complement the Lynch characters’ sufferings.

As new colonials, these men suffered from ill health, poverty and professional failure, the fate of sons of good families fallen on hard times, their sense of entitlement thwarted: unsettled ghosts, indeed. In a memorial Clarke volume, Mackinnon appears to affirm this idea of their pathological temperaments in explaining Clarke’s emotional response to the poem ‘The Sick Stockrider’ after

Gordon's death.

To those who knew Gordon and Clarke intimately, the keen sympathy of genius existing between them was easily understood, for there was, despite many outward differences of manner, a wonderful similarity in their two natures. Both were morbidly sensitive; both broodingly pathetic; both sarcastically humorous; both socially reckless; both literary Bohemians of the purest water—sons of genius and children of impulse (2011: 7).

In *Boy on a Horse*... a 1957 novel, Gordon hears a bell and his mind flashes back to childhood pain, 'where the enemy drummed and knocked night and day', suggesting it as something more significant than pain derived from recent riding injuries (Samuel and Heddle 1957: 160).

Appropriating genre: literary gothic, realism, adventure

Notions of atavism, family pathology and hereditary illnesses are common tropes of Victorian Gothic mysteries. Humphris and Sladen allude to Gordon's dark clan background: 'Familiarity with death is the birthright of those Cocks of the North, the Gay Gordons' (1912: Lxxviii). Alfred Cecil Rowlandson suggests that Gordon inherited family instability: '... blood was too hot' and 'Celtic qualities and defects', 'Born without full physical health and steady balance of mind...' (Prefatory Sketch: v, vi). Reflecting the late nineteenth-century literary zeitgeist, 'Unsettled' incorporates notions of temperament present in apocryphal narratives but abandons Gothic genre for realist treatments of pride and justice. Atmospheric scenes, in which Gordon appears disconnected and morose, both allay and foreshadow his impending death.

Marcus Clarke's referencing of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry Kendall in describing the 'Weird Melancholy' of the Australian bush created literary precedents for gloomy Australian-colonial settings. Meehan cites S. Simmons' argument that Clarke first used the term when describing paintings by Buvolet and Chevalier and then reworked it in the preface to Gordon's first collection, posthumously published, *Sea Smoke and Smoke Drift* (1876) (*Quadrant* 1). Clarke describes the bush using images of dark foreboding that are close to Gothic. But Meehan's Frobisher believes that he projects his own unhappy circumstances onto this text and that 'the sadness mote... was in Clarke's own eye ... Australian forests no more funereal than other forests' (85). This mood also sublimates his journalistic accounts of weird Melbourne as an inner city scene of vice. Meehan's protagonist, who resembles Clarke, goes more deeply into this displacement than discussion in this paper warrants, suggesting that 'Melancholy is not a presence. It is an absence... the lack or want of language' and that it is associated with alcohol abuse (87). This argument might equally apply to textual references in Gordon's poetry. It is clear that anxiety and depression inflect Gordon, Clarke and Kendall's friendship and their writing. Visiting Gordon Melbourne sites helps me maintain the delineation of complementary moods in both sections: responsive depression and wild exhilaration.

Exorcising the mood in haunted places

It would be easy to entirely infuse South East bush land and metropolitan Melbourne with the melancholy mood depicted by some late nineteenth-century writers. Meehan's Frobisher describes Clarke's writing of 'the opium dens, the Chinese quarter'...sets out to probe "a deeper gulf of misery"...'bleakest sketch Clarke ever wrote, the darkest thing...grimmiest nightmare view of Melbourne ever penned in Clarke's Dantesque downward journey through all the "several depths of human misery" towards the Yarra's muddy shores' (Meehan 2010: 175).

According to Lt Hergenhan, Clarke feared he might descend into their company (Introduc.). 'Unsettled' tries to resist the dark colonial mood manifest in Clarke's preface to Gordon's collection (1876), and in his 'Sketches of Melbourne Low Life', including 'Night Scenes in Melbourne' and 'Lower Bohemia'. Meehan's novel suggests that Clarke simultaneously wanted to inform 'respectable readers' of the "ragged, dirty, wet, infamous, and obscene"...characters in their city and to draw on the tropes of the popular market to write sensational Melbourne's 'dark side' (Meehan 2010: 175-6, 200). Perhaps I am guilty of this too.

In Clarke's sketches, the Princess Bridge provides a conduit to the dark side whereas for Rosanna it is one of opportunity and promise (Meehan 2010: 178). Set in a bookshop and two theatres, her Bourke and Collins Street scenes on the eve of Gordon's suicide carry convivial and literary conversations but rather than depict her as breathless ingénue interested only in city fashion, theatre and glamour, I show her wistfulness over her lover's failure to honour his promise to find her work as a Melbourne actress. Despite his betrayal she perceives his parents, the Sutherlands, to be cultured and successful people and Melbourne a place to improve her life and her son's. She enacts the role of *flaneur*, experiencing an exotic but also dangerous world she would never have imagined in the early version of the novel.

The decadent and violent exchanges between the minor characters of a pimp and his rebellious girl observed by Rosanna at the Café in Bourke Street and at Flinders Station indicate the fate of many young women adrift in colonial cities at that time. These characters enable my protagonist to show compassion for someone down on her luck, and matter of fact respect for an Indigenous man on the banks of the Yarra Yarra River. She connects the wet and foggy atmosphere including its pestilential vapours with the Wurundjeri man's general displacement to the fringes of central Melbourne and from meaningful employment. I follow Kate Grenville's lead in *The Secret River* (2005) in creating another layer to family stories that may now become apocryphal (Lynch *TEXT* 2009).

Novelistic strategies: mood

In pushing my plot forward I need, nevertheless, to demonstrate that I can engage with an historical moment ten years hence. I draw on Martin Boyd, Marcus Clarke, Fergus Hume and Henry Handel Richardson to understand register, milieu and zeitgeist. In Hulme's *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab* (1887), a murder is

carried out in filthy fog on the Princess Bridge, the victim on his way to a Brighton lodging house after a night of gambling and debauchery in the city. Characters in 'Unsettled' take the cab without resorting to murder.

Bate summarises Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: The Way Home* (1925) as 'a revealing and authentic picture of Brighton as a gentleman's suburb' (289). Her fictional father not only belongs to the Yorick Club but also fits my novel's time frame as a likely family physician and, therefore, I borrow him. Yet, my novel's 1870's and 1880's authorial voice needs partly to resist the mood and tone of contemporaneous books. Any change must be organic, plausible and consistent with earlier focalisation through an 1859 protagonist.

I imbue scenes in which Rosanna and Gordon meet in Melbourne and reminisce with nostalgia tinged with fatalism and black humour. In several scenes on the beach he shows affection for her, rebuilding her self-esteem after a lonely decade living as a single mother in the bush. Under his gaze, she rekindles her wild opportunism and their meeting is thus transformational. To contrast, he has lost his resilience and will to live but plays along with her banter. I offer authorial insight into Gordon's character only through the eyes of a protagonist who recognises that her family's troubles mirror some of his.

In confining new work to a week or two in 1870, I encapsulate two new climaxes. In the first, Rosanna takes revenge on the death of her brother, thereby laying his ghost to rest. In the second, Gordon's death enables her to see the perils of poverty and the importance of education and family connection, galvanising her into action to prevent her son suffering a similar fate. Ironically, to save him she must give him up: a difficult agency. Offering circularity to the plot, the Brighton Sutherland grandparents take the boy and Lucifer, the Lynch family stallion, from Rosanna enabling her to escape the grind of spinsterhood and resume her independent quest for adventure and prosperity.

Conclusion

Researching new scenes experientially, in situ and listening to the voices of literary ghosts enabled me to write beyond the ending of my novel narrative, bringing about a happier denouement developed over two decades of my protagonist's adult life. Relinquishing her child frees Rosanna to become mobile and independent, and helped me adhere, to historical records, or lack of them for two unmarried Lynch girls. The resumption of the fictional boy's birthright may protect him against the tragic fates of Gordon and Rosanna's brother. At the end of the novel, we leave him aged eighteen and reunited with his mother. In fine family tradition, Rosanna finds employment and happiness working with money and horses. Meeting Gordon in Melbourne enables her to envisage suicide as a natural consequence of prolonged suffering, something on her mind and those of others in her family, and to understand the important counterbalance of stories in seeking agency in family and national narratives

In summary, this paper shows how practice-led research enabled me to, partially at least, ignore the way other people saw and wrote Gordon, and sequester him entirely for specific narrative purpose – to commune with Rosanna, my protagonist, offering her new agency and tying up important strands of the plot. Writing new scenes renewed my enthusiasm for the creative task, while maintaining links between an Irish frontier family and the protagonist’s adventures in an urban setting. Such praxis increases the likelihood of an original take on historical characters. My novel does not depart from facts and understandings commonly agreed upon by present day Gordon historians in speculating about a young woman missing from the records. Historical fiction stands or falls on its readability and sincere attempts by authors to honour historical verisimilitude. All this analysis stands outside the practical difficulties of reconnecting with a publisher; nevertheless, exegetical writing and deep reflection about appropriating historical characters enabled my creative writing to progress.

Endnote

¹ (<https://griffithreview.com/melbourne-prize-for-literature-2015-finalist-essays/>).

List of works cited

Books:

- Bate, Weston 1963 first edition 1962, *A History of Brighton*, London & New York: Cambridge University Press
- Blau DuPlessis, Rachel, 1985 *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press
- Buckrich, Judith Raphael and Keith Dunstan; Rohan Storey 2005 *Collins : the Story of Australia's Premier Street*, Melbourne : Australian Scholarly Publishing
- Campbell, Malcolm 1997 *The Kingdom of the Ryans: the Irish in Southwest New South Wales: 1816–1890* , Sydney: UNWS Clarke, Marcus 1972, L.T. Hergenhan (Laurence Thomas, ed.), *A Colonial City: High and Low Life: Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press
- Clarke, Marcus 1876 Preface, *Adam Lindsay Gordon, Sea Smoke and Smoke Drift*, Melbourne: Clarson, Massina.
- Gordon, Adam Lindsay 1918 ‘Gone’, in Prefatory Sketch, Alfred Cecil Rowlandson, *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, Sydney, N.S.W.: Bookstall Company Limited,
- Gordon, Adam Lindsay, letter to Charlie Walker, Adelaide, January 1857, in Humphris, E. M. & Douglas Sladen 1912, *Adam Lindsay Gordon and friends in England and Australia*, London: Constable
- Hinton, Edith 1971 *Recollections of the South-east Adelaide*: Edith Hinton
- Hume, Fergus 1887, 1971 Edition, *The Mystery of the Hanson Cab* Melbourne: Sun Books
- Humphris, E. M. & Douglas Sladen 1912 Preface, *Adam Lindsay Gordon and friends in England and Australia*, London: Constable
- Hergenhan, L.T. (ed.) 1972 *A Colonial City: High and Low Life: Selected Journalism of Marcus*

- Clarke, St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press
- Hutton, Geoffrey 1978 *Adam Lindsay Gordon: the Man And His Myth* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- Kendall, Henry 1920 *The Poems of Henry Kendall* Sydney: Angus and Robertson
- Leys, Simon 2011 Part 1, 'Quixotism: Lies That Tell the Truth', *The Hall of Uselessness* Collingwood, Victoria: Black Inc. Lynch Gay 2010 *Apocryphal and Literary Influences on Galway Diasporic History*, Newcastle on Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing
- Lynch, Gay 2009 'Unsettled', manuscript, PhD English and Creative Writing, Flinders University, South Australia
- McCann, Andrew, 2004 *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia: Literature and Modernity in Colonial Melbourne* Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press
- Mackinnon, Hamilton, 2001 *Marcus Clarke Memorial Volume* (1884), Melbourne, Cameron Laing quoted, Michael Wilding
- Quadrant* (November)
- Madden, Frank in Humphris E.M. and Douglas Sladen 1912 Preface, *Adam Lindsay Gordon and Friends in England and Australia*, London: Constable
- Meehan Michael, 2010 *A Novel: Below the Styx*, Crows Nest NSW, Allen and Unwin
- O'Connor, B.J. 1995 *From Barrier Rise: The History of Horse Racing in the S.E. of S.A.*, Mount Gambier: B.J. O'Connor
- Richardson, Henry Handel, 1925, 1971 edition, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: The Way Home*, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Penguin Modern Classic, introd. Leonie Kramer
- Riddoch, John, *The Last Letters 1868-1870: Adam Lindsay Gordon to John Riddoch*, Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1970, ed., intro. Hugh Anderson
- Samuel, H.J. & Enid, Moodie Heddl 1957, *Boy on a Horse: The Story of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, London: Angus and Robertson Ltd.
- Sladen, Douglas & Humphris E.M. 1912 Preface, *Adam Lindsay Gordon and friends in England and Australia*, London: Constable.
- Trollope, Anthony 1873 *Australia and New Zealand* London: Dawsons of Pall Mall.
- Wilding, Michael 2015 *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: a Documentary*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Press.
- The Yorick Club: its Origin and Development, May, 1868, to December, 1910* 1911 George Bell(ed), Melbourne: Atlas Press.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris 1995 *Magic Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Durham, M.C. Duke University Press
- Magazines:**
- The Press*, Christchurch, 23 September 1891 in Michael Wilding 2015 *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: a Documentary*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Press.
- Online sources:**
- De Serville, Paul 2015 *MICHAEL WILDING Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall*, <http://newtownreviewofbooks.com.au/2015/04/14/michael-wilding-wild-bleak-bohemia-marcus-clarke-adam-lindsay-gordon-and-henry-kendall-reviewed-by-paul-de-serville/> (accessed 28 June 2015)
- Gandolfo, Enza 2015 Preamble to *Women walking: fragments*, *TEXT*, Special Issue 15: Creative Writing as Research II, Edit., Nigel Krauth and Donna Lee Brien, <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue15/Gandolfo.pdf> (accessed 30 April 2015).

- The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc.
<http://adamlindsaygordon.org/aboutus.htm> (accessed 7 February 2015)
- Krauth, Nigel 2008 'The body in coupled action': writers as becoming-animals, *TEXT*: 12:2
<http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct08/krauth.htm> (accessed 15 May 2015)
- Lynch, Gay 2009 'Apocryphal stories in Kate Grenville's Searching for the Secret River', *TEXT*, 13:1 www.textjournal.com.au/april09/lynch.htm (accessed 12 April)
- Martin, Susan K. 2015, rev. *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: a Documentary*, *ABR*, June-July, <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/current-issue/157-june-july-2015-no-372/2594-susan-k-martin-reviews-wild-bleak-bohemia-by-michael-wilding> (accessed 2 April)
- De Serville, Paul 2015 'MICHAEL WILDING *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall*', *The Newtown Review of Books*, <http://newtownreviewofbooks.com.au/2015/04/14/michael-wilding-wild-bleak-bohemia-marcus-clarke-adam-lindsay-gordon-and-henry-kendall-reviewed-by-paul-de-serville/> (accessed 7 April)
- Sutherland, Emily 2007 'Historical Lives in Fiction, Characters in Fiction: Are they the same people?' *TEXT*: 11.1. <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april07/sutherland.htm> (accessed 15 August 2015)
- Sornig, David 2015 'Jubilee: a hymn for Elsie Williams on Dudley Flats', Melbourne Literature Prize, Finalist Essays, *Griffith Review*, <https://griffithreview.com/melbourne-prize-for-literature-2015-finalist-essays/> (accessed 28 November 2015)
- Williams, Tony 2013, *Iterations: Days, walks, episodes, chapters, scenes*, *TEXT* 17:3
<http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct13/williams.htm> Accessed 18 June 2015 (accessed 8 May 2015)