

**School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts**

**The Windy Season: A Novel**

**and**

**Shadows in the Water: Pastoral Poetics in Western Australian Coastal  
Narratives: An Exegesis**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
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of  
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**DECLARATION:**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.



Samuel Carmody: .....

Date: 31.10.16 .....

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## ABSTRACT

In his essay “A Beach Somewhere: The Australian Littoral Imagination at Play”, Bruce Bennett declares the coastal landscapes of Australia to be “vital elements in the literary consciousness” (42). The late Randolph Stow and his younger counterpart, Tim Winton, are two examples of Western Australian writers who, as Bennett argues, have presented “human dramas played out against the sea, sand, wind, rocks, and vegetation” of the Western Australian coast (42). Bennett’s thesis reveals a Western Australian literary imagination that has often dwelled away from the cities and suburbs and dry interior, drawn instead to the natural and to the past. These nostalgic tendencies are evident, for example, in Stow’s wartime representations of the mid-west coast in *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, and can also be found in the Arcadian depictions of the coast in Tim Winton’s novel, *Breath*. However, Bennett also observes a shadowed literature of the coast. Discussing Robert Drewe’s *The Shark Net*, Bennett finds the “simultaneous lure and threat of oceans and beaches” (32). A close analysis reveals a literature that indeed moves beyond straightforward revisitations of Romantic Arcadianism, frequently depicting the simultaneous destruction of nature at the hands of men and the subjugation of women, all set against dualistic coastal settings. But how should we explain this preoccupation with the Western Australian coast? And how do we account for this binary of literary representation, the romanticism and nostalgia within these narratives, and environmental destruction and toxic masculinities that are symbolised above all by shadows in the water and the menace of sharks? This thesis will examine how pastoral theories relate to the representation of the coast in Western Australian narrative.

The creative production, *The Windy Season*, is a novel that engages with, and at times works against, pastoral ideas and images. The creative production is not merely an attempt to subvert or undermine the pastoral, but is an interrogation of pastoral aesthetics and ideas and their recurrence in Australian narrative.

In the exegesis, I will argue that not only is a relationship to the pastoral mode evident in Western Australian narratives about the coast, but also that this distinct pastoral has become an important literary form. Finally, I will argue for a reclaiming of what Leo Marx distinguishes as “complex pastoral” and examine the importance of new versions of the mode in recording contemporary Western Australian experience.

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## THE WINDY SEASON

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Shadows in the Water: Pastoral Poetics in Western Australian  
Coastal Narratives

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. The 'lure and threat of oceans and beaches'

ON A SATURDAY MORNING IN MARCH, 2014, I found myself speaking before a crowd of five thousand people on the shore of Cottesloe Beach, Perth, Western Australia. We were there to protest a state government policy to catch and kill large sharks using baited drum lines off the metropolitan coast, a policy announced in response to five fatal great white shark attacks in Western Australia in the span of ten months between 2011 and 2012 (Gibbs 117).

I stood at the podium—midway up the stepped retaining wall that was built against the dune—racked with nerves and aware that I was not a politician or environmental scientist, like the speakers before me, but a student writer who, as I'd come to feel, had been given the job of addressing the protest under dubious circumstances.

Below the podium, under an already hot morning sun, the huge crowd huddled together on the sand: as varied and diverse a crowd as you might find. There were the committed environmental activists, women mostly, with placards or wearing cartoonish great white shark costumes. There were families, also, with children holding homemade signs. As I stood before them, I questioned my credentials. What right did I have to be there: before a microphone at a rally over environmental policy? And secondly, had I manipulated some element of the public consciousness to be given the podium?

A few months earlier, I'd submitted an article to the ABC's *The Drum* website. Titled "A Surfer's Defence of the Great White Shark", it posed the argument that there was perhaps a time when Western Australian surfers would have railed against the killing of sharks, describing my memories of the surfers I grew up observing on the central Western Australian coast, recasting them as almost pastoral heroes, something like the noble shepherd-poet of Virgil's *Eclogues*:

To them the sanctity of the ocean was absolute. Their submission to its power was all encompassing. They hooted after a death-

defying wipeout, and spoke with a sailor's romanticism about death at sea . . . But in recent times the roughened wisdom of surfing appears to have lost its compass.

(Carmody)

The article was published, and gained surprising attention. It was referenced by Captain Paul Watson from the activist vessel, *The Sea Shepherd*, in an article titled “The Tao of Sharks and Surfers”:

Fortunately there are surfers speaking up in defence of the sharks. Samuel Carmody of Western Australia recently wrote an excellent article on the current controversy and reminded surfers about what surfing is all about.

(Watson)

“A Surfer’s Defense of the Great White Shark” was also cited in another article by Bob Irwin, animal conservationist and father of the late television personality, Steve Irwin. He wrote:

I recently read a very profound article written by a surfer—Samuel Carmody—in reference to the West Australian Government’s decision to cull sharks following recent shark attacks on WA beaches.

(Irwin)

And the article was panned in the surfing community. Fred Pawle, surf reporter for *The Australian* newspaper, tweeted a link to the article, writing: “WA surfer says sharks “enliven” the act of surfing. Lucky him. For an unfortunate few, it endeathens it” (Pawle). On the SeaBreeze.com website forum, a user named Ex wrote:

As for Samuel Carmondy (sic) Opinion, what a load of self righteous (sic) crap, I as a surfer won't be told what I should or shouldn't support and I was brought up different to that fantasy.

(Ex)

The article had gone viral, hated as much as it was admired, and through its notoriety I was invited to talk at the rally on Cottesloe Beach.

The divided reception of the article, and the clear tensions around the drum line debate, exposed, for me, the complex relationship that Western Australians had with their own wilderness. For every person who saw the killing of sharks as reckless destruction, there was another who just wanted to “kill the damn fish” (Currie): a view that my article had depicted as an irrational position.

But when I reflected on the central conceit of “A Surfer’s Defence of the Great White Shark”, a call to a nobler past—a suggested time when West Australians had a communion with nature—I had to question my own rationality. Like Ex, the SeaBreeze.com user, a part of me had suspected, even in the writing of the article, that such a nobler, simpler, idyllic past was questionable, if it had existed at all. Yet I had consciously romanticised the rural coast, opening the article with the memory of being taught to surf by my father on the beaches of Geraldton, with setting description that flirted with the metaphysical:

I remember that moment clearer than any other memory I have.  
The whiteout of the afternoon summer sky, the water torn by the sea-breeze. I remember the scream of that wind in my ears. And I remember most vividly the pure, potent anxiety I felt, the recognition that I was entering a space so much bigger than myself, bigger and more powerful even than my father had seemed to me all those years ago.

(Carmody)

And I suspected that it would work, that there might have been some part of the Western Australian public imagination that would respond to a romantic appeal—a nostalgic appraisal of the past, and a poetic rendering of nature. The article was, in that way, a simple pastoral, setting a sublime natural past in Geraldton against a complex urban present of Perth.

However, the most vexing thing about writing that article had been my own conflicts with the very men I was writing about, these bygone surfers of the Geraldton and Kalbarri beaches. In my depiction of them, I had valorised rural masculinity, conjuring a portrait of these men of the ocean that in reality seemed closer to myth. In truth, I was unsure about the men I had witnessed in my childhood on Western

Australia's rural coast. I had for a long time observed the nature of rural masculinity—what I read as its silences, anti-intellectualism, and not-infrequent aggressions and violence—and been uncomfortable with it. Ironically, the loudest voices calling for the cull were in fact the surfing community of Margaret River, —a coastal rural town south of Perth; —a group that proudly pitted themselves against the science (Sturmer),<sup>1</sup> favouring direct action in reducing shark populations (Wahlquist).<sup>2</sup>

For months after the rally, the debate raged on. There was a sense the state was being “divided” (Muller): between those that professed to love sharks, and those that hated them; those that called for a cautious, scientific approach to the threat of shark attacks; and those that dismissed scientific arguments as out-of-touch, effete, city-minded intellectualisation; those who identified as environmental activists, most notably led by women<sup>3</sup>; and those that depicted environmental activism as weak-minded, feminine sentimentalism, a view, it seemed, largely held by men (Murphy).<sup>4</sup>

The volatility surrounding the shark cull debate mirrored the complex way the coast figures in the Western Australian literary imagination: what Bruce Bennett describes, in a discussion of Robert Drewe's *The Shark Net*, as the “simultaneous lure and threat of oceans and beaches” (32). But how do we account for this binary in literary representation, the romanticism and nostalgia within these coastal rural narratives, and the gothic horror symbolised by sharks? And how do we understand

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<sup>1</sup> Over 250 international scientists and researchers signed a submission to the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority “which argue[d] that there is no evidence [culling] is making beachgoers safe” (Sturmer).

<sup>2</sup> Documents obtained by Sea Shepherd lawyers revealed WA state government consultation notes over the proposed shark cull. Of 23 stakeholders, “only one of the groups consulted, The Margaret River boardriders club, supported all aspects of the cull”. Despite Premier Colin Barnett's claims of “a silent majority” in support of a cull, a poll found “82% of Australians opposed killing sharks” (Wahlquist).

<sup>3</sup> The rallies in protest of the shark cull were organised by No Shark Cull founder and Sea Shepherd community campaigner, Natalie Banks (Law).

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Murphy's *WA Today* opinion piece argues that opponents to shark culling are “well-meaning but largely misinformed and sentimental types”. Murphy implores the public to “please at least take the time to read the comments from two very experienced ocean men”, a “third-generation rock lobster fisherman” named Leo Sgherza, and diver and author, Hugh Edwards, two men who provide anecdotal evidence that, Murphy argues, support “getting rid of a couple of big rogue great whites”. Similarly, Tim Winton's article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* confronted the arguments for shark culling, such as those proffered by Murphy, examining their masculine tendencies: “The ugliest utterances seem to come from those at distance, often citizens who rarely get their hair wet, whose hatred is implacable. Usually blokes, I'm sorry to say. Men, of course, are far more likely to die on the toilet than from a shark encounter, but some blokes still want to see every last shark dead before their last straining moment” (Winton, Deeper Water).

the gendered constructions and contestations within these coastal rural spaces? This thesis will address these issues through an examination of how pastoral theories relate to the representation of the coast in Western Australian narrative.

The metaphor of the shark frequently shadows the literature, as it does, too, the creative component of this thesis, the novel *The Windy Season*, and is a motif returned to often in this exegesis. The first chapter examines the poetic importance of the shark in Western Australian coastal pastorals, and the complicating shadows they cast upon the coastal imaginary. The second chapter will examine the masculine darkness in coastal narrative. And the third and final chapter will discuss Gifford's proposed new version of pastoral, the post-pastoral, in relation to Western Australian coastal narrative.

This introduction will begin with a definition of pastoral, as it will be employed in this discussion.

## 2. Pastoral

In *Some Versions of Pastoral*, William Empson begins with a discussion on the "proletarian art and fiction of the twenties and thirties" (Cunningham 190), and what might be read also as a treatise on the "false limitation" mistakenly applied to pastoral (Empson 3): its characterisation as a literature of propagandist rural nostalgia, or a straightforward literature "by and for" the factory working classes (6). Far from being a simple mode, Empson describes the pastoral process as inherently self-conscious, a process of putting the "complex into the simple" (22). Various pastoral scholars have worked away, too, at a persistently limited reading of pastorals. In their critical introduction to *New Versions of Pastoral*, David James and Philip Tew argue for reclaiming a critical understanding of pastoral, declaring that "very often these Arcadian or bucolic traditions are misunderstood or misrepresented as simply a contraction into conservative nostalgia" (18). In an argument that resonates with Empson, and also with Leo Marx's seminal study of the pastoral in American literature, *The Machine in the Garden*, and his call for a distinction between 'simple' and 'complex' pastorals, James and Tew claim that "in origin and in practice, the dynamics

of pastoral texts are far more adaptable, capable as they are of fluid and complicated negotiations” (13). The characterisation of pastoral texts in “romanticised terms” has, they argue, “compromised a more sensitive understanding of the pastoral tradition as it intersects with successive phases of literary innovation” and contexts (13). My thesis seeks to challenge this characterisation also. It argues that the oceanic narratives of Western Australian coastal literature belong in the bucolic tradition, and it will also attempt to reaffirm the complexity of the pastoral mode as it appears in these narratives.

In *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford writes that the term ‘pastoral’ in literature can be understood in three different ways. The first is as “a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed in dramas and more recently can be seen in novels” (1). The tradition is traceable to classical origins, beginning with the Greek poet Theocritus in 3 BCE in a series of poems titled the *Idylls*.<sup>5</sup> Gifford describes this poetry about the bucolic lives of Sicilian shepherds as a “poetry of nostalgia,” offering a “vision of simplicity of life in contact with nature” (15). It was developed extensively in subsequent cultures, most notably in the Renaissance pastoral dramas of Elizabethan playwrights, including Shakespeare and Marlowe (Gifford 84). Gifford follows the tradition as it moved through various periods, cultures and narrative forms, informing the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the late nineteenth-century novels of Thomas Hardy, and on to what Gifford terms the ‘post-pastoral’ novels and poetry of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

The second, and far broader, way in which the term ‘pastoral’ is applied in literary criticism, as Gifford explains, is to describe an “area of content” (2). In this use, ‘pastoral’ may refer to “any literature that describes the rural with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban” (2). A poem about trees in a city, Gifford argues, could be read as a pastoral for the focus upon nature in contrast to the urban (2). In this sense, a pastoral is typically associated with a “celebratory attitude” towards nature (Gifford 2).

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<sup>5</sup> In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx argues that “although Theocritus is regarded as the first pastoral poet”, it is the later Roman poet Virgil and his *Eclogues* that “are the fountainhead of the pastoral strain in our literature” (19). Marx finds within these poems the beginning of the pastoral’s “symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality”, and in this, the conception of Arcadia (19).

This “delight in the natural” becomes an object of critique in what Gifford defines as the third use of ‘pastoral’ (2): that is, ‘pastoral’ as pejorative, suggesting a genre that is uncritically romantic and nostalgic, or as Gifford terms, “too simplified and thus an idealisation of the reality of life” in nature (2). Leo Marx defines this third version of the pastoral as “popular and sentimental,” distinct from what he argues—and what this thesis argues—is a pastoral that is “imaginative and complex” (5).

Gifford’s introduction to the pastoral highlights the multifarious nature of literary and cultural criticism that endeavours to speak of it. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that any discussion of the pastoral takes place on unsettled ground. As Paul Alpers suggests in *What is Pastoral?*, “it sometimes seems as if there are as many versions of pastoral as there are critics who write about it” (437). Alpers describes a failure by critics and scholars to design an appropriate methodology for defining the pastoral and, as he argues, a propensity to “swing back and forth between helpless inclusiveness, in which it seems you can call just about anything a pastoral, and a narrow focusing on specific periods or types of poems or even works and authors” (439). Ultimately, Alpers takes a position somewhere in the middle of these approaches, choosing to distinguish between historical instances of literary pastoral but also to highlight the intertextuality of the mode, “conscious of the various dependencies of literary works” (440). My argument aligns itself with this position also, opting to observe the politics and poetics of the pastoral as fluid, and resurfacing in different historical periods and in different forms. What becomes important, then, is identifying commonalities and traits within this vast tradition of literature.

Although this thesis ultimately commits itself to a study of pastoral poetics and politics in contemporary Western Australian narratives, a historical and formal consideration of the mode is nevertheless critical as it is these understandings of pastoral as a tradition of literature and as a literary mode that were carried by the colonies that first made the eastern seaboard of Australia in 1788, and the subsequent first British settlers to Western Australia in 1829.

### 3. Australian pastoral

In his article “Some Versions of Australian Pastoral,” Ivor Indyk argues that “the study of Australian pastoral is important for several reasons” (105). Firstly, it “allows one to trace the persistence of an ancient literary form in a modern context” (115). Secondly, the pastoral as a genre is appropriate in allowing the critic to explore what Indyk defines as an “abiding Australian preoccupation with the land” (115).

Indyk’s observation of a “preoccupation with the land” in Australian writing is reiterated in much literary criticism. In *Gone Bush*, Roger McDonald speaks of the “crucial” relationship between Australian writers and “non-urban” Australia (vii). Dennis Haskell writes of the emergence of this pastoral impulse in late-nineteenth-century Australian literature:

In the first strong period of Australian literature, that of the 1890s, it was the life of the bush that was celebrated—in the poems of Banjo Patterson, the stories of Henry Lawson.

(92)

Any discussion of Australian pastoral inevitably leads to the conspicuous figure of Les Murray, whose post-war bush poetry has seen him become one of Australia’s most recognised living writers, nationally and internationally (O’Driscoll). David McCooey has declared Murray “the most significant exponent of the pastoral mode in Australia”, identifying within his work a romantic pastoral expression that “explicitly figure(s) the bush as a source of renewal and social cohesion” (198). However, despite the popularity of his work, or perhaps even due to it, Murray’s pastorals, often characterised as simple and nostalgic, could be seen as responsible for the beginnings of the anti-pastoral in Australian literature, inspiring a countering poetry that sought to “de-romanticise rural life” and “present the country realistically” (McCooey 199). McCooey cites the writing of Phillip Hodgins, Coral Hull and Brendan Ryan as indicative of the “self-conscious” anti-pastoral poetry that emerges in late twentieth-century Australian literature (McCooey 199). This self-consciousness is evident, also, in the pastoral novels of writers such as Patrick White, David Malouf and Peter Carey. Post-war Australian fiction has often presented a complex pastoral vision that, John

Eustace argues, “invites readers to see beyond the narrative romanticisations of the bush” and contemplate the “psychological and ideological impulses” behind these representations (113).

#### 4. Pastoral in Western Australian narrative

In *Wide Domain: Western Australian Themes and Images*, Bruce Bennett and William Grono acknowledge that Western Australian writers have, in concert with the national literary tendency, traditionally gravitated towards the “open spaces,” “preferring to depict man alone in the bush rather than men and women living and working in the city or suburbs” (3). The poetry of Dorothy Hewett typifies this pastoralisation of the Western Australian landscape by its writers. In his article “Concepts of ‘the West’ in Canadian and Australian Literary Studies,” Bennett writes of the urban/rural dichotomy within the work of Hewett that pitches the “city” of the eastern states of Australia against the “garden” of the West. Within Hewett’s work, Western Australia is written as a place of “brutal innocence”, the antithesis to her depiction of Sydney as “materialistic, vulgar, articulate and unashamed” (81).

However, despite the traditional pastoral binaries at work in Hewett’s rural imaginary, the relationship of her poetry to the pastoral remains complex, refusing to “divide along such neat lines of formal versus experimental, rural versus urban” (Henry 191). As Indyk argues, the relationship that Australian writing has to the pastoral tradition “depends as much on the assertion of differences, as it does on the assertion of continuities” (115). A similar awareness of tradition, and willingness to depart from it, is notable in the ‘anti-pastorals’ of contemporary Western Australian poet, John Kinsella. In the essay, “Tradition and Questioning; The Silo as Pastoral Symphony,” Dennis Haskell writes of Kinsella’s self-conscious pastoral poetry that is simultaneously “serious and ironic” (94). Haskell argues that, like the work of his forebears, Judith Wright and Hewett, Kinsella’s poetry represents a complex brand of pastoral that is both “traditional and experimental” (92).

A pastoral tendency in Western Australian literature has long existed; however, the site of this pastoral imagination may have altered or evolved over time. In his essay “‘Nature Strip’: Australian Suburbia and the Enculturation of Nature,” Trevor Hogan

notes a perceptible shift in Australia's pastoral imagination, a movement away from the rural into the wild:

In recent years, the meaning of the 'bush' has transmuted from the country into the wilderness, and from a valorisation of the historic settlement process to myths of pure, aboriginal nature unadulterated by human imaginings and intervention.

(54)

This point is a vital one in my argument for a reading of certain coastal narratives as pastorals for it highlights a movement away from a traditional and restrictive definition of pastoral texts that simply refer to literature that deals exclusively with rural or bucolic contexts. Hogan's observation of a new mythology, a mythology of 'wilderness', casts a new focus on Western Australia's long, isolated coast, and the literature that has responded to it.

### **5. Tim Winton, the coast and the pastoral**

In light of the traditional definitions of pastoral mentioned earlier, the discussion of Tim Winton's fiction in relation to pastoral ideas and aesthetics might, at first, seem to be a misguided one. Winton's salt-water-infused prose is in many ways distinct from the bucolic origins of pastoral writing. However, a close reading of Winton's work reveals more than a tenuous indebtedness to the pastoral mode. Romantic depictions of the Western Australian coast, the aesthetic divisions made between rural and urban Western Australia, along with recurrent themes of nostalgia for a supposed ideal past and the protagonist's desire to "escape" (Garrett 122) (either from 'the real', the present, or from a complex urban reality), are some examples of the pastoral at work. In this reading, an understanding of the pastoral, not only as a tradition but also as a literary mode, is vitally important.

James M. Garrett defines the classic plot of the pastoral as an "escape from complexity into simplicity, followed by reorganisation or reinterpretation of life made possible by the escape and reduction of life to fundamental concerns" (122). This narrative trajectory is recognisable in the course often run by the protagonists in Winton's fiction. In *Breath*, a middle-aged city ambulance officer, Bruce "Pikelet" Pike,

embarks on a retrospective narration of his childhood in Sawyer, a fictional remote mill town on the south coast of Western Australia. It is in this nostalgic rural setting that Pikelet reassesses his life, and the novel exists predominantly in this temporal and spatial shift. In the climactic scenes of *Dirt Music* the central character, Luther Fox, journeys deep into the Arcadian wilderness of the Pilbara, a land that he sees as “dreamed, willed, potent” (227). In *Mind the Country: Tim Winton’s Fiction*, Salhia Ben-Messahel examines this pastoral space, “the spiritual bush, which becomes a place of personal revelation and reality” (101). Ben-Messahel argues that “Winton’s characters evolve in a symbolic and liminal space, imbued with a certain spirituality” (101). To Ben-Messahel, these characters yearn for a different, simpler world—“a space where personal emptiness is explored and overcome” (84). Lyn Jacobs also writes of this preoccupation with the natural in her essay “Tim Winton and Western Australian Writing,” arguing that Winton’s writing “distinctively evokes relations to the land, almost as a character or presence” (309). This thesis will argue that a similar, perhaps even greater, symbolic impetus in Tim Winton’s fiction of retreat is given to the sea. In particular, this analysis centres on two short stories and a novel. The short stories “Family” and “Boner McPharlin’s Moll” are both taken from Winton’s celebrated short collection, *The Turning*. The third chapter of this exegesis considers his most recent novel, *Eyrie*. As a popular and recognised figure in contemporary Western Australian literature, and with a literary preoccupation with coastal settings and their communities, Winton makes an ideal candidate for this analysis.

This exegesis will examine Winton’s fiction as part of a broader tradition of coastal narratives that emerged in post-war Western Australia; a distinctive and complex pastoral genre that represents a sustained reflection on the conditions of late-modernity. Randolph Stow’s *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, and Robert Drewe’s novel *The Shark Net*, are examples of such Western Australian texts that position a sublime coastal imaginary as central to complex pastoral narratives that confront the unsettling processes of change and loss (Hassall xxiii).

## 6. 'Oceanic pastoral' and the 'shadow'

Two key and interrelated concepts prevalent in my reading of Western Australian coastal pastorals are, firstly, "oceanic pastoral" (Marx 285), as discussed by Leo Marx in his study of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and secondly, an observation of the poetic symbolism of shadows in Western Australian narrative, a persistent motif in oceanic pastorals and one attributable to psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the "shadow": a figure of the subconscious. This thesis will argue that both concepts are vital to a critical understanding of the form and function of pastorals that take place on or near the "symbolic setting" (Marx 285) of oceans and beaches, and the psychological underpinnings of these works.

### Oceanic pastoral

Melville's *Moby-Dick* is established as a central text in Marx's analysis of the American pastoral ideal in *The Machine in the Garden*. Marx's argument traces a complex pastoral motivation in American literary history—a movement beyond the rural and towards "primal nature" (Marx 283) that arises from the psychic violence caused by the intrusion of the machine upon the American imaginary. Marx surveys the "complex pastoral design" of *Moby-Dick*—an inquiry into the novel's pastoral movement that is not simply a retreat from the urban to the rural, but from the urban to the sea (278). In his analysis, Marx seeks to define the pastoral "question" at the heart of *Moby-Dick* (282). "Why are they attracted to the water?" Marx writes, and then, quoting Melville, he asks: "are the green fields gone?" (282). In Melville's oceanic pastoral, Marx observes the continuing "intensity of (American writers') feeling for the opposite of the machine, landscapes", and a "heightened sensitivity to the onset of Industrial Power" (33), prompting a new pastoral focus beyond the rural and to the natural.

A critical aversion to the "sea as a pastoral domain" (N. D. Smith 432) can be traced back to early responses to the "piscatory pastoral" of Jacopo Sannazaro's *Eclogae Piscatoriae* (434). Nicholas D. Smith surveys the "piscatory debate" from the seventeenth-century criticism of Rene Rapin and Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle

“about the unsuitability of the fisherman to pastoral” (434),<sup>6</sup> to the eighteenth-century criticism of Samuel Johnson and his “idiosyncratic” (Smith 439) view that “the sea has not the variety of land, and therefore less subject range” (Kinsella, *Can There Be a Radical "Western" Pastoral. . . ?* 120).<sup>7</sup> As will be discussed later in this introduction, a false limitation applied to works set on or near the sea has continued through to contemporary Australian literary criticism. Therefore, Marx’s reading of the complex poetics of the oceanic pastoral setting, as evidenced in the work of Melville, is central in my analysis of the Western Australian coastal narratives as pastorals.

Marx’s assessment of the “complex pastoral motive” in this movement towards nature, and in the case of Melville, towards the “greenness” of the sea when the “green fields” on land are gone (Marx 282), suggests the psychological substructure of the pastoral design, “the psychosomatic consequence of a retreat into nature” (284). In his accompanying analysis of a predecessor to *Moby-Dick*, Melville’s *Typee* published in 1846, Marx observes a writer “in the process of discovering an equivalence between the exterior and psychic landscapes” (285).

### The Shadow

In “A Beach Somewhere: The Australian Littoral Imagination at Play,” Bruce Bennett cites a “Jungian mythology and psychology of water” that emerges in Western Australian writing about the coast (33). In Tim Winton’s fiction, characters often retreat to the coast, and to deeper water, in a search for wholeness, to confront darkness in their past, or a darkness within. “The author’s subtext,” Bennett argues, in an analysis of Winton’s fiction, “is a character’s search for emotional and spiritual redemption” (41). The mythology that Bennett references above in his observation of a “psychology of water,” relates to Jung, who famously developed the concept of the

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<sup>6</sup> As Nicholas D. Smith argues, Rapin and Fontenelle were convinced of “the illegitimacy of the fisherman (among others) as a pastoral character” (433). Sannazaro’s depictions of life at sea, the critics felt, worked to “compromise the simplicity” of pastoral (434). As Smith argues, to Rapin and Fontenelle, “it is impossible to escape the associations of toil and hard work that the fisherman embodies; [Fontenelle’s] pastoral discourse cannot accommodate their intrusive “realism”” (434).

<sup>7</sup> In Johnson’s *Rambler* essay 36, he admonishes Sannazaro’s endeavour “to remove the scene from the fields to the sea, to substitute fishermen for shepherds, and derive his sentiments from the piscatory life” (202). “The sea,” Johnson argues, “is an object of terror, and by no means proper to amuse the mind, and lay the passions asleep” (202).

‘shadow,’ a figure of the unconscious “that represents the unknown or little-known attributes of the ego” (Franz 168):

Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected, and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness.

(C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* Volume 11: *West and East* 76)

In “Fearful Symmetries”, Mark Ryan argues that, while Jung’s theories were not as “readily admitted into academia” as those of Freud (181), Jungian archetypes as applied to literary texts, particularly in the work of critics like Northrop Frye<sup>8</sup>, have had a “lasting influence” (181). Published more than half a century ago, John Halverson’s “The Shadow in *Moby-Dick*” is an example of such Archetypal Criticism that examines a pattern of identifiably Jungian images as “literary symbols, quite different from those of the mind” (Ryan 181). Halverson surveys the oceanic symbolism of *Moby-Dick* “in the light of Jung’s theory” (Halverson 438):

As a preconscious phenomenon, the shadow figure is conceived by the analytical psychologists as an intermediary between the conscious mind (the ego) and the deep unconscious. The conscious ego may be symbolized by whatever is aerial or high, mountain peaks and particularly birds; the deep unconscious by whatever is deep and dark and formless, caves, for instance, but particularly the sea.

(438)

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<sup>8</sup> In “Fearful Symmetries”, Mark Ryan argues that the work of Northrop Frye “presents a valuable second branch of archetypal theory as it suggests that archetypes can be related to society or history and used as a model of literary criticism, without having to accept the idea that primordial images exist within a collective unconscious” (181).

Halverson's application of Jung's theory of the shadow to his reading of Melville's oceanic setting is instructive for my reading of the poetics of the coast in Winton's narrative. For Halverson, the oceanic setting "embodies archetypal figures and dynamics" (438):

The two principal characters, Ishmael and Ahab, both setting out on journeys of the soul, encounter their "shadows" and are saved and damned by the result of these encounters. Their journey is on the sea of the unconscious . . .

(438)

Leo Marx also references Jung in his work-in-progress paper "The Machine in the Garden", delivered to The Modern Language Association in 1954. In it, he discusses the Jungian symbolism of Melville "as designed to get at circumstances which gave rise to conflicting emotions, and which exceeded, in their complexity, the capacities of understanding" (Marx 31). By the publication of *The Machine the Garden*, a decade later, Marx's reference to Jung's symbolism had been removed, which might reflect the growing ambivalence to Jung in academic circles.

Despite the prevailing negative attitude of the academy towards Jung in the second half of the twentieth century, analysis of key texts in Western Australian coastal narrative find a repetition of shadow images and symbols that make reference to Jung "unavoidable" (Jensen 2). It is, then, with a focus on the influences and resonances of Jung's theory of the shadow for the poetics of oceanic pastoral—with no commitment to the scientific validity or cultural reputation of the theory itself—that the following discussion will take place.

Both Marx's reading of the "exterior and psychic" qualities of Melville's oceanic pastoral settings and Halverson's reading of Jungian symbolism within *Moby-Dick*, suggest what Renato Poggioli has called the "psychological root" of the pastoral; an acknowledgment that despite the mode's explicit attention to physical settings, its drivers are internal (Garber 435). In "Pastoral Spaces," Frederick Garber examines the inner topography of the pastoral, and the tendency for elements buried within the narrative "to rise to the surface" irrepressibly, a description that is analogous to the surfacing of Melville's whale (440):

It is the property of a subtext, the pastoral's and all others', that the subterranean life that it leads within the whole always has the potential to rise up to the surface and undermine the assertions that characterize that surface. It is another property of subtexts that the energy within them seems hardly to be containable, that it always seems to be poking away at the statements of the surface and some- times pokes through, making its own urgent claims.

(Garber 440-441)

Equally, Jung's archetype of a shadow that threatens always to "burst forth" sits fittingly with Tim Winton's protagonists, who are often stoic characters "encumbered by their pasts" and for whom "disengagement is not working" (McCombie 253). This is true of Winton's Luther Fox, a character who attempts to contain his grief over the loss of his family through a quiet life lived in self-exile, and whose stoicism eventually gives way. "We carry our past with us", Jung wrote, "and if it comes to neurosis, we invariably have to deal with a considerably intensified shadow" (*Psychology and Religion* Volume 11: West and East 76). As will be shown in the following chapters, this bursting forth of the intensified shadow, beyond one's control, is a central and recurrent plot device in Winton's fiction. Furthermore, it is the shadows in the sea that come to symbolise the irrepressible shadows of the psyche in Winton's characters.

## 7. Masculinity and the pastoral

As outlined earlier in the introduction, the second chapter of this exegesis will examine the depiction, and complication, of hegemonic Australian rural masculinity<sup>9</sup> in an analysis of Tim Winton's coastal pastoral short story, "Boner McPharlin's Moll." This discussion acknowledges the complexities inherent in any analysis of masculinity, urban or rural, and the difficulties presented by the term masculinity itself, or more problematically, rural masculinity.

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<sup>9</sup> In *Masculinities*, R. W. Connell defines "hegemonic masculinity" as "not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (76).

In *Masculinities*, R.W Connell describes the impossibility of producing “a coherent science of masculinity” (67). “Masculinity,” she writes, “is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced” (67). Instead, Connell defines masculinity as “inherently relational:”

Masculinity does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture.

(Connell 68)

In “The Question of Rural Masculinities,” Hugh Campbell and Michael Mayerfield Bell reiterate Connell’s above caution, claiming the impossibility of pursuing a singular definition of “rural masculinity” (539):

[T]here can be no such thing as a singular object called "rural masculinity." Rather, we should speak of the symbolic, discursive, or ideological constructions that we use to demarcate some things, some people, and some places as masculine rather than feminine. Just as recent debates about rurality have established that there can be no such thing as a singular object called "the rural" we should recognize the existence of "rural masculinities."

(539)

The critical hesitations of Connell, Campbell and Bell acknowledge the complexity of constructions of masculinity, constructions that are inextricably linked to, and dependent upon, “inherently historical” gender relations: “their making and remaking ... a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change” (Connell 44).

In “The Big Dry”, Alston and Kent examine hegemonic rural masculinity in a contemporary Australian context:

In rural areas, and against a backdrop of men’s greater access to resources and power, men are portrayed as strong and tough, rugged individuals who are stoical in the face of adversity. This

image is constructed around male dominance over women but also over land . . .

(Alston and Kent 136)

This observation of a parallel between male dominance over women and nature recalls the argument of Carolyn Merchant's seminal work, *The Death of Nature*<sup>10</sup>. Alston and Kent also examine the link between "hegemonic rural masculinity and men's mental health" in the sociological context of Australian drought and its destructive effects on agricultural communities (133):

While this hegemonic position has benefited men in good times, it also locks them into fairly rigid subject positions, typified by a stoic resistance to adversity and a rugged individualism that prevents help-seeking behaviour.

(136)

Alston and Kent's analysis of the "vulnerable" (145) construction of hegemonic rural Australian masculinity recalls Freud's similar analysis of the masculine, an analysis described by Connell as finding "a complex, and in some ways precarious, construction" (Connell 9). Connell cites the work of Freud and his "sustained attempt to build a scientific account of masculinity" (8). Connell describes "the openings he supplied for the analysis of masculinity":

He provided a method of research, 'psychoanalysis' itself; a guiding concept, the dynamic unconscious; a first map of the development of masculinity.

(10)

Connell underscores Freud's observation of the shadowed nature of masculinity (9):

The point he most insistently made about masculinity was that it never exists in a pure state. Layers of emotion coexist and contradict each other. Each personality is a shade-filled, complex structure, not a transparent unit.

(10)

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<sup>10</sup> Merchant traces an "age-old association—an affiliation" between women and nature (xix), arguing for the relation of masculine violence towards—and domination of—both.

Freud's "shade-filled, complex structure" of masculinity as defined by Connell supports Terry Gifford's analysis of the suitability of the pastoral's "discourse of retreat" to engage with, and complicate, hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality (Gifford, *Pastoral* 66). Gifford, quoting Karoline Szatek, points to "the pastoral's shadowed borderland" in the dramas of Shakespeare, that Gifford argues, "can take an audience into Arden or Bohemia to examine the relationships between notions of male and female" (Gifford, *Pastoral* 66).

## 8. Post-pastoral

In *New Versions of Pastoral*, Terry Gifford's closing essay makes a hypothesis for new senses of the natural that might emerge as writers begin to engage with contemporary environmental concerns, including global warming. Gifford's analysis of the complexity of the contemporary pastoral imagination—the 'problem' of Arcadia within the environmental anxieties of our age—is argued in this exegesis as relevant to elements of present-day Australian experience. The late industrialisation of Australia's coastline, for example, particularly in the north-west of the country, or the effects of climate change on fisheries, provide an opportunity for pastoral texts to interrogate notions of 'remoteness' and 'wilderness' in the coastal imaginary.

Gifford argues that "our present transitional position in relation to notions of environment demands new versions of pastoral for our times," in particular what he calls a post-pastoral literature (249). Post-pastoral, Gifford explains, refers to:

Literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language. Such a term should enable 'a mature environmental aesthetics' to sift the 'sentimental pastoral' from the 'complex pastoral' in a way which takes account of the urgent need for responsibility and, indeed, advocacy for the welfare of Arden, informed by our current and updated best judgements of what that should be.

(Gifford, Pastoral 131-132)

The third chapter of this exegesis examines Winton's coastal narratives in the context of Gifford's suggested post-pastoral. Gifford offers the following set of principles in his case for post-pastoral literature as work that demonstrates: [1] "Awe in attention to the natural world" (134); [2] "The recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution" (136); [3] "The recognition that the inner is also the workings of the outer, that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature" (138); [4] "An awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature" (143); [5] "The realisation . . . that with consciousness comes conscience" (144); [6] "The ecofeminists' realisation that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities" (146).

### 9. The Windy Season: A post-pastoral novel

The creative production novel, *The Windy Season*, is offered as an exploration in creative practice, a pastoral that self-consciously examined contemporary Western Australian experience. The novel consciously adheres to the classic pastoral movement towards the natural, where, as Leo Marx outlines: "the symbolic landscape is inseparable from the action or narrative structure, which may be divided into three movements. The retreat, exploration of nature, and the return" (Pastoral Ideas and City Troubles 252-253). In the aftermath of his older brother's disappearance, Paul retreats from the city, embarking on a grim pilgrimage north to the crayfishing town of Stark where his brother Elliot was last seen. Paul joins the crayfishing boat, *Arcadia*, which his brother last worked on, the experience on board affording him an *exploration of nature*. And at the conclusion of the novel, Paul begins his *return* to the city.

However, *The Windy Season* attempts not only to demonstrate the connection between Western Australian coastal literature and an ancient and complex literary mode, but also examines the capacity of these narratives to engage with contemporary political and environmental anxieties. *The Windy Season* enacts Gifford's post-pastoral rejection of *Arcadia* in favour of a more knowing, even . . . adversarial, sense of

'environment' rather than 'nature,' or 'the countryside,' or 'landscape' (Gifford, *Pastoral* 173), and demonstrates the applicability of oceanic pastoral poetics to a post-pastoral literature.

### 10. 'Misunderstood or misrepresented': Reclaiming a critical understanding of Western Australian coastal pastoral

The application of pastoral theories to Western Australian narratives about the coast is significant because the pastoral, as a tradition, is classically associated with rural and agricultural contexts. Critical discussions of Randolph Stow, Dorothy Hewett, Robert Drewe and Tim Winton are often limited to an analysis of their work as isolated, 'regional' texts, categorised by their peculiar preoccupation with the Western Australian coastline. Bruce Bennett, for example, hints at a pastoral impulse in these narratives in "A Beach Somewhere," briefly describing a "renewal of the 'pastoral' impulse" in comparison to an American pastoral tradition (34). However, Bennett's thesis is tentative on this point:

With the exception of some major works, such as *Moby-Dick* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, this literature largely relates to the land, including gardens and ponds in the North and swamps in the South.

(34)

In what resembles a caveat, Bennett falls short of drawing an explicit link between Western Australian coastal narratives and Marx's proposed "oceanic pastoral" genre (285). Marx's study of an American pastoral tradition that is inclusive of oceanic settings unlocks a bucolic limitation to pastoral criticism, moving towards what Steve Mentz has called a "blue cultural studies:" a renewed maritime perspective that "does not view the oceans simply as bodies to be crossed, but as subjects in themselves" (Mentz 997). In his article, Mentz applies a new emphasis on maritime poetics in his re-examination of early modern pastoral works, Milton's "Lycidas" and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a reconsideration of the way the sea defines the "symbolic landscapes" in these narratives (1002). Mentz suggests a possible explanation for the perceived "gap" in post-war literary criticism, and why "(t)he typical reader today has lost much of the

specialized information, language, and first-hand experience of the sea that were once common in Western culture” (998):

Powerful trends in late capitalism and postmodern culture made the maritime world less present in Western culture during the second half of the 20th century. The literary scholar Robert Foulke has described the ‘missing context’ of the maritime in late 20th-century Anglophone culture as a ‘historical . . . linguistic . . . and experiential’ gap in our collective understanding.  
(998)

As a result of the same hesitation of post-war Western Australian literature scholarship in its assessment of coastal literature, what is denied is the knowledge of these coastal narratives as part of a much larger literary tradition, similar to the “discovery” Leo Marx made in understanding “the intriguing affinities between the American works in which the interrupted idyll occurs and Virgilian pastoral” (Machine 376). Even present-day literary criticism of Winton’s narrative can appear disoriented, as if unable to find the appropriate framework in which to understand the oppositional poetics at work in his fiction: “the delineations of the native landscape” (377). In a 2014 scholarly collection, *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, various attempts are made to define individual qualities of Winton’s work. Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O’Reilly write of Winton’s narrative effect as a “strange, vernacular, peculiarly Wintonesque mirror through which Australians—and international readers, differently—can see themselves refracted” (4). Bill Ashcroft examines “the rapture, the ‘syncope’ of the oceanic in Winton’s fiction” (16), the critic focusing on what he sees as a unique compulsion of the writer: “Water is everywhere in his writing, as people sail on it, dive into it, live on the edge of it. Clearly the sea and the river are vital aspects of the writer’s own experience” (Ashcroft 16). However, none of the collected essays identify a pastoral tendency in Winton’s binary poetics of “sea and land, male and female, wilderness and urban blight” (Rooney 243). I will argue that the failure of critics to understand Western Australian coastal narratives as pastoral, due to an inadequate understanding of the pastoral as a mode, has meant a failure to truly understand Australian literature.

This thesis endeavours to stimulate greater attention to the poetic properties of the pastoral in contemporary Western Australian coastal narrative, and through an interrogation of the coastal imaginary, contribute to understandings of emerging senses of Arcadia and the changing sites of the contemporary pastoral imagination. As David James and Philip Tew endeavoured in *New Versions of Pastoral*, this thesis seeks to “contribute to a more nuanced account of how literary innovators continue to participate in physical, yet increasingly fragile, environments” (21).

## Shadows in the Water: Sharks and Pastoral Darkness in Western Australian Coastal Narratives

*In a deeply tribal sense, we love our monsters.*

—EO Wilson

### 1. *The Windy Season*, pastoral escape and ‘the shadow’

In my creative production novel, *The Windy Season*, the protagonist Paul retreats from the city of Perth to the fishing town of Stark after news of his brother’s disappearance from the town. This movement is a deliberate adherence to what Leo Marx describes as the “cardinal metaphor of the literary mode” of the pastoral: the motion “away from city toward the country” (10).

Stark is the destination for numerous characters who demonstrate what Marx calls the “the inchoate longing for a more ‘natural’ environment” (5). The town is frequented by holidaymakers from Perth and international travellers, so when Paul tells his parents of his desire to leave the city, his mother agrees that “it would be good for him to leave, to get away from everything.”

But Paul soon witnesses firsthand that Stark is not the uncomplicated refuge his older brother had sought. In *The Windy Season*, the pastoral setting of Stark and its wild coastline is shadowed, literally and metaphorically, by the presence of sharks: “Paul could sense movement in the water but all he could make out were shadows. His vision flickered.”

At this early point in the novel, new to the crayfishing boat *Arcadia* and plagued by seasickness, Paul struggles to get a clear view of the sharks, to see their true form. This quest to make sense of the shadows—in both the literal sense of sharks and the metaphorical desire to understand the psychological shadows in the narrative (the post-war trauma of his father, the silences and the violence of men and so on)—forms a central thread in *The Windy Season*: “He forced himself to open his eyes, shuffling along the gunwale, trying to get a clear sight of them, the shadows sweeping underneath.”

This chapter will discuss the poetics of the shark in Western Australian coastal narrative, and their role in complicating the pastoral space. It will firstly offer a brief history of ‘sea monsters’ as they appear in narrative more broadly, before examining their conspicuous reappearance in Western Australian coastal narrative in the form of sharks, and their poetic relation to psychoanalysis and theories of the unconscious. The chapter will then move to a discussion of the metaphor of the shark in Tim Winton’s short story, “Family.”

## 2. Leviathan: Sea monsters and literary symbolism

Perhaps the earliest story that has a monster of the sea at its heart is the ancient Greek myth of Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia, king and queen of Aethiopia. In the myth, the boastful queen Cassiopeia enrages Poseidon, god of the sea, when she claims her daughter Andromeda is even more beautiful than the Nereids, the sea nymphs. In vengeance, Poseidon sends Cetus—the Greek ‘Ketos’ meaning large fish or sea monster (Liddell and Scott)—to stalk the African coastline. Cetus can only be placated by the sacrifice of Andromeda, so Cepheus chains his daughter to a rock in the sea, but she is rescued by Perseus, who slays the sea monster and marries Andromeda (Papadopoulos 217).

In “Leviathan and the Beast in Revelation,” Howard Wallace argues that there “is no question that the most famous monster of western civilization is the Biblical Leviathan” (62). References to the Leviathan are littered throughout the Old Testament—most popularly in the tale of the prophet Jonah, who spent three days in the gullet of a “great fish” (*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Jonah. 1. 17). The account of Leviathan in the Book of Job carries all the fevered poetry that frequently emerges in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*: “Upon earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear” (Job. 41. 33). Biblical scholar Samuel Bochart wrote of the possibility of one of the original Hebrew terms given to the sea monster—dag gadol—having been inspired by various species of large shark, including the great white shark that inhabits the Mediterranean Sea (Clarke 123). However, Howard Wallace refutes Adam Clarke’s exegetical commentary that asserts Bochart “abundantly proved” that the Leviathan of

the bible was “a fish of the *shark* kind, and not a *whale*” [emphasis in the original] (123). Rather, Wallace describes the continuing uncertainty of Biblical scholarship, and the “bewilderment of early commentators” in attempting to ascertain exactly what creature the author of The Book of Job was trying to define “in the comparison of Leviathan with a crocodile, a whale, a large fish, and a dragon” (63).<sup>11</sup> Despite the contestations over exactly what biblical authors had in mind when writing of Leviathan, the emphasis in this discussion is more concerned with its poetic legacies; allusions that resurface in modern and contemporary oceanic pastoral imagery, for example in Melville’s *White Whale*, or in the sharks that circle the boat of Ernest Hemingway’s protagonist Santiago in *The Old Man and The Sea*.

In Melville’s oceanic pastoral *Moby-Dick*, large sea animals, including sharks, are explicitly symbolic, in the following passage taking on psychological, gendered associations:

Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small unspckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air; but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.

(635)

Ishmael observes the sea, and the shadows that move within it, as a materialisation of the mind and the soul. He describes the “mystic ocean” as:

The visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly discovered, uprising fin of some indiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it.

(193)

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<sup>11</sup> Despite these varied readings of the biblical Leviathan, including typically non-oceanic figures such as the crocodile and dragon, Wallace cites several Old Testament references that position the sea as the “dwelling place of Leviathan:” the Hebrew Rahab and Tannin, both relating to “sea monster” (Wallace 59).

Much has been written of the symbolism underpinning Melville's leviathan, the White Whale, and Captain Ahab's mad pursuit of the animal. Melville himself was of course aware that in his leviathan he was handling a weighty symbol with a long history, conscious that his work continued on from "all the leviathanic allusions in the great poets of past days" (*Moby-Dick* 162). In 1929, Lewis Mumford, a biographer of Herman Melville, somewhat prophetically wrote:

Each age, one might predict, will find its own symbols in *Moby-Dick*. Over that ocean the clouds will pass and change, and the ocean itself will mirror back those changes from its own depth.

(194)

In a confirmation of Mumford's prediction, Don Dingleine describes the novel's continued relevance in twenty-first-century America, and the "seemingly limitless ways in which it speaks to human actions and events in our own age:"

Melville's novel has been used to comment on the rise of fascism, the War on Drugs, the War on Terror, and debates over Social Security and national health care.

(15)

In *The Machine and the Garden*, Leo Marx applies Melville's novel to his commentary on the human relationship to the environment, both real and imagined, examining an "equivalence between the exterior and psychic landscapes" (285). Marx's extended analysis of the oceanic pastoral setting of *Moby-Dick* unveils a narrative that reflects the emergent environmental anxieties of the industrial age, and its intrusions on the natural, Captain Ahab's whaling ship *The Pequod* becoming "an extension of western civilisation . . . moving across an inscrutable Pacific wilderness" (Marx 282).

As well as contemporary environmental anxieties, literary manifestations of leviathan, including sharks, have been used to comment on masculine darkness manifested in the "exterior and psychic" destructions wrought by war. Susan F. Beegel has written of Ernest Hemingway's resistance to the symbolic reading of sharks in his short novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Beegel quotes a letter Hemingway wrote to friend and art historian Bernard Berenson, claiming "all that symbolism people say is

shit” (30). Despite the author’s denial, Beegel finds in the novella an undeniable symbolism to the sharks that circle the boat of Hemingway’s protagonist, Santiago:

The sharks certainly represent the inevitability of death and the inherent, indifferent cruelty of nature. They are also aligned with man’s inhumanity to man, with mindless greed and violence, and with “that shocking sharkish business”—war.

(30)

Beegel’s analysis of Hemingway’s sharks in *The Old Man and the Sea* tells of a writer traumatised by his experiences on the battlefields of World War II, “fresh from the fierce fighting of the Hürtgenwald offensive” east of Germany in 1945 (12). Returning to his Cuban home with “indelible memories of carnage and a legacy of anger, loss and terror,” Hemingway learned of the capture of a 21-foot-long great white shark by local fisherman, which came to be known as the “The Monster of Cojimar” (10). Beegel describes how, revealed in letters from Hemingway to his fourth wife, Mary Welsh, the writer had come to see the terrors of war embodied by the shark:

When the great white shark appeared to Hemingway, it appeared to a man prepared to receive an impression of something monstrous, something that still lurks beneath the surface of his post-war sea fiction.

(32)

As Dingedine argues, leviathans and the seas they inhabit are “fertile and pliable” symbols (15). This assessment reinforces Mumford’s earlier argument of the “mirror” effect of oceanic symbolism: that a symbol like *The White Whale* adopts different associations for each individual age and context. It is this relativist reading of the symbolism of sea monsters that my exegesis adopts in its analysis of Western Australian coastal narratives. In the following chapters I will argue that the shark in Western Australian coastal narrative has come to embody multiple troubles, in particular Australian masculine darkness and contemporary environmental anxieties.

Fundamentally, any single meaning for what the leviathan symbolises in narrative is not what is being defined here. What this exegesis seeks to contribute to is an

understanding of the influence that the presence of sharks in Western Australian narrative has upon what Marx calls a “complex pastoral design” (278). It is this “encounter with the shadow” (C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 29), and the troubling effects these encounters have upon the narrative, that have become a crucial motif in complicating the pastoral space of the Western Australian coast.

### 3. Psychology of water: The shark and Western Australian coastal narratives

Like the eternal, inscrutable leviathan of the Bible and *Moby-Dick*, great white sharks stalk the Western Australian literary imagination. In Robert Drewe’s short story “Shark Logic,” taken from his collection *The Bodysurfers*, a character imagines sharks everywhere:

In every kelp patch, in the lip of every breaker, I sense a shark.  
Every shadow and submerged rock becomes one; the thin plume  
of spray in the edge of my vision is scant warning of its final  
lunge.  
(28)

The presence of sharks in Western Australian literature in some ways reflects the real-life prevalence of great white sharks, particularly with the onset of spring (Sprivulis 141).<sup>12</sup> The months from September repeat a cycle of the arrival of great white sharks followed by the ritual horror they inspire, captured here in John Kinsella’s 2004 “Perth Poem:”

the Great White comes in close to the shore,  
tracking seals and the human swimmer  
on the surface agitates the water  
in much the same way; government  
must be seen to be in control

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<sup>12</sup> In his article “Western Australian coastal shark bites: a risk assessment,” Sprivulis finds “the majority of large white shark bites occurring during the southward humpback whale migration past the metropolitan Perth and southwest coast in late spring, when white sharks are known to navigate northward along the same coastline” (Sprivulis 141).

so increases air and sea patrols,  
 a network TV station lends its chopper,  
 fishermen hunt like sentinels  
 (65)

Of course, these descriptions of sharks in Western Australian coastal narrative do more than report a factual presence in the coastal environment. Bruce Bennett describes the psychological function that sharks perform in Robert Drewe's memoir, *The Shark Net*, which, Bennett writes,

brilliantly recreates the younger Drewe's apprehensions of threat and danger in the sea to which he is drawn by fascination and need. The danger is principally represented in the images of sharks which grew in the young man's imagination.  
 (32)

With its primordial gaze alone, a shark can tear a character open, unravelling their human stitching. Barney, the fourteen-foot great white shark that patrols Winton's bildungsroman *Breath*, silently watches as the book's young characters, Pikelet and Loonie, tumble into the perils of adulthood:

Barney surfaced like a sub in the channel, rolled over beside Loonie and fixed him with one terrible, black eye before sliding away again.  
 That eye, said Loonie, was like a fuckin hole in the universe.  
 (74)

On the page, sharks are the witnesses of human fears and failures: unblinking and inscrutable, deadpan escorts into psychic uncertainty. And when sharks surface, showing their physical selves, they do so in concert with a protagonist's deepest troubles. The following analysis of Tim Winton's short story "Family" examines a narrative where two characters literally and metaphorically encounter shadows in the sea.

#### 4. “The shark moiling beneath:” Encountering the shadow in Tim Winton’s short story, “Family”

In Winton’s “Family,” the story’s first sentence *précises* the central character’s pastoral retreat from the city: “After the shit died down Leaper chucked his board and wetsuit into the old HK and buggered off to White Point” (171). In the anachronistic vernacular—“the old HK,” “buggered off”—Winton assumes the “rustic voice” of conventional pastoral (Kinsella, *Can There Be a Radical "Western" Pastoral. . . ?* 120). It offers an almost reassuring invitation to a reader: the apparent movement from complexity into simplicity.

The protagonist, Frank ‘Leaper’, is an Australian Football League player, reeling after a high profile meltdown under a masculine national gaze, “all fingerpointing and gob spray,” after walking off a football field “up the player’s race with the game still in progress over his shoulder” (172). The disarray of Leaper’s suburban house suggests his tormented physic landscape: “a stinking mire of bottles and pizza boxes” (172). The description goes on to accentuate a violent rejection of modern objects, the character destroying or discarding mass communication technology: “the phone line was out of the wall and beneath a midden of dirty dishes and malarial sinkwater the mobile would be cactus by now . . . He’d left the TV on its back, wide-eyed and out of commission like a kinghit wingman” (172). Some days after the infamous episode on the football field, at four in the morning and “still half pissed” (171), and with the press having finally abandoned their watch on his street, Leaper steals out of the “sleeping burbs” towards his childhood coastal town north of the city (171).

The opening passages of the story, detailing Leaper’s rejection of a technologised urban present, and his escape from the city to a favourite surfing spot in his childhood town of White Point, appear to adhere to the simple pastoral trajectory suggested by Garrett as an “escape from complexity into simplicity” (122). At the outset, this pastoral movement promises genuine pastoral relief: “As pony farms and market gardens gave way to the blankness of bush he began to relax a little” (171). Leaper’s anguished state of mind that preceded his pastoral escape from the city to the coastal town resembles “the spiritual sickness that impels Ishmael to the sea” in *Moby-Dick* (Halverson 438). It preempts a poetic focus in the narrative that descends beneath the exterior landscape

into the subconscious, concerned with elements of the character's self and a past that might have been repressed.

Like Ishmael's "spiritual journey" (Halverson 438), Leaper's movement towards the sea reveals a character that also "hopes for a cure" (Halverson 438). There is an initial note of doubt about the promise of pastoral relief. At daybreak, after waking hung over in his car on the outskirts of the city, "he thought about driving back to the city" (Winton 172): "Leaper sat there a minute. He knew a surf would do him good. And right now, more or less sober for the first time in days, he couldn't think of anywhere else to go" (172). A couple of hours later Leaper first observes the pastoral scene: "he crested the ridge and looked down on the great train of dunes and the winter sea and the hamlet in the margin between them" (173).

However, as in the "complex pastoral design" that moves within and beneath Melville's characters in *Moby-Dick*, Winton's darkly symbolic pastoral setting of White Point defies Garrett's pastoral movement of complexity into simplicity. It is a setting complicated by various shadows. When Leaper parks "the old station wagon" (173) on the sandy peninsula at White Point, he observes the ageing water tower on the dune behind that signifies both the passing of time and warns of the presence of past conflicts that might still exist in the present. The water tower casts its shadow across the setting, interrupting Leaper's reverie:

The land breeze was cool at his back, and when he turned to put his face into it he saw the water tower from the caravan rising bigheaded from behind the scrubby dune. It gave him a strange pang to see it again. He'd grown up in the shadows of its trestle legs.

(173)

The tower is also forewarning of the presence of a figure from Leaper's past, his older brother, Max:

As boys, in that van park in the lee of the sandhills, the tower loomed over Max and him; its faded red tank was a bloodshot eye that never closed. From anywhere in town or from miles out at sea it was clearly visible . . . From what he could gather, Max still

lived over there with his missus and the kids on the same site and maybe even the van the old man dragged up in the sixties.

(174)

Winton's description of the water tower, "its bloodshot eye that never closed," conjures the fiery eyes of leviathan in the Book of Job: red eyes "like the rays of dawn" (Job 41. 18) (this description of the eye that never closes, eternally watching, also notably invokes the giant, brooding eyes of Doctor T. J Eckleberg in *The Great Gatsby*).<sup>13</sup> In "Family", the water tower as both an ageing monument casting its shadows over the coastal town, and also an eternally watching eye, suggests Leaper has returned to a setting where the past is eternally projected on the present.

White Point itself is a problematic pastoral setting, deliberately stripped of "greenness" (Marx 282). Winton describes a barren town: "scrubby dune", "sand white and packed hard", a harsh environment where "even in the weak June light the glare off the sand was enough to make him wince" (173). The description distances the pastoral from what Marx describes as "soft pastoralism . . . landscape as a token of realisable ideal" (282). Leaper's urge towards the water, away from stark land, instead embodies the "complex pastoral motive" of oceanic pastoral (Marx 282). Rather than pastoral relief existing within the rural town, it is the sea that offers the possibility of greenness, in the "green sandy holes" of the seabed beneath his surfboard (Winton, Family 175):

With the board under his arm, Leaper jogged the few steps to the water and plunged in with a shout. For the first few moments he just put his head down and paddled to distract himself from the cold but after a few minutes he was comfortable enough to enjoy the dappled seagrass, the green sandy holes passing beneath him, the rhythm and repetition of the stroke, and the easy grace of his own body.

(175)

But even as Leaper experiences what Sigmund Freud has called "oceanic feeling" (qtd. in Marx 281)—a transitory, euphoric state of mind that Marx describes as

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<sup>13</sup>In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the giant billboard of Doctor T. J Eckleberg, a fictional oculist, watches over an industrialised district, "the valley of ashes" (26): his "retinas are one yard high" (26), and his eyes "brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (26).

“transcendental, metaphysic” (281)—the lure of pastoral relief in “Family” is also tinged with doubt and a sense of threat: “There was a lot of water moving out here. He was five hundred yards from shore. The swell seemed to be picking up. He returned to the jittery feeling he had before he hit the water” (Winton 175).

This simultaneous “lure and threat of the oceans and beaches”, as Bruce Bennett describes it, mimics Ishmael’s simultaneous impulse toward, and wariness of, the sea. The oceanic pastoral is therefore complicated by the persistent suspicion about the very promise of pastoral relief to be found upon it, “so that even as the narrator surrenders to the escapist impulse he is uncertain about its validity” (Marx 282).

Leaper finds his older brother Max out alone in the surf, and his initial physical observations of his brother are marked by an awareness of the brutalising effects of time and Max’s almost monstrous masculinity, describing his older brother as looking “savage and battleworn” (176):

A wetsuit did little to hide the fact that Max had stacked on some pudding, yet he still had his big deckie shoulders and his neck was like a straining-post. Max’s hair was buzz cut and he’d grown a biker beard that gave him a fearsome look and blurred his resemblance to the old man.

(176)

Despite the “fearsome” physical depiction, Max’s body is also marked by visible wounds. Leaper registers the “pulpy scars on his eyebrows and a fresh dint in his forehead” (176). Winton offers here a complex portrait of the male body, at once formidable and vulnerable. It is a device repeated in Winton’s short story “Boner McPharlin’s Moll”, discussed in chapter two of this exegesis; the eponymous character Boner conjured as the “solitary rough boy” (252) whose body is marked with unexplained “bruises on his arms and neck” (260).

Leaper’s physical description of his brother also works to distance the narrative’s present from a suggested gentler political and social past: “Nobody would mistake Max for one of the friendly hippies who’d taught them to surf here in their early teens” (Family 176). The promise of the story’s *précis*—the appearance of a conventional pastoral movement towards simplicity—is now uncertain. After the two characters

trade wary greetings, Winton uses the complex oceanic pastoral setting, at once “calm” and “shadowy,” to foreshadow the trouble of the past that will resurface between the brothers (176): “They sat there in the calm a few moments, turning their feet in the light-shafted water with the reef shadowy beneath them” (176).

Max disparages his younger brother, both for abandoning the town and for his recent public abandonment of the football field:

So what’s the story?

Leaper shrugged. I haven’t been back for a while.

Christ, you haven’t been anywhere for a while, from what I hear.

The paper’s full of it. They sack you?

I walked.

Fucksake.

Leaper smiled, but the skin felt tight on his face.

Frank Leaper. The White Point jack-in-the-box. A two-season wonder.

So it seems.

Jesus Christ.

(176)

In contrast to his “contemptuous” brother, Leaper is drawn in the narrative as a sensitive character who has endured Max’s “meanness out of love” (177). Leaper is a character who “instinctively believed the best of people” (177), an attribute, he now reflects upon out in the surf with his brother, that Max had always attempted to condemn as a weakness: “it was Max who introduced and fed the idea that his little brother was a bit simple” (177). Leaper’s enlightenment throughout the narrative is explicitly bound to a growing awareness of the nature of the men in his life, reflecting that “he was almost twenty before he saw that, instead of hiding his feelings toward him, his father had no feelings at all” (177).

The psychological darkening of the narrative, and its violent climax, is once more foregrounded by the leviathanic poetics of Winton’s setting description, in the “creaturely shiver” beneath a wave that emerges from deep water (179): “Another wave reared from the deep. It seemed to stagger a moment as it confronted the shoaling

reef, and a creaturely shiver ran along it as Leaper spun and paddled into its path” (179).

When Leaper paddles for the wave on his surfboard and falls, “hurling him out across the bubbling reef” (179), Max mocks his younger brother in directly gendered criticisms, and the narrative once more invokes past resentment:

Some things are best left to the men, said Max as they sat in the calm water outside.

Yeah, said Leaper. Whatever.

You never had the steel for it.

What? Football?

It’s a man’s game.

It’s just business, Max. You’re so naïve.

Max glared at him, his beard streaming water, and Leaper felt his face flush with unholy pleasure.

You were soft, said Max. You were a fuckin coward.

(180)

Now, as though his realisation is, too, rearing from a deeper, shadowed place in the narrative, Leaper comes to realise how Max’s contempt is grounded in his jealousy of his younger brother’s superior talent. Furthermore, there is a connection made between Max’s hatred for Leaper and the hatred directed at their absent mother:

But I just played for fun, Max. I loved playing the game.

Remember? Shit, *you* should remember. You hated my guts for it.

Jesus, I was the only person you hated more than the old woman; it was like I was responsible for her pissing off as well as everything else. I was like some insect you had to squash.

(182)

Max’s only response to the mention of their mother having left when they were young, and perhaps the suggestion that their loveless father was responsible for the breakdown of their family, is to physically challenge Leaper: “You think you can take me? Max said, sculling closer. You reckon you can?” (182). The exchange suggests the vulnerability of Max’s formidable facade, and his implicit defence of their father

suggest the older brother's loyalty to a patriarchal order that requires an "abjection of the feminine" (Buchbinder 101).<sup>14</sup> Understandably, Leaper's doubt as to the salving power of the sea returns:

Why the fuck are you here?

I'm not sure. Maybe I wanted to say some things. There's nowhere to go.

(182)

That there is now "nowhere to go" for Leaper is a crucial point. The movement to the sea has only resulted in an encounter with shadows: the failed relationship with his brother, and the recognition of the masculine darkness that overshadowed their childhood in the caravan park beneath the water tower. The pastoral's apparent dead-end recalls Marx's observation of Ishmael's troubled pastoral retreat to the sea: "instead of an asylum, he had found a hideous wilderness" (Marx 289). Sitting on his surfboard in the winter sea, Leaper now turns back to the town in hope of pastoral relief:

What he felt like was a cup of tea and about fifteen doughnuts in the warmth of Max's van. He wanted to see [Max's] girls. They were small, still; they'd smell of clean pyjamas and honey on toast.

(184)

However, it's also evident, when Max pleads for him not to visit his family, that Leaper's imagined idyll of family life in the caravan park is, too, shadowed by a darker truth:

Hey, tell me about your missus.

Max scowled.

Raelene, that her name?

His brother nodded.

I was thinking of coming over.

Don't, said Max.

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<sup>14</sup> In *Studying Men and Masculinities*, David Buchbinder argues that "both masculinity and the patriarchal order require, and come into existence simultaneously with, the abjection of the feminine and the male-homosexual order" (101).

(184)

In a moment of vulnerability, Max reveals that he has been “put off” the crayfishing boat where he works as a deckhand, an allusion to another linked short story in the collection, the title story “The Turning,” where Max is fired from the boat after he brutally assaults his wife Raelene. Max’s almost vulnerable characterisation here in “Family” offers a counterpoint to the monstrous figure in the earlier story:

Don’t come. You can’t come.

There was a strange note of urgency in Max’s voice. Along with the fury there was a kind of pleading that Leaper couldn’t believe.

(184)

Max turns away from Leaper to deeper water:

Max paddled away a few yards as the dark lines of another set piled up in the distance. Leaper followed him out of habit, a reversion to old ways, until he caught himself and sat up. He was too tired for this, there was no point talking to him.

(185)

It is at this moment, as Leaper comes to fully understand the toxic nature of the relationship with his brother, and the legacy of their father’s intimidation and emotional neglect on both of them, that the “creaturely” shadows of the oceanic pastoral setting finally surface:

A surge of turbulence passed between Max and him, a sudden fattening of the water that caused Leaper to blink. His brother had his back to him, was still paddling away, when a bronze flash jerked him sideways on the board and drove him high in the water, spinning him round so that Leaper saw his opening mouth within the streaming beard and the shark moiling beneath him. A second later he was all flailing arms that went under a moment until he surfaced in a pink smear.

(185)

In the efforts of Leaper to rescue the limp body of his older brother, their relationship is clarified. The shark as narrative device serves to disturb the fog created by the brother's argument, analogous to the way the physical presence of a shark might clear swimmers from the ocean, abandoning the water to leave it clear and undisturbed. The exterior event of the shark attack has had psychic consequences. Leaper now sees that it is his brother who was the shadow "lurking" in his psyche; that it was the repressed memory of their damaging relationship that had derailed Leaper's football career:

You, he thought. When the grass went suddenly hard underfoot, and the ball forever out of reach, it was you lurking at the back of my mind. That's what fucked it, that's why I started to care. There you were, bro. Just the thought of you was a weight in my legs, and the more I cared the worse it was.

(187)

In the story's brief denouement, Winton applies an evocative description of the sea in the aftermath of the shark attack, the tone turning from horror to the sublime. The brother's ride almost triumphantly down a large wave towards shore with "Max's head . . . loose on his neck," the sea is evoked in vivid, painterly description:

They bellied down the long, smooth face and beneath them the reef flickered all motley and dappled, weaves of current and colour and darting things that were buried with Max and him as a thundering cloud of whitewater overtook them.

(187)

There is in these final passages the sense of "dissonance" that Erwin Panofsky observed of Virgil's *Arcady*, the melancholic effect of "human suffering and superhumanly perfect surroundings" (qtd. in Alpers 453). "This dissonance," Panofsky wrote, "once felt, had to be resolved, and it was resolved in that vespertinal mixture of sadness and tranquillity" (qtd. in Alpers 453). In these last moments of "Family," Winton offers a similarly complex sense of a present that is finally understood against a traumatic past, and the associated relief felt by the protagonist in that moment of understanding, even if it comes without redemption. For Leaper, the shadows of the narrative have been encountered and understood, but little has changed. On the wave, returning from his

retreat to the sea, Leaper still holds on to his dying brother despite the damage their relationship has done to him:

The reef was all over him but he held fast to his brother, hugging him to the board, hanging on with all the strength left in his fingers, for as long as he could, and for longer than he should have.

(187)

In *Pastoral*, Gifford examines the ‘discourse of retreat’ to Arcadia, offering one definition as the integration of “passion, mind and soul in an image of order that resolves the human relationship with the natural” (70). Similar to this pursuit of ‘order,’ Jung’s theory of the shadow, and the encounter which “is crucial to the development of the self,” as defined by Halverson, resonates with the traditionally restorative motivation of the pastoral retreat, “the development of the individual into wholeness” (Halverson 437). Halverson writes:

Rather less pessimistic than his teacher, Jung believed mankind to be salvable . . . Jung’s way is a psychological elaboration of many a timeless precept from “Know Thyself” to “The kingdom of God is within you”. It assumes a *conatus* of the self towards integration. The development of the individual into wholeness requires as its first step the recognition and assimilation of the shadow.

(Halverson 437)

Halverson’s observation of a “helpful shadow” (444) in *Moby-Dick* is analogous to the function of the sea and sharks in Winton’s coastal pastorals, including “Family.” Leaper’s encounter with the exterior shadows of the coastal pastoral setting—those cast by the water tower, in the “dark lines” of swell in a powerful sea (Winton 185), and the shadow of the “shark moiling beneath” (Winton 185)—precedes his recognition of the shadows within himself. Though the complex pastoral design denies simple resolution to the conflicts of the narrative, the nature of the conflicts themselves have become clear to the protagonist. Ultimately, it is these shadows of the coast and the

sea, including sharks, which become necessary, even beneficial, in the integration of a divided self.

## 5. 'Misunderstood Monsters'

In Winton's narrative, sharks encapsulate Bennett's "lure and threat of oceans and beaches;" shadows in the narrative are at once the object of both horror and fascination, even sympathy. Endangered as they are in real world, sharks often appear, too, in Winton's fiction as a maligned, threatened species. Like the dying tiger shark of Winton's novella, *Blueback*, which is hooked to a drum line and, having dragged its buoy along the coast, eventually washes up dead on the beach. Or the white shark hung from the jetty in the novel *Shallows*. The dead shark is a powerful, dualistic symbol, a metaphor of the simultaneous darkness within, and fragility of, the psyche.

The following chapter of this exegesis will discuss the symbol of the dead shark, the poetic significance of a character attempting to vanquish the 'shadow;' the proposition that the destruction of the shark—like the attempted destruction of Ahab's White Whale—arrives with the destruction of the self, destroying a character's opportunities for redemption and the chance to understand their deeper selves (Halverson 445).

In his article "Misunderstood Monsters," Peter Benchley, the author of *Jaws*, wrote of the "paradox inherent in our reckless assault on sharks" (35). In recent times, Benchley has spoken and written mournfully of his first novel that had him, in his own words, "catapulted to two-bit celebrity" (32), and great white sharks vulnerable to extinction. He wrote: "As the bizarre overreaction to *Jaws* demonstrated, while we may fear sharks and profess to hate them, we are also thrilled by them" (35). Benchley references here the oft-quoted writing of biologist E. O. Wilson:

We're not just afraid of predators, we're transfixed by them, prone to weave stories and fables and chatter endlessly about them, because fascination creates preparedness, and preparedness, survival. In a deeply tribal sense, we love our monsters.

(qtd. in Ellis 109)

Wilson's observation of the restorative mythological function of monsters is reinforced by the etymology of the word itself. The Latin root of monster, *monēre*, means not only to warn but also to remind and advise, to instruct (Ibrahim 130).

The simultaneous warning and instruction that the shark presents in Winton's fiction has become emblematic of the narratives' complexities as pastorals, a mode Leo Marx describes as a "source of writing that is invaluable for its power to enrich and clarify our experience" (11). The ever-present shadow of the shark establishes Western Australian coastal settings, these liminal spaces away from the urban, as troubled idylls in which the writer seeks to both unsettle and reorder the coastal imaginary.

The following chapters will take a closer look at these re-imaginings in contemporary Western Australian coastal pastorals. Firstly, I will discuss the ways in which masculinity is interrogated and reimagined in Tim Winton's short story, "Boner McPharlin's Moll," a pastoral narrative that explicitly engages with, and complicates, hegemonic rural masculinities.

## VANQUISHING THE SHADOW: PASTORAL MASCULINITY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COASTAL NARRATIVES

*To and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.*

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

### 1. The Windy Season and the shadows of men

The creative production, *The Windy Season*, began as a novel about the search for a missing older brother, Elliot: a young adult Western Australian male who appears as an enigmatic figure in the eyes of his younger brother, Paul. Elliot's undisclosed secrets and troubles, and Paul's desire to make sense of them, propel the narrative. But in the early stages of writing, the narrative became more than a search for a young man and increasingly a search for an understanding of what I suspected were the troubles of Australian manhood, seemingly plagued, too, by its own secrets and vulnerabilities. In Paul's retreat from the city to the fishing town of Stark, *The Windy Season* sought to interrogate notions of Australian masculinity by utilising a pastoral setting and the non-urban locus of the archetypal man of Australian myth, the "bushman" (Davison 429).

This chapter will discuss Winton's short story "Boner McPharlin's Moll," and examine how the pastoral space is used to interrogate masculinity in an Australian rural context.

### 2. "Shadows in the water:" Masculine darkness in "Boner McPharlin's Moll"

"Boner McPharlin's Moll," published in Winton's 2004 short story collection, *The Turning*, is a coming-of-age narrative. Narrated by thirteen-year-old Jackie, "Boner McPharlin's Moll" begins in 1970 in Angelus, a fictional whaling town located on

Western Australia's southern coast. The story's title refers to Gordon 'Boner' McPharlin, Jackie's adolescent crush and the town scoundrel, with whom Jackie is both "appalled and enchanted" (252): "Boner McPharlin was the solitary rough boy that country towns produce, or perhaps require. The sullen, smouldering kid at the back of the class" (252).

In the opening passages of the story, the eponymous Boner McPharlin, who wears "his smirk like a battlemask" (253), represents for the young Jackie the rural masculine archetype. She describes him as "a legendary figure" (251):

In his Levi's and thongs he had that truckin stride, like a skater's wade, swaying hip to hip with his elbows flung and his chest out. He had a fuzz on his chin and an enigmatic smirk. His whole body gave off a current of sexy insouciance.

(251)

His phallic nickname, too, explicitly establishes the masculinity at the core of his characterisation, and positions the issue of Australian masculinity at the heart of the narrative. At the start of the story, Jackie knows little of Boner McPharlin, "only the legend. He was just a posture, an attitude, a type" (252). The story of Boner McPharlin is set up as the story of a myth.

In his article "The Australian Legend: Writing Australian Masculinity/Writing 'Australian' Masculine," Linzi Murrie defines the mythic Australian man as he appears in Russell Ward's "celebrated, much contested, but still provocative thesis" (Carey), *The Australian Legend*:

Our man is practical rather than theoretical, he values physical prowess rather than intellectual capabilities, and he is good in a crisis but otherwise laid-back. He is common and earthy, so he is intolerant of affectation and cultural pretensions; he is no wowser, uninhibited in the pleasures of drinking, swearing and gambling; he is independent and egalitarian, and is a hater of authority and a 'knocker' of eminent people. This explicit rejection of individualism is echoed in his unswerving loyalty to his mates.

(Murrie 68)

Boner McPharlin mirrors this Australian rural archetype, “the embodiment of rebellion” (Winton 251), located in binary opposition to the feminised urban; a pastoral masculinity, or what Murrie describes here as a “bushman masculinity,” a masculine identity “positioned against an excluded 'feminine' or 'non-masculine’” (68): “in terms of an Australian nationalism, the legend's 'other' here represents authority, respectability, and intellectualism” (Murrie 68).

When Boner is expelled from high school and joins the meatworks—the abattoir—he works in the boning room with his father, earning his nickname. Boner’s departure from the “feminine or ‘non-masculine’” (Murrie 68) space that is represented by the school is significant also as it suggests an inherited masculinity, following in the tradition of his father. The adoption of his father’s masculine identity is complicated later in the narrative when Boner’s hatred for his father, and perhaps the hatred for himself, and the reasons that underlie both, become apparent.

Despite the title, “Boner McPharlin’s Moll” is Jackie’s story. Jackie, now an adult woman living in Perth, reflects upon her adolescence in a rural Australian town in the seventies. The novel’s predominant setting—spatially and temporally removed from an urban present to a rural past—is important, for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes the story as pastoral. Secondly, the rural setting allows for a re-examination of archetypes and myths in non-urban Australia, an important symbolic location that Ward read as the wellspring of “the national self-image” (Australian legend re-visited 174). And lastly, Jackie’s concern with her adolescence that begins in 1970 allows the narrative to explore changes in gender relations, in particular the growing struggle for empowerment by women that occurs in this period of Australian history (Magarey).

It is two years after Boner McPharlin is expelled from school, when Jackie is fifteen, that she again glimpses him, stalking Angelus in his HT van:

That kind of car was trouble. It was a sin-bin, a shaggin-wagon, a slut-hut, and as he did bog-laps of the main drag, from the memorial roundabout to the harbour’s edge – the rumble of his V-8 was menacing and hypnotic.

(255)

When Jackie accepts his offer of a ride in full view of the town, “a jury of peers staring out at (her) from the café” (257), she earns her reputation in the town as “Boner McPharlin’s Moll:”

I’d done something reckless by climbing in beside Boner. I’d made something happen. What frightened me was that I didn’t know what it was.

(256)

Though Jackie’s acceptance of a ride in the car with Boner is enough to cement her reputation as “Boner’s jailbait” (258), the car ride itself is a sexual non-event, an event Jackie later describes as “the unglamorous truth” (257):

We didn’t stay at the beach – didn’t even pull into its infamous carpark – but wheeled around beneath the Norfolk Island Pines and headed back to the main street of the town.

(256)

The non-sexual nature of their interactions, as they remain throughout the story despite Jackie’s own sexual curiosity, reveals another element to the falseness of the myth of Boner McPharlin. Boner’s supposed sexual prowess, as presumed by both Jackie and her friends, “his sexy insouciance” (251), is undermined by the reality of Jackie’s awkward interactions with him: his extreme silence and apparent sexual disinterest. Nevertheless, Jackie becomes ostracised by her peers as rumours of her alleged transgressions spread throughout the town:

After school I stayed indoors. I went nowhere until the next Saturday when, in a mood of bleak resignation, I went walking alone. I was at the memorial roundabout when Boner saw me. He hesitated, then pulled over. I will never know why he did, whether it was boredom or an act of mercy.

(258)

Jackie is, once more, picked up by Boner in the town centre, and she experiences “the weirdest sense of having been rescued” (258). They drive towards the sea, away from the town centre, and in a romantic passage of nature writing that appears to adhere to

Leo Marx's definition of simple pastoral, Winton's description of nature offers the scene "the soft veil of nostalgia" (Marx 6):

Within five minutes we were out of town altogether. We cruised down along the coast past peppermint thickets and spud farms to long white beaches and rocky coves where the water was so turquoise-clear that, cold or not, you had the urge to jump in fully clothed. Wind raked through our hair from the open windows . . . I ached with happiness.

(258)

However, Jackie's pastoral escape with Boner McPharlin holds only a tenuous grip to the sublime: "The longer we drove the stranger his silence seemed to me. I couldn't admit to myself that I was becoming rattled" (258). Jackie attempts to preserve a simpler understanding of Boner's masculinity, an interpretation that itself hints at the fragility of such a construct: her growing awareness of his unexplained injuries and troubling disappearances:

I loved everything about Boner, his silence, his incuriosity, the way he evaded body contact, how he smelled of pine resin and tobacco smoke. I liked his sleepy narrow eyes and his far off stares. The bruises on his arms and neck intrigued me, they made me think of men and knives and cold carcasses, his mysterious world. Sometimes he'd vanish for days and I'd be standing abject at the Esso until dark. And then he'd turn up again, arm down the door with nothing to say.

(260)

Throughout the narrative, Jackie's adolescent fascination with Boner develops into an emerging awareness of the vulnerabilities underpinning the silences of men, including her father, who she describes as "dour, punctilious and completely without tact" (259): "Apart from dinner time and at the end-of-term delivery of school reports, he barely registered my presence" (260). Conversely, Jackie describes her mother as "passive and serene:"

She liked to pat my hair when I went to bed. I always thought she was a bit simple until I discovered, quite late in the piece, that she was addicted to Valium.

(260)

Jackie comes to understand the burden carried by the older women in the town; the damage wrought by their male partners, both physical and psychological. She later learns of her father's failed professional ambition that underlies the "terrible quiet" of her parent's marriage (268):

I could feel the ghosts of their marriage hovering within reach, the story behind their terrible quiet almost at hand, and I hesitated, wanting and not wanting to hear more.

(268)

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the narrative deliberately reflects upon the changes in gender relations in 1970s Australia. Jackie's "new hippy teachers," recent arrivals to the town, encourage what they see as her "pushing social boundaries" (262): "to them my little rebellion was refreshing, spirited, charming" (262). Winton depicts a town in the process of social change, but uncomfortably so. In tandem with the sense of peril in Jackie's adolescent adventures and learning, there is, too, a prevailing sense of unease about the coming-of-age of Angelus itself and a questioning of its veracity:

My young teachers' sisterly hugs gave way to stilted homilies. Free love was cool but a girl didn't want to spread her favours too thin, did she. I grimaced and smirked until they left me alone.

(262)

Some changes within the town are certainly real and not illusory. Unlike her mother, and women of older generations within the town, Jackie is destined to escape the confines of Angelus, to do the things she "dreamt of, some diplomatic stints, the UN, some teaching, a think tank" (284). However, as I will discuss later in the chapter, her eventual departure and professional success in adulthood, rather than an emancipatory step beyond the boundaries of Angelus and the damage observed in her childhood and adolescence, seem designed more to accentuate the persistent psychological hold that the town continues to have upon her. Ultimately, the reader will find Jackie at middle

age, stalled in the process of returning to the city. In this complex—and in crucial ways, problematical—final image of the narrative, the protagonist finds herself stranded between the past and the future. Hers is a pastoral retreat without return.

In the same way that the pastoral setting of White Point is shadowed in Winton's "Family"—"the shadow moiling underneath" (185)—the coastal town of Angelus in "Boner McPharlin's Moll" is, too, stalked by allusions of leviathan. "*Creatures*" (author's emphasis 264) and sharks are repeated motifs throughout the story, themes and images that become increasingly explicit as the underlying troubles of the narrative are brought to bear:

We drove out to the whaling station where the waters of the bay were lit with oily prisms and the air putrid with the steam of boiling blubber. I puked before I even saw anything . . . He was grinning. He pointed out the threshing shadows in the water, the streaking fins, the eruptions on the surface.

Horrible, I said.

He shrugged and drove me back to town.

(261)

The sharks in the narrative surface as Jackie's suspicions about Boner's silence turn to discomfort, and her isolation in the town becomes something darker, "brutal" (262):

In the talk, passed notes, the toilet scrawl, I sucked Boner McPharlin, I sucked anybody. And more. At the drives Boner hired me out, car to car, Jackie Martin meatworker. Slack Jackie.

(263)

The judgment towards Jackie is universal: in the predatory approach of men, "boys newly emboldened to try their luck" (263); the gossiping talk of her peers; to the hippy teachers, "their Aquarian indulgence withered" (262). However, it is the pervasive sense of estrangement she feels within the patriarchal dominion of Angelus that Jackie finds hardest to endure: "I could bear the vile talk behind my back, but all the icy silence on the surface wore me down. I had enough remoteness at home" (263).

Eventually Jackie's disillusionment, "the deeper bleakness" (266) she feels as a result of the masculine "remoteness" of Angelus, is directed, too, at Boner: "His silence

began to seem idiotic, and the endless driving bored me” (266). Jackie ceases to go on rides with him, and his response to her withdrawal from him, though wounded, is predictably muted:

Ride, Jack? he murmured.

Nah, I said. Not anymore. But thanks.

He shrugged and dragged on his roly. For a moment I thought he'd say something but he just chewed his lip. I knew I'd hurt him and it felt like a betrayal, yet I walked away without another word.

(267)

Jackie's encounter with the sharks at the harbour, “the threshing shadows in the water” (261), also precedes her awareness of other changes taking place in the town. The year Jackie turns sixteen she notices “something feverish in the air” (269):

The first overdose didn't really register. I wasn't at the school social – I was no longer the dancing sort – so I didn't see the ambulancemen wheel the dead girl out of the toilets . . . But that overdose was only the first of many. Smack became a fact of life in Angelus. The stuff was everywhere and nobody seemed able or inclined to do a thing about it.

(270)

The shadows of the sharks in the Angelus harbour might be also read, then, as a metaphor of the clandestine movement of drugs through the town, and the associated police corruption that Jackie will later become aware of. The surfacing of heroin trafficking and addiction in the fictional setting of 1970s Angelus reflects the real-life “flourishing” of the heroin drug trade in Australia in the second half of the twentieth century (Gibson). A National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre report, titled “Global and Australian Heroin Markets,” charts the increased demand for heroin that came “with Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War” (Gibson 45), the drug becoming an established focus of organised crime and “corrupted police” by the late 1960s (Gibson 45).

The arrival of heroin in Winton's *Angelus* also constitutes a powerful complication of the rural coastal imaginary, subverting the myth of simple pastoral. Winton's coastal rural town is not removed from urban complications. Rather, *Angelus* is well within their reach. It is winter when Boner McPharlin is "found out at Thunder Beach with his legs broken and his face like an Aubergine" (270). In the hospital, under medication and incoherent, Boner refuses to out the men who have beaten him, or why. Instead he talks for the first time to Jackie about his late mother when he describes her "as like a picture, kinda, real pretty" (272): "I remember. When I was little, when I was sick, when she rubbed my back, in bed . . ." (272). Boner's brief moment of candour, as it comes whilst medicated, with his head "battered" (273), is a familiar depiction of male communication in Winton's work. Jules Smith has observed that, in Winton's fiction, "characters . . . often have to be in extremis in order to find themselves" (Tim Winton: *Critical Perspective*). Further to this, I argue that there is a suggestion in Winton's fiction that it is Australian men, in particular, that can only speak freely "in extremis," that it is only when medicated or hallucinating or near-death that a man is briefly liberated from his masculine constraints and can speak openly. Like the fevered confession of the badly dehydrated Luther Fox in *Dirt Music*, "lacerated, sunburnt, crusty with salt and dirt, his lips split, his eyes red above bruises of exhaustion" (155). It is in a fleeting moment of consciousness that Fox is able to tell his lover, Georgie Jutland, of the traumatic memory of his dying sister: "I didn't tell you. About Bird. She lived for a while. On machines. They kept shovin all these forms in my hands. I wasn't gonna do it. I stayed and stayed. Think I just got tired. They wore me down" (*Dirt Music* 157). In a similar state of semi-consciousness, in the hospital, Boner hints at some horror witnessed, involving his father:

I come in and he's bent over her, hands in her, blanket across her throat, eyes round, veins screaming in her neck and she sees me not a word sees me and I'm not saying a word, just lookin at the sweat shine on his back and his hands in the muck and she's dead now anyway, doesn't matter, does it.

(272)

Boner refers ramblingly to the sharks of the harbour, utterances that betray his obsession with the animal—a simultaneous hatred of the shark, and an even darker identification with them:

Sharks know, he said, they know. You see em flash? Twist into whalemeat? Jesus they saw away. It's in the blood, he had it, twistin all day into hot meat. And never sleep, not really.

(272)

The shadows that lurk within the town, and the shadows that underlie the silence of Boner McPharlin, have been revealed, however Jackie has not yet come to understand them all, and the way they are interconnected: “I was sixteen years old and all at sea” (271).

The darkening pastoral is tempered by one more moment of pastoral relief, when Jackie and the recovering Boner McPharlin go fishing together, driving away from town “in the Valiant with two rods and a lard bucket full of tackle and bait” (276):

Out on Thunder Beach we cast for salmon and even caught a few. We stood a few yards apart with the waves clumping up and back into the deep swirling gutters in a quiet that didn't require talk. I watched and learnt and found to my surprise that I enjoyed the whole business. Nobody came by to disturb us. The white beach shimmered at our backs and the companionable silence between us lasted the whole drive back into town.

(277)

However, of course, the complications and corruptions within the town remain. In the “new year,” Jackie finds Boner “parked beside the steam cleaner at the Esso” (278):

I knew he'd seen me coming but he seemed anxious and reluctant to greet me. A sedan pulled up beside him—just eased in between us—and the way Boner came to attention made me veer away across the tarmac and keep going.

(278)

In her last year of high school Jackie excels: “I became a school prefect, won a History prize” (278). Her academic success, like her later professional successes, distances her

from Boner, attaining the “authority, respectability, and intellectualism” that represents the aforementioned feminine “other” to the narrow masculine construction of Boner McPharlin (Murrie 68):

Boner taught me to drive on the backroads. We fished occasionally and he showed me the gamefishing chair he'd bolted to the tray of the Land Rover so he could cast for sharks at night. His hands shook sometimes and I wondered what pills they were that he had in those film canisters on the seat. I smoked a little dope with him and then didn't see him for weeks at a time.

(278)

Boner's greatest level of communication, whilst unencumbered from medication, illicit drugs or injury, comes after Jackie's final high school exam, where she finds him “in the shade . . . parked illegally at the kerb beneath the trees” (280).

Ride? he murmured.

Thanks, but I'm going home to bed. That was my last exam.

Good?

All except French. I was in beaucoup shit today.

Bo-what?

Beaucoup. It's French. Means lots of.

(280)

The scene accentuates the growing intellectual and emotional distance between the characters, but also the benign motivation of Boner McPharlin, his attempt at friendship, and perhaps a deeper desire to hold on to the humanity represented by Jackie. Boner hands Jackie a gift, a small sculpture of a shark he has made, a foregrounding of the way she will come to see Boner, as a maligned “creature,” a masculine creation both nurtured and forsaken by the town:

Made you somethin, he murmured.

I looked up and he passed me a piece of polished steel, a shark that was smooth and heavy in my hand.

Hey, it's lovely.

Friday he said. I'm havin a bomfire. Massacre Point. Plenty piss.

Bo-coo piss. Tell ya mates.

(280)

Jackie doesn't tell anyone about the party at Massacre Point. "It was so unlike him to organize anything like this," she observes (280). Jackie worries, for Boner's sake, that no one will turn up to his party: "He was probably doing it for me and I hated to think of him disappointed (280). However, when Jackie arrives at Massacre Point, "Boner's fire . . . as big as a house" (280), she sees that "the dirt turnaround above the beach was jammed with cars and there must have been a hundred people down there. A blur of bodies silhouetted by flames" (281). Jackie resents the crowd, "the shadows of classmates:"

I thought of the shitty things these kids had said about us. They were the same people. Fuck the lot of you, I thought. I'm his friend. His only friend. And only his friend.

(281)

The party at Massacre Point becomes a pivotal event, one that is returned to in several other connected stories in *The Turning*. Jackie describes a complex pastoral scene on the beach at night, both nightmarish and triumphant, Boner's final act to assert himself in a changing world:

All of Boner's vehicles were there. At the ready was a pile of fuel . . . Stuck in the sand in the firelight was the school sign itself with the daft motto—SEE FAR, AIM HIGH . . . beyond the fire was a trailer full of ice and meat. On old doors between drums were beer kegs, cooking gear and cassettes. There were cut-down forty-fours to barbecue in and a full roasting spit with a beast on it.

(281)

Down near the water, "trailing crowds like a guru," Boner waits for sharks. Though thrilled by the scene, Jackie's description of it accentuates the spectacle that it is, the performance:

While we stood there kids burnt kites above us and fireworks fizzed across the sand. The air was full of smoke and of the smells of scorching meat. It was the beach of Ithaca, it was Gatsby's place, Golding's island.

(281 – 282)

Jackie's literary allusions to the mythic masculine domains of epic heroes in Homer's *Odyssey* and Fitzgerald's *Jay Gatsby* maintain the complex design of the pastoral scene at Massacre Point. The name of the setting itself, "Massacre Point," though unexplained, suggests a legacy of violence in Angelus, perhaps of a colonial period genocide of Indigenous inhabitants of the coast, or relating to the slaughter of whales. The scene is full of savage imagery, the "beast" on the spit (281), the "tubs of blood and offal that boys were ladling into the surf to chum for sharks" (281). Winton casts a persistent shadow of violence over a littoral setting that is complicated further by Jackie's transcendent descriptions:

About midnight the beef on the spit was ready and we hacked at it, passed it around and ate with our hands. Everyone's eyes shone. Our teeth glistened. Our every word was funny.

(282)

Boner parades on the shoreline before the dark sea, fishing lines in the water:

Then the big reel on the back of the Landy began to scream . . .  
Boner's earrings glittered in the firelight as he took up the rod, clamped on the drag and set the hook with a heave. Line squirted out into the dark.

(282)

Boner performs for the assembled crowd, "pumping and winding" the rod for hours (282), the uneducated boy in front of a peer group that is about to leave him behind. In that moment, however, he briefly reattains the idealised masculine image that had initially delivered him status: "He looked beautiful in the firelight, as glossy and sculpted as the steel carving he'd given me" (282). Boner's masculine performance recalls Victoria L. Bromley's definition of masculinity as an inherently "vulnerable identity, one in constant need of affirmation" (Bromley 156). His final act before the

crowd is the killing of the shark with his “shark sticker” (282)—a handmade spear—a plainly phallic symbol:

When the shark bellied up into the shallow wash, Boner limped into the water with his inch-thick spear and drove it through the creature’s head and a kind of exhausted sigh went up along the beach.

The fire burnt down. We drank and boozed until sun up.

(282)

Just as it was in Winton’s “Family,” with the arrival of the shark the story is brought into relief. The sea, that had in the beginning of the narrative delivered aching happiness, now delivers a creature that is increasingly symbolic, both for the perils of opioid drugs and corrupt policing that encircle the town, and, with the shark’s quick death, a metaphor for the tragic character of Boner, who himself had been lured in by those same forces and nearly killed.

Two days after the party at Massacre Point, Jackie departs for the city and university: “It was a long time before I looked back” (282). However, what begins is a cycle of retreats to the town of her childhood, as if repeatedly drawn to the psychological shadows that remain there.

The image of the shark figures strongly in the final half of the narrative. On a trip south from the city to visit her parents, Jackie drives out to the home that Boner shares with his father and finds him “on his cot with a pipe on his chest and the ropery smell of pot in the air . . . On the walls were a set of shark jaws” (284). Looking “confused”, once more in an altered state of consciousness, Boner confesses his desire to kill his father with his shark “sticker” (284):

He got off the bed in stages, like an old man.

One day I’ll kill him, he said. Take me sticker down there and jam it through his fuckin head.

It’s Jackie, I said.

I don’t care. You think I care?

(284)

Years later, Boner will literally adopt the form of the shark, wearing “shark jaws around his neck” when he is found “in a state,” cowering naked behind his shed, his father lying dead in the house nearby (285). Jackie returns again to Angelus after news that Boner McPharlin is in custody:

I flew to Angelus expecting Boner to be up on a murder charge, but when I arrived I found that he was not in the lock-up but in the district hospital under heavy sedation.

(285)

Boner has not killed his father, and in this way his characterisation remains benevolent, even good, though vulnerable, unable to resist the patriarchal forces that have brutalised him. A detective tells Jackie of his condition:

He was naked when he was found. He had a set of shark jaws around his neck and his head and face were badly cut. His shack was full of weapons and ammunition and . . . well, some disturbing pornography . . . Ah, there was also some injury to his genitals.

(285)

In his bedroom, Jackie discovers something like a lair:

Boner’s hut looked like a cyclone had been through it. The floor was a tangle of tools and spare parts, of broken plates and thrown food, as though he’d gone on a rampage . . . His mattress was hacked open and the shark sticker had been driven into it. They were right. He’d lost his mind.

(286)

The form of the shark is conjured again when Jackie learns the severity of Boner’s psychic implosion (Millet):

A squarish set of shark jaws lay on the pillow. It took me a moment to register the neat pile of magazines beside it. On impulse I reached down to pick one off the pile but froze when I saw it. This was the porn they’d told me about. The cover featured the body of a women spread across the bonnet of a big

American car, her knees wide. There were little holes burnt in the paper where the woman's anus and vagina had been, as though someone had touched the glossy paper with a precisely aimed cigarette. On the model's shoulders, boxed in with sticky tape, was my face, my head. A black and white image of me at sixteen . . . I felt a rush of nausea, and rage.

(287)

Jackie feels "robbed, undone" (287). She reluctantly accompanies Boner back to the city where he is admitted into a hospital and "never released" (288). She drives past the hospital every day but only visits once a year, at "New Year:" "I conceded that he was sick. He hadn't been responsible for his actions. I didn't go any more frequently than that because my disgust overrode everything else" (288). The now wheelchair-bound Boner is described in monstrous terms, Winton returning once more to the motif of the shark:

His hands were claw-like, his knees horribly distorted. When I realised how bad (his arthritis) had become, I sent along supplies of chondroitin in the hope that it might give him some small relief. I don't know if it ever helped but he seemed to enjoy the fact that the nasty-tasting powder was made from shark cartilage.

(288)

Boner hints at a visit at the hospital from four men he calls "santa's helpers" (289):

Cunts are scared. Came by all scared. Big red, he's lost his hair.  
Frightened I'll dog him. Fuckin cunts, every one of em. Come in here like that. Fuckin think they are?

Someone visited?

Santa's helpers.

(289)

Boner's complex characterisation, something like Benchley's "misunderstood monster," is perfectly captured in his final exchange with Jackie, the last time she sees him alive, where he is in turns detestable and pitiable:

Get me out, Jack. Let's piss off.

You are out. See, we're in the courtyard.

Out! *Out* you stupid bitch.

I'm going now.

( . . . )

Well it's not fuckin right. I never said a word. Never once.

Boner, I can't stay.

Just drivin, that's all I did. Never touched anything, anybody, and never said a word—Jesus!

I'll turn you around.

Please, Jackie. Let's ride, let's just arc it up and go.

Both of us were crying when I wheeled him into the darkness of the ward. He slumped in his chair. I left him there.

(291)

At Boner McPharlin's funeral, Jackie sees four men she recognises: "they were older, of course, but I knew they were the cops from back home" (291). She observes "the tall redhead cop, his eyes still watchful" (291). She understands, "too late" (291), how Boner had been brutalised by the masculine code of the town, the crimes they had made him commit and the secrets they forced him to keep: "I thought of Boner's fire, his twisted bones, his terrible silence" (291). He was, she now knows, their "creature" (292):

All that driving, the silence, the leeway, it had to be drugs. He was driving their smack. Or something. Whatever it was he was their creature and they broke him.

(292)

"Boner McPharlin's Moll" reimagines rural masculinity not as an ideal, but as a brutalising, deforming hegemony. Winton's characterisation of Boner amounts to a damning portrait of masculinity, but also one that is sympathetic. Boner is drawn as a victim of his own myth, diminished by it. Similarly, Murrie argues that the construction of masculinity is ultimately reductive, "defined as much by what it is not, as by what it is" (68). Once more, Murrie's description of the Australian man as he appears in Ward's *Australian Legend* epitomises Boner McPharlin:

His independence, his inarticulateness, and his nomadic existence all position him outside of society at large, but not outside of all society. Among his mates—where his independence is sacrificed to the obligations of group loyalty—his masculinity is given its legitimacy.

(68)

By the end of the narrative, Jackie comes to fully understand Boner McPharlin's silence and the trauma and fear that underlie it: the way he was both isolated and endangered by his misplaced loyalties to men. Boner McPharlin is the mythic Australian man written as tragedy.

### 3. Vanquishing the shadow

Where Jackie finds an understanding of the shadows in the narrative, if not redemption, Boner McPharlin finds ruin. The surfacing and then gradual disembodiment of sharks—from “shadows in the water” to the killing of the shark at Massacre Point, to the “squarish jaws” on the bed in Boner's room—run in parallel with the character's gradual psychic disintegration. Boner's obsession with sharks, and his murderous pursuit of them with his “shark sticker,” evokes Ahab's obsession with destroying the White Whale of *Moby-Dick*.

Halverson writes of Ahab: “Projecting his own unconscious self on to the whale, he would assault and destroy it—and therewith destroy himself” (441). Ahab sees *Moby-Dick* not only as the creature that bit off his leg but as the “monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them” (Melville 222), as “that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil” (Melville 222), as “all the subtle demonisms of life and thought” (222), as, in short, “all evil” (222). It might be read, too, that Boner McPharlin has come to see the shark as the embodiment of the all the damage done to him, and has, as Melville wrote of Ahab, “pitted himself, all mutilated, against it” (222).

Lydia Millet, writing on the wilderness settings of contemporary Alaskan writer David Vann, observes Vann's frequent return to untamed landscapes as “the locus for

men's anger" (Millet). Ultimately, as Millett argues, it's when these characters "try to assert their dominance over the wild that their psyches and personal lives implode" (Millet). In the case of Boner McPharlin, like Ahab, it might be argued that also the inverse is true: that in a threatened psychological state, he tries to assert his dominance over the wild.

#### 4. Retreat without return: "Boner McPharlin's Moll," a complex pastoral

As mentioned earlier, Jackie's pastoral retreat is both spatial and temporal, a movement away from the city whilst also a movement into memory and the past. However, the short story ultimately subverts the "retreat-return structure" of the pastoral (Cannon 57). Corruptions and complexities archetypally associated with the city have infiltrated "the borders of the pristine," the rural town of Angelus (Cannon 58). Furthermore, through complex depictions of a damaging legacy of rural masculinity, in particular violence and the subjugation of women, the notion that the town was ever simple or idyllic in the first place is clearly put into question:

I didn't see it whole yet—it was too early for the paranoia and second-guessing to set in—but I could feel things change shape around me. My life, my history, the sense I had of myself, were no longer solid.

(292)

Rather than returning to the city, in a completion of the pastoral movement of retreat and return, the reader last finds Jackie still in Angelus in the hours after Boner's funeral, sitting "in the car beneath the lighthouse" (292). It is a tenuous final image; the protagonist is in search of pastoral relief at the foot of an enduring oceanic symbol. It suggests multiple potential readings. The benign, steadfast monument of the lighthouse—enduring the weather and the passage of time—might be read as a stabilising symbol of service and also warning, and a signal that the shadows in the narrative have been illumined. But it is also an explicitly phallic monument, whilst simultaneously a relic: the lighthouse's once simple and noble purpose made redundant, of course, through the arrival of modern navigational technology. It is a

complex image that provides both the possibility of hope and illumination, and at the same time a sense of change and loss, the sense that the moment for redemption has passed.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jackie's inability to "return"—to find wholeness and stability in her successful, self-determined professional life away from the town—is also worth questioning. Why would Winton deny his female character psychological emancipation from the brutalising patriarchy of the town, in the face of the suggested social changes of the predominant decade in which the story occurs? This is, of course, despite Jackie realising, beyond the confines of Angelus, things she had "dreamt of" (284). It might be read, within Winton's final image, that some intangible value was lost in the social changes brought about in Jackie's 1970s adolescence—an unhelpful implication that the rewards of female liberation were illusory, that liberation could only be, in a way, "dreamt of" and never truly realised, and that there might be some kind of peril in its pursuit.

This thesis argues that, whilst acknowledging the questions in the narrative's representation of women, Winton's reimagining of hegemonic rural masculinity is nevertheless important. It is the characterisation of Boner McPharlin—the "creature" manufactured by the patriarchal forces around him, the corrupt police and a community committed to the rural masculine myth—and the way these narrative elements are reflected and stressed by the oceanic pastoral setting, that reveals Tim Winton's complex pastoral vision. In her article "Idylls of Masculinity," Susan Reid writes of the pastoral genre's "juxtaposition of the complex and the simple, the mind and the body, interior and exterior" (95). It is this chiaroscuro poetics of Western Australian coastal pastoral—its light and its dark, the "lure and threat"—that, in the case of "Boner McPharlin's Moll," enables a complex re-imagining, or re-examination, of the trauma and dysfunction within the male psyche, and within the hegemonic masculine culture more broadly. Jackie's retreat from an urban present to nature and to the past enables her to "encounter the shadow" of Boner McPharlin and confront and re-examine the myths of hegemonic rural Australian masculinity.

## “THE DEATH OF NATURE:” NEW VERSIONS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COASTAL PASTORAL

### 1. Ecofeminism and the Post-Pastoral

“When we speak in this age,” Gifford writes, “we apparently do so with the differently situated voices that make up the shape-shifting postmodern self” (*Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice* 3). However, as Gifford argues in his introduction to the contemporary relevance of the pastoral, “this is also the age of holism, of the yearning for a sense of the self as a whole, of a drive toward the reintegration of the self with the natural world to counter postmodern instability and disconnection” (3). Gifford proposes a new version of pastoral—the post-pastoral—that offers a vital way to engage with contemporary tensions between the natural world and the self. Where Leo Marx proposed the inherent complexity of the pastoral, and its response to the Industrial Revolution and “civilization’s growing power and complexity” (Marx 9), Gifford writes of a new version of the genre at work in the age of climate science, writing that he describes as urgent, concerned with our very survival as a species.

In Gifford’s definition, the ‘post’ of post-pastoral “is more conceptual than temporal”:

It is ‘post’ in the sense of being beyond the traps of the pastoral, of being aware of some of the problematics of the pastoral, of pushing into the complexities of celebration and responsibility, of being a part of nature and yet uneasy with relationships of ownership and exploitation.

(Judith Wright’s *Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral* 1)

This final point, “the ownership and exploitation” of nature, is key to my reading of a Western Australian post-pastoral, and its engagement with what Gifford describes as “the ‘ecofeminists’ realisation that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities” (*Pastoral* 146).

In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant examines the correlation between “the women’s movement and the ecology movement,” both being “sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy’s modus operandi in nature and society” (xx):

The vision of the ecology movement has been to restore the balance of nature disrupted by industrialization and overpopulation. It has emphasized the need to live within the cycles of nature, as opposed to the exploitative, linear mentality of forward progress . . . Similarly, the women’s movement has exposed the costs for all human beings of competition in the marketplace, the loss of meaningful productive economic roles for women in early capitalist society, and the view of both women and nature as psychological and recreational resources for the harried entrepreneur-husband.

(xxi)

Gifford connects the ecofeminist exposure of patriarchal exploitation of the environment to what he refers to as the “sixth aspect” of the post-pastoral (Pastoral 149):

Exploitation, problematic as it is in considering our economic relationship with our planetary environment, has led to the alienation which the pastoral sought to heal through the borderland imaginative space of Arcadia. Today the focus now includes an anxiety about our alienation from nature as well . . . It is this urgent problem with which the sixth aspect of post-pastoral literature seeks to engage

(Pastoral 148)

As has been discussed earlier, the work of Tim Winton frequently places representations of environmental destruction within proximity to representations of the masculine, evident in the killing of the shark in “Boner McPharlin’s Moll,” for example. This chapter will now discuss these representations of patriarchal exploitation of nature in Winton’s fiction, and its relation to a post-pastoral genre.

## 2. Tim Winton and post-pastoral Western Australian coastal narrative

Tim Winton's work has long projected an eco-critical consciousness. The opening vignette of Winton's first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, published in 1982, describes the protagonist Jerra Nilsam's unease over his father's capture of a fish:

'Want to open it for the pearl?'

'No.'

'It might have one.'

'I don't want to cut him up, Dad.'

He wished they had a bigger engine and that the fish would be alive again.

(2)

Brian Matthews describes the complexity of the oceanic pastoral setting of *An Open Swimmer* as at once sublime—beautiful and pure—whilst also the growing site of guilt and corruption:

Sensations of guilt and, gradually, corruption, cluster around the discontinuously-surfacing discussions and recollections of hunting and fishing . . . this guilt and corruption emerge in sinister co-existence with beauty and purity.

(62)

Winton's 1984 novel *Shallows* depicts the battle to end whaling in a small town on Western Australia's south coast, one reviewer describing the novel as a recasting of the "parable of Jonah and the whale; *Shallows* itself shows what happens when it is man who swallows the whale" (Willibanks 221). The main thread of the novel, set in 1978, records a problematising of the rural masculine order. The protagonist, Queenie Cookson, leaves her husband, Cleve, after he reacts violently when she sides with foreign anti-whaling activists who descend on the town. Cleve briefly entertains the masculine self-destruction exhibited by Boner McPharlin—through alcohol and acts of violence towards nature—including an event of near-suicidal shark spearfishing while diving in the bloodied waters off the whaling station. However, Cleve later comes to see the pointlessness in the slaughter of sea creatures. His transformation occurs when

he sees the rotting carcass of a large shark hung from the end of a jetty by fishermen, an image of horror that recalls Hemingway's "Monster of Cojimar:"

A fourteen foot white pointer hung by its tail from the gallows.  
Its skin was dry and tearing where the chains held it. The huge  
guts had fallen forward, bunching grotesquely behind the head,  
and weepy juices drolled from the mouth.

(172)

Cleve is angered by the talk of the men responsible for catching the shark, men he once understood and identified with:

'Not bad, eh?' Baer said, smacking the emery flank with gloved  
hands. 'Not a record, but a nice fight. Forty minutes he was.'

'Yeah,' Cleve said. Tell him it's bloody disgraceful, he  
thought; tell him what you think of hanging it up like that going  
out of shape...stinking like... 'Nice.'

'Shoulda been there, mate.'

'Yeah,' Cleve said. Like hell, he thought.

'What about comin' out next time? See how broad yer skills are,  
eh?'

'Well'—My God, what's the point of it, Cleve thought, where's  
the sense in it?

(172)

Embittered, Cleve leaves the jetty, the men and the dead shark, "full to bursting with the smell and anger of it" (173). It is made clear that Cleve's rejection of the slaughter is not simply one borne of a new environmental awareness, but that it also represents a rejection of a destructive, thoughtless masculinity. "You can piss off mate, he thought. You and all your men's shit" (173). That the male character's enlightenment here is thought rather than spoken emphasises the way in which an individual man becomes isolated in his adoption of an eco-consciousness. In Winton's fiction, environmentalism is the feminine other set against a masculine standard of environmental abuse and neglect.

### 3. *Eyrie*: The disoriented male gaze in Western Australian post-pastoral

Like the environmental conflicts at the heart of *Shallows* and *An Open Swimmer*, Tim Winton's 2013 novel *Eyrie* tells the story of an environmentally sympathetic character pitted against an unsympathetic, patriarchal state: a character who sees himself in opposition to "all those folks, booted and suited, still in the game" (9). Tom Keely, the protagonist, is a disgraced former environmental campaigner, a character battling to retain optimism, "trying to hold to the long view, the greater hopes he'd begun with" (7):

Like appealing to people's higher nature. And getting Nature itself a fair hearing. Which, was, of course, in this state, at such a moment in history, like catching farts in a butterfly net.

(7)

Keely is a strongly Jungian character,

painfully aware of the fact that neither his great religions nor his various philosophies seem to provide him with those powerful animating ideas that would give him the security he needs in face of the present conditions of the world

(Jung 101)

The reader is first introduced to the unemployed, divorced Keely as he suffers an obscene hangover, an anguished condition of consciousness that casts an almost apocalyptic glare across his view over the port city of Fremantle, a city drawn as "capitalist dystopia" (McCredde 310). From his tenth floor apartment, Keely sees "the shining sea, iron rooftops," "all gathering up their cruel, wince-making sheen in the dregs of morning" (Winton 5). With its predominantly elevated, urban setting, *Eyrie* might be read superficially as conscious movement away from the oceanic pastoral, perhaps even an anti-pastoral, a narrative that deliberately departs from nature in order to grapple with the consequences of its death. A closer reading finds that the novel maintains strong links to pastoral convention. Keely's vista, overlooking the gleaming city of Fremantle and to the Indian Ocean, teases with the possibility of pastoral relief. However, the tone of Winton's pastoral here is always nuanced, self-

conscious. Early in the novel, Keely looks west towards the sea and watches a pilot boat depart the wharf, “out into open water:”

Twin plumes of diesel smoke flagging from its stacks, the wake like a whitening wound on the skin of the sea. Which seemed all very lyrical and seafaring until you cracked the door a little and felt the red-plain wind. More hellish updraught than pastoral uplift. Harsh, pitiless. Laden with grit sharp enough to flay a baby-boomer to the bone.

(8)

Keely’s shadows do not inhabit the sea. In *Eyrie*, the symbolism of leviathan is explicitly embodied by the late capitalist fervour and environmental indifference represented by his home state of Western Australia, “the greatest ore deposit in the world. The nation’s quarry, China’s swaggering enabler . . . Leviathan with an irritable bowel” (5). Leviathan, here, assumes a poetic meaning similar to its use in Thomas Hobbes’ famous philosophical work of the same name. Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, “a heated and provocative polemic” (Parkin 3) published in 1651, utilises the myth of leviathan as a “symbol of the State” (Farneti 363).<sup>15</sup> In *Eyrie*, leviathan as State is conjured in unambiguously monstrous terms. Away from the sea, Keely senses the central business district of Perth, lurking:

The great beast’s shining teeth were visible in the east, through the kitchen window. Not that he was looking. But he could feel it at his back, the state capital looking out there on the plain in its sterile Windexed penumbra.

(5)

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<sup>15</sup>In his article “The Name and Nature of Leviathan” Noel Malcolm examines the persistent questions arising from Hobbes’s application of “the title *Leviathan* to his major work of political theory” (21): “why did [Hobbes] select, for the thing he valued most highly in human existence, a name which was so freighted with negative implications—a name likely to conjure up, in the minds of many of his readers, at best a monster and at worst the Devil himself?” (23). Malcolm argues that although Hobbes was likely very aware of these negative connotations of leviathan, “that was not the only interpretation available; there were other, more positive (or, at least, neutral), symbolic meanings to be had” (23).

Winton's leviathan recalls the beast in *The Book of Revelation*, a biblical allusion "indicative of the whole leviathan strain, in which leviathan is the representation of the restless forces of chaos, later to become the representation of evil" (Wallace 68).

Throughout the narrative, Keely's city home is continually described as blinding, hostile: "all that hideous light . . . hot enough to kill an asbestos sparrow" (14). The harsh poetics continue throughout the narrative, saturating the setting:

Acid light plashed underfoot of smashing wall to wall, window upon window, and he waded in it a moment, so suddenly porous and chalky it was all behind his eyes in an instant, fizzing within his skull until it rendered everything outside him in flashes and flickers.

(15)

The description conjures a toxic world, an urban environment that is inhospitable to life. It is a setting that is also essentially shadowless, with "no gentling tones" (15): a dizzyingly reflective environment—a room of mirrors—that does not allow for a coherent reflection; for "the sense of the self as a whole" (Gifford, *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice* 3). Keely instead feels as if he is in a state of disintegration, "trapped like a bug in a jar . . . wilting in the full shock and awe of the sun" (120). Keely's experience, as Lyn McCredden writes, is "an all-consuming personal apocalypse, one that mirrors the whirling corruption of the world around him" (*'Intolerable Significance': Tim Winton's Eyrie*).

The novel's title, *Eyrie*—meaning the nest of a predatory bird, often situated at height on a tree or cliff (Oxford Dictionaries)—is worth considering as it foregrounds the narrative's postmodern critique of "standpoints and viewpoints"<sup>16</sup> (Levin 26), and its examination of the concept of "seeing" and the male gaze<sup>17</sup> (Berger 7).

Keely's vantage point—ten floors up, looking down on the city—positions the narration as a societally removed commentary on the state of the nation, and an

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<sup>16</sup> In *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation*, David Michael Levin argues that "the problematizing of standpoints and viewpoints—in brief, the question of relativism—is an essential part of the postmodern critique of humanism and its vision of rationality" (26)

<sup>17</sup> In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes that men are the "surveyors of women:" "Men 'act' and women 'appear.' Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47).

overrun natural world; his pained assessment of the present is achieved mostly through sight descriptions, in blinding light or “colours so saturated they looked carcinogenic” (Winton, *Eyrie* 15).

From his eyrie, Keely peers often towards scenes of nature and the past. However, the pastoral vision here is self-conscious. Driving down a childhood street Keely observes feeling “the twinge of loss, despite himself” (222): the moment of nostalgic reverie and longing registered and qualified.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the uncertain postmodern vision of the future is invoked in disembodied images of youth, in particular the obscure image of a central young male character, six-year-old Kai, drawn in “wisps and fits and flashes” (49): Keely’s regular migraines and disturbed dreams turning the physical into figments and apparitions.

And perhaps most importantly, as I will also discuss later in this chapter, Keely is also self-aware of his own gaze, disappointed by its sexual objectification of women—its reduction of women to “particularly an object of ‘vision’: a sight” (Berger 47)—but also increasingly aware of his own problematic need to view women and nature as vulnerable and degraded, and in need of rescue. “Men like it,” Keely’s mother Doris observes midway through the narrative, speaking of what she sees as a male attraction to “lost beauty:” “Gives them confidence. Then there’s the added *frisson* of damage. They can’t resist” (216).

Into Keely’s disoriented urban present arrives Gemma Buck: Keely’s high-rise neighbour, and troubled figure from the grassy Perth suburbs of Keely’s past. However, the narrative’s turn to the pastoral brings discomfort rather than relief:

Tommy Keely, she said.

He blinked. It was nasty hearing his name uttered. Here in the building. Out in the open. Through his own screen door.

(27)

Winton locates his pastoral setting once more in early 1970s Australia, the same temporal setting of “Bonner McPharlin’s Moll,” but in *Eyrie* this setting is also spatially removed away from the rural coast, to a suburban Perth street once named Blackboy Crescent (now Grasstree Crescent). Keely’s memories of the street, and of Gemma

Buck, concentrate on scenes of domestic violence in Gemma's home, and upon Keely's own mother and father's attempts to protect the childhoods of Gemma and her two sisters:

Keely thought of the hundred nights the Buck girls came knocking: summer evenings out there on the porch sobbing in their nylon nighties, the sound of glass breaking up the hill behind them. There was always screaming; their place was bedlam after dark . . . Fridays were the worst, when Johnny Buck drank his pay right to closing time and did not care to be admonished by the missus when he came home shitfaced and broke with a couple of brown baggers under his arm and a torn shirt hanging off his back. The beltings were fearsome and public.

(33)

These pastoral scenes, rather than offering simplicity, provide, in their depictions of violence, a complex mirroring of the late industrial present: the congruent images of the "subjugation of nature and women" (Merchant 294). Keely and his father continue the aforementioned characterisation of Winton's male protagonists as self-conscious men pitted in opposition to unconscious masculine horrors. Keely's own environmental fight and idealism is set against his memories of his father, Nev Keely, a large, earnest man who would intervene during these regular instances of domestic violence in their neighbourhood:

When some addled boofhead started playing up the neighbours sent for good ole Nev. He was the holy fool with hands like mallee roots and a heart, while it lasted, as big as a beer keg. Night after night, they sent him out and let him bear it all. And hung back in the shadows, urging him on from a cosy distance.

(35)

Gemma embodies the "lost beauty" of which Keely's mother Doris refers. Gemma's character is defined by her beauty as a young girl, remembered here again by Doris: "God, she was a beautiful child. Don't you remember that gorgeous hair . . . she was

like a little doll” (46). When Keely first sees the adult Gemma he doesn’t recognise her, but nevertheless catalogue’s the woman’s appearance in a crude demonstration of the male gaze, seeing her only as Berger’s “object of ‘vision:” “She’d been pretty once. In her denim skirt and sleeveless top she seemed puffy, almost bruised. Her dirty-blond hair was dry and she had the kippered complexion of the life-long smoker, but any man would still look twice” (25). Now in her forties, Gemma is the carer of her quiet six-year-old grandson, Kai, a boy who has “seen too much” (280). Gemma’s daughter—Kai’s mother—is in a Perth prison, and Gemma works throughout the narrative trying to settle her daughter’s debts with Kai’s drug-dealing father.

Keely attempts to liberate Gemma and Kai with a movement towards the pastoral, taking them on a bird watching trip on Perth’s Swan River. Under Keely’s instruction, the characters lie on their backs in a boat, looking for birds in the overhanging trees of the riverbank. In a passage of nature writing that implies a significant, transformative moment in the narrative, Keely sees the predatory bird he was hoping to show the woman and boy—the osprey:

The boat yawned, the tree hung right over them. And Keely realised he’d been seeing it for seconds already, seeing it without taking it all in. Thank God. There it was on the outermost limb, the same colour as the bleached and weathered wood, motionless, watching them, plotting their drift, not yet deigning to stir.

(87)

Gemma observes the bird as “creepy-lookin” (87), which foretells of the poetic significance of birds revealed in her backstory: the nature image that becomes associated with her experience of sexual violence at the hands of men. Nevertheless, Keely watches the osprey with reverence, and when it dives towards the water in front of them and captures a fish, he appears convinced of the salving effect of their encounter with nature: “Keely refrained from commentary. The act itself was enough” (88).

Later, after Keely and Gemma develop a sexual relationship, she explains her discomfort associated with birds, and the earlier pastoral scene at the river is further complicated—its transformative power placed once more into doubt:

Just tell me, he said. This thing. About birds.

She sighed. She was quiet for a long moment.

They make me feel bad. Sad and guilty, sorta thing.

But they're just birds.

See, when I was a kid, men wanted me . . . They were always touchin me. Even the way they looked was like they were touchin me.

(108)

The trauma that surfaces in correlation with the image of birds suggests that the damage wrought by Gemma's father's violence, and the violence of other men, was not 'fixed' by the interventions of Keely's father, Nev (33). Gemma details her sexual assault at eight years old by a male neighbour, Bunker (a deliberately masculine name with its own militarised, industrialised connotations):

He caught me in the yard once. Lookin at the budgies and the finches and the cockies. Said he wouldn't tell no one. He got me by the hair, the plaits, pushed me up against the wire and all those birds are goin crazy, all claws and beaks and flappin. And he says to me things a little girl shouldn't have to hear. All the time, those birds rushin at me, my face hard in the wire, and he's got his hand right up me, like a bloke pullin the gizzards out of a Christmas turkey.

(108)

Birds are a repeated motif in *Eyrie*, from Keely's perch to Gemma's descriptions of sexual violence: the panicked captive birds, and the man who holds the girl as if butchering her. Gemma's revelation of her sexual assault as a child by Bunker is followed by another potent description of burning birds when she sets fire to his aviary in retaliation:

Whole cage. Them poor birds going spare. Just lit the match. And whoof! Lucky I didn't set myself alight. They were like crackers going off, all those poor birds. Just flames flyin and screamin. Like Catherine wheels, they were. It was fuckin horrible.

(108)

The damage of male violence—the horror of Gemma's sexual assault—is poetically conjured in the description of the burning aviary. Winton's portrait of male violence once more reflects Gifford's aforementioned assertion of the ecofeminist "element of post pastoral writing" (Gifford, *Pastoral* 165), and the equivalence between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women and children.

The characterisation of the child, Kai, reveals a complex masculinity, one that stands in measured contrast to the depictions of male violence and environmental apathy in the novel. Though emotionally muted—suggesting the damage already done to him—Kai is intelligent and intuitive. He develops an obsession with birds. Furthermore, despite his young age, he is conscious of contemporary stresses posed to the environment. He unsettles Keely with his awareness of, and preoccupation with, the threat of animal extinction:

One day, said the boy. The birds in the world will die.

What? he asked? What did you say?

In the end, said the kid. All of them, the birds. They die.

Well. Yeah. I suppose everything dies eventually.

I saw pictures. All the birds dead. On the beach, in town.

(141)

Keely, of course, knows what Kai is referring to, a catastrophic environmental event that he, as an environmentalist, was unable to prevent:

Esperance. Ten thousand birds killed. An entire town contaminated. Vegetable gardens, watertanks, clothing, food. Kids poisoned. Because of how easy it had become to do business in this state. There was nothing in the way of the diggers and dealers but hot air.

(141)

Keely comes to see how Kai's awareness of the vulnerabilities of the environment are concurrent with his awareness of the threat posed to him by men, including his own addict father. Keely shares his worry for the boy with Doris: "[Kai] doesn't believe he'll ever grow old, [Keely] said, hating himself for letting it out, relieved he had. He thinks he'll die young" (310). As highlighted earlier, the boy is frequently written as immaterial, disembodied. Early in the novel, Kai is a "pale glow" (49), later Keely sees him standing in his doorway "silent and backlit . . . no more substantial than a blur" (131). Kai is man in formation, a tenuous creation that at once offers beauty and hope, and also the threat of annihilation personified in Boner McPharlin. In a dream, Keely envisions Kai in a sublime, enigmatic image that speaks of both the hope, and waiting dangers, within the boy's future:

The size of a child. Naked in the strobing, distant light. Pressed against the screen as if held there by wind-shear alone. Bare arms aloft in a benediction of flight. He was calm, those moments he lingered; the boy was calm and solemn and terrible.

Then gone, like an unsustainable thought.

(49)

Keely's view of the world, and of himself, is complicated further by his consciousness of his own contradictions. His memory of Gemma as a child is not only as the victim of her father's violence; he problematically remembers her "golden plaits" (136):

Thought you didn't remember anything. About me.

Well. There you are.

It was beautiful, my hair. Inside I was rubbish. But on the outside, them golden plaits, I was a friggen princess. And look at me now.

It was beautiful hair, he said.

Nah, it was just trouble. Honey on a plate.

(136)

Following the aforementioned scene, after Gemma and Keely's lovemaking, and her post-coital revelation of sexual abuse as a child, he analyses his own residual lust:

His triumphal glow was pathetic. And that was nothing when you thought of the aftermath. Her confession. To which he'd listened distractedly, still pawing her, like a grimy priest who couldn't distinguish her needs from his own. He disgusted himself. In an instant he felt oblivion stalking, crackling, flashing behind his eyes, and he welcomed it, deserved it.

(114)

Keely's confusions, his lust and guilt, his recklessness and regret, tell of an "inherently unstable male gaze" (Richardson 42). It is his own revulsion to what he has become, and his desire for stability and for wholeness, that propels Keely through the narrative: a need to embody something or someone nobler than he is, such as the idealised image of his father, Nev. So when Kai's addict father, Stewie, threatens the safety of the boy, demanding money and Gemma's daughter's car, Keely attempts to protect them. His attempts at doing so, anonymously threatening Stewie in written messages, are amateurish: "All he'd done was make it worse. He'd indulged himself" (383). He is later counselled by his mother, Doris, about the mistake in assuming a woman or child needs rescuing. Doris reflects on the "costs" of her and Keely's father's attempts to rescue Gemma's own mother, Bunny (a name, itself, which simultaneously evokes nature and sexual objectification):

I think, despite ourselves, we got caught up, Nev and me, making her the victim, only ever seeing her as, I don't know, prey. She was passive enough to begin with. We didn't expect enough. We didn't really help.

Well, you were about saving the kids.

Yes, she said. From her, as much as him, truth be told. All that sixties optimism, love. We infantilized the poor woman, indulged ourselves. At her cost, I think, and our own.

(313)

Ultimately, Keely's positioning of Gemma as victim is overturned by her own agency, when Gemma takes the car that Stewie demands from them and runs the man down with it. Conversely, it is Keely who is unable to protect himself. In a climactic scene,

Keely wrestles with Clappy, a “whiskery runt” (421) and violent subordinate of Kai’s father, who has been sent to hurt him, and Keely is stabbed and critically injured. The violence is imbued with pastoral relief, a moment of consciousness:

As (Keely) staggered out onto the walkway the east wind rose in his face. It tasted of dust, of crops, the great country . . . Every fingertip began to spar. He felt lightheaded with overcoming. He was larger than himself. His legs shook.

(422)

Keely chases the man down from his eyrie, into the “impossible light” of the street (423), before collapsing. The over-brightness of the urban scene relents with the crowd above him: “a circle of dark heads in hoods enclosed him, offering moments of merciful shade” (423). Lying on the concrete, looking skyward—an oppositional view from the ‘bird’s-eye-view’ of the narrative—Keely sees the boy “safe on the balcony” (424), this time the masculine tied to an image of a bird, an embodiment of benevolent nature: “the boys face a flash—or was that a gull?” (424)

This last scene—the hope of a future encapsulated by the image of the young boy—suggests that it is not the ‘rescue’ of women, or nature, that is required, but it is a man’s rescue of himself and his attainment of consciousness: “Sir, there is bleeding. Are you well? Yes, he said with all the clarity left to him. Thank you. I am well” (424).

In *Eyrie*, Winton’s view of the Western Australian coast is complex, a vision complicated by the multiple elements discussed in this chapter: the novel’s fevered poetics; the white light of Perth in a heat wave obscuring and disembodying the pastoral setting; the equivalences frequently drawn between state violence towards nature and individual male violence towards women and children; its embattled portrait of masculinity in the conflicted character of Keely; and the “precarious construction” represented by Kai, and the tenuous hope for the future that the child’s splintered image represents. In its reconsideration of the natural and our human relationship to it, *Eyrie* demonstrates the post-pastoral, a contemporary Western Australian coastal narrative that “shows the suffering of the human inextricably linked

to the suffering of nature” (Kinsella, *Can There Be a Radical "Western" Pastoral. . . ?* 133).

## CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to promote a greater understanding of a small pocket of our national writing, that of the western coasts and beaches, securing the link to the pastoral, one of Western culture's oldest, most enduring modes of thought and expression (Marx 376). In the introduction of this exegesis, I argued that the pastoral is a mode prone to misreading. Furthermore, in the context of Western Australian literature, it is my conclusion that too limited a reading of Western Australian literature has denied an understanding of its complexity, and suitability as a response "to the deepest anxieties of our age" (Gifford).

In his 2015 memoir, *Island Home*, Tim Winton writes of the "old colonial mindset" that he felt still lingered in the Australian literary criticism that met his first published work in the early 1980s (135):

If you were a writer or painter and you showed more than a passing interest in *place*, you risked being labelled second-rate, provincial or reactionary. Having understandably had their fill of bushrangers, hardy pioneers and Hans Heysen gumtrees, the guardians of culture were leery of anything countrified. There was a palpable anxiety about presenting a clean face abroad. Idiomatic language and settings a little alien to the inner-city milieu of publishing and cultural power bore a shaming whiff of redneck armpit.

(135)

Winton describes this critical "anxiety" as enduring. "Colonial stigma," Winton writes, "doesn't evaporate overnight, especially while we keep finding new ways to reproduce it, and perhaps it's deeper in our communal psyche than I care to think" (*Island Home* 139).

A cursory survey of present-day literary criticism proves the persistence of a critical suspicion of Australian work that depicts the rural and the past. In a 2016 book review in *The Saturday Paper*, an anonymous literary critic, operating under pseudonymous initials, wrote despairingly of contemporary Australian literature: "A snapshot of fiction here betrays a depressing 20th-century nostalgia focusing on the

broken family unit and rural inertia” (JD). Similarly, in Jonathon Dunk’s review of Stephen Orr’s 2015 novel *The Hands*, titled “The Politics of Australian Pastoral,” the critic describes, disdainfully, an Australian pastoral that “merges with the Wintonesque suburban narrative.” Wintonesque, of course, is shorthand here for populist nostalgia:

It becomes a fleetingly examined self-consciously masculine realism; predictably solid fare for that mythical tribe: ‘Middle Australia’. This kind of book is a perspiring VB in a Carlton FC neoprene sock. It’s quartered oranges at half-time, unveiled like corpus Christi in a Tupperware coffin by someone’s cardiganed mum. It’s double-brick and a Hills Hoyst, Winfield Blues and Wonder White, Menzies’ forgetting people, and Howard’s perpetual battlers: a mirage of diesel-slick wilting up from an endless stretch of bitumen into a blizzard of midday sun. A tedious rehearsal of threadbare clichés.

(Dunk)

In *Pastoral and the poetics of self-contradiction*, Judith Haber writes of the habit of literary critics to underestimate the self-consciousness of the pastoral mode, a mode that has, as Haber argues, from its classical origins “worked instinctively against itself” (1):

[Critics] ignore or downplay, that is, the extent to which pastoral texts problematize relations between the literary and the “real,” the aesthetic and the material, and the present and the past, creating neither a simple union of contraries nor an equally simple discontinuity.

(2)

Haber argues that “not only is [the pastoral] an extremely self-reflexive mode, explicitly concerned with constructing representations of representations, it is also a supremely self-correcting mode” (11). Practitioners of the pastoral demonstrate “an acute awareness of the problems inherent in their own strategies and assumptions (11)”.

I would argue that the aforementioned plaintive dismissals of the contemporary value and complexity of Australian pastoral are broadsided by, for example, Charlotte Wood's treatise on twenty-first-century misogyny in her 2015 award-winning novel, *The Natural Way of Things*: a dystopian novel temporally removed—like its captive female characters—to Australia's red centre. Or one could consider, also, the writing of Indigenous author Alexis Wright in *The Swan Book*, an innovative novel that depicts an Australian natural landscape "rendered unrecognisable by climate change" (Mulcrone 519), and finds equivalences in the destruction of Indigenous communities. In light of these examples of contemporary Australian pastorals, Dunk's urge that it might be time to "abandon the genre" of Australian writing about non-urban environments appears premature.

This exegesis sought to show, primarily through the study of Winton's narrative, the connection of Western Australian coastal writing to this complex pastoral tradition: a literary mode, Marx wrote, "that is invaluable for its power to enrich and clarify our experience" (*The Machine in the Garden* 11). In "Boner McPharlin's Moll," Winton's examination of the brutalising effects of hegemonic rural masculinity, far from "fleeting" as Dunk suggests, is necessarily unrelenting, and complex. As argued in the second chapter of the exegesis, Boner is a self-conscious literary creation, observed by the protagonist as a "myth," a tragic construction that Winton uses to explore the fragility beneath the silence of Australian men, and its destructiveness. *Eyrie* again tackles masculine violence towards women and nature, and its implications for the future as a complex post-pastoral narrative that examines environmental degradation and misogyny, and poses the question about our resolve to correct both.

*The Windy Season*, too, is a self-conscious exploration of the complex possibilities of Western Australian coastal pastoral, a novel that seeks to explore vulnerabilities of hegemonic rural Australian masculinity, and present the problematical human relationship to the natural in the age of climate science. An analysis of Western Australian writing about the coast reveals not an isolated literature of simple, populist nostalgia, but rather a complex and evolving strand of the pastoral, capable of the necessary interrogations of Australia's past, and of even more vital imaginings of its future.

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