

grounds

Malcolm Howie, painter of fungi
bound his watercolours and died, aged 36.

*From age 16 he was unable to walk, and towards the end of his life
only able to paint with movements of his wrist.¹*

I consider making a crude analogy out of his demise.

*Mushrooms spring up with autumn rain, expand, shed
their spores, and decay; all in a matter of weeks.²*

It crumbles: fungi do not atrophy, they do not fail.
When a fungal flower perishes
it has done its work until
remade.

¹ Australian National Herbarium Biographical Notes, 'Malcolm Ian Howie':
<https://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/howie-malcolm-ian.html>

² Tom May, 'Bringing Mushrooms Alive', *Botanic News* (Autumn 2014), p12.

To walk the field again

through his wrist, flashing up
threads of pigment

as in life

the fibres
of a stinkhorn (high plains drifter)

on a large cream ground
for hands.

Its skin tingles
lines of *unfinished business*³
bust from the archive
tall on fire
sparks carry up the air buzzing
clouds.

³ Natalie Harkin, 'Writing into Invisible Spaces' workshop, RMIT University, 16 April 2016.

*A walk in the Victorian bush in Autumn after rain.*⁴

In roots of the ribbon gum
metaphor moves like spores
or crumbs ambling uphill.
The colour of its rough speech
bubbles/paradise, trouble. The colour of infected nymphs.

You are reading this far
enough from its place of making

I am putting it together in Narrm

where fragile metaphors tremble and reach
in custom-made boxes
forever 21 degrees.

⁴ MELU, 'Malcolm Howie Watercolours': <http://biosciences.unimelb.edu.au/engage/the-university-of-melbourne-herbarium/significant-collections>

Meanwhile, fungi provide a rash of myth, since *by virtue of the ecologically and ontologically articulated modes fungi inhabit, to write of them is to write in a different way than of animals and plants.*⁵

Like the primeval fern, the fungus is pure Aussie gothic. The terror of life on other terms in *the oldest ocean—evil and beautiful, sluggish and blind and dumb*⁶*—a land of floating brains*⁷

becomes the threat of undifferentiated invaders
as thinkless slime, reaching
for nutrients, budding selves, *getting & spending*⁸
*held together by dirt and foul tempers*⁹

as their host consumes herself
*slowly at first but then much more quickly.*¹⁰

And how green is the valley
of boho back-blocks, where fungi
are heir to pagan plots:
troll cat/witch butter/Sunday bile. Sex spot.

⁵ John Charles Ryan, 'A Poetic Mycology of the Senses', *PAN* 10 (2013), p55.

⁶ Douglas Stewart, 'The Fungus', Australian Poetry Library: <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/stewart-douglas/the-fungus-0503032>

⁷ Nigel Fechner, 'My Fungi!', Fungal Poetry, Queensland Mycological Society: <http://qldfungi.org.au/fungal-poetry/my-fungi>

⁸ William Wordsworth, 'The World is Too Much With Us', Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45564>

⁹ Wowiki, 'Fungal horrors': http://wowwiki.wikia.com/wiki/Fungal_horror

¹⁰ Adam Harry Knight, *The Fungus*, Start, 1985.

Sowing future
remembers

open-tipped
the lengths that keep you

like frequency or magnetism:
a peripheral circle.
Over the bogongs, the Bundian Way.

You float from highlands to bay,
your home is potentially anywhere,
a moveable colony

I watch fast-motion films of furry morsels rising and falling out of logs
through suspended marshes across the fat creeks, sudden hills that are
lost to lowlands (were grasslands), watercolour
draining from the eye

repeated dryly
*in Roman capitals.*¹¹

But under the herbarium's glass, a pruney smile.
There is juice and bright, and a crunch of old very light spice.

¹¹ Kenneth Slessor, 'Elegy in a Botanic Gardens', Poem Hunter: <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/kenneth-slessor/elegy-in-a-botanic-gardens/>

Australian poetry sees fungi as nativist; exotic locals. Kinsella defends fungi to the plough, which makes nothing from something; he praises its *night growth and industry*.¹² Dutton sets blithe mushrooms and maggots against needy sheep.¹³ Shaw Neilson invites wakeful lovers to hear caps surfacing through the autumn dew.

Overnight our neighbourhood's walls and windows
produce BIG JIZZ in a silver must. Smut.
In the colony it was called Punk.

*Metaphor is a dynamic tool for building knowledge and enabling new insights and connections by relating thoughts from one sphere to another.*¹⁴

The poet's psychotropes:
handling the fungus like, like, like
carrot, cock, coral, cunt, crab

still the hyphae hang

and spend themselves

chucking up their kids

¹² John Kinsella, 'Mushrooming', Australian Poetry Library: <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/kinsella-john/mushrooming-0317008>

¹³ Geoffrey Dutton, 'Mushrooms', Australian Poetry Library: <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/dutton-geoffrey/mushrooms-0731096>

¹⁴ Alison Pouliot, 'Intimate Strangers of the Subterrain', *PAN* 10 (2013), p18.

In Howie's work a Victorian fungus is strong and dense, gripping a bundle of sticks.

Perhaps he reappears
in the flickered lithe and rarrky flange
of his pictures and their purple litter

a folded
furtive voucher

deep drawers closing.

*If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an
interminable string of toadstools, budding
and sprouting in endless convolutions why,
that is something like it.¹⁵*

In his late confinement, he saw a rain-darkened trunk.

¹⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', University of Adelaide Library:
https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/gilman/charlotte_perkins/yellow/

The port its puffs of brown smoke. Flattened and tinny from up here, gasping.
Ice thrashes in the river, we read the pale history on its banks.

Back in the city searching for Taungurung histories:

Benalla—benalta = big waterhole

Delatite—Delotite, wife of Beeolite, clan head of the Yowung-illam-balluk clan

Murrindindi—murrumdoorandi = place of mists, mountain

Trawool—trawalla = wild water

*Nagambie—nogamby = lagoon.*¹⁶

Books say native bread doesn't rise in such a volatile climate.

Back in the herbarium, country flakes off

the smooth, shiny,

*creaminess of the colonies.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Taungurung News, 'Taungurung – A Brief History by Loraine Padgham':

http://taungurung.net/2011/04/taungurung_a_brief_history.html

¹⁷ Tarsh Bates, 'HumanThrush Entanglements', *PAN* 10 (2013), p42.

Rust and thrush:

mycology sounds see-through
to me; all the words

removed of their soil.

Not so—

it clings.

If you can imagine how everything else resembles a fungus.

At the edge of your vision
*what we learn how to see*¹⁸

the curtain of strands
itching and glancing

all this struggling
to leap out of yourself

to the possibility of the colony

*you can only clear a place for it*¹⁹

or relocate

¹⁸ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (Autumn 1988), p583.

¹⁹ Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016.