

ENGLISH

Matthew Dardis

His Voiceless Songbird

REFLECTION STATEMENT

“Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? –In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there? – Or is the use its life?”¹ (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

As a child of eleven, I unknowingly parodied Wittgenstein’s internal conflict: pondering, no doubt with less eloquence, a more perfect form of language (still allusive), my biological narrative (luck), my death (–in bed, at eighty, I concluded) and the story of my life (denial, cheerfully). Through studying English, my childhood desire for these objective answers led me not to Wittgenstein’s single meaning, but an appreciation of its multiplicity. As a post-modern short-literary-fiction, *His Voiceless Songbird*, reevaluates the role of language in the dialogue between the voice of one’s present and the characters of one’s youth. Through the creative writing process as a self-reflexive conversation with the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and my childhood experience, I attempt to characterise the distinct voices of a lingual persona. Thus, in the short-story’s plot, my piece portrays the authorial voice’s response to questioning, loss, and long-eluded healing.

As an extension of my interest in language, I engaged in a semiotic study of Ludwig Wittgenstein that provided both a conceptual and allegorical framework for my protagonist’s growth. The conflict inherent in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophicus*,² where he desires unattainable linguistic perfection: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”,³ contrasted with his posthumous, *Philosophical investigations*⁴ (which reveals Wittgenstein’s acceptance of imperfect expression), provided multiple frameworks that mirrored my protagonist’s own growth.

1 Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922 pg. 159

2 Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922

3 *Ibid.* Pg. 2

4 Wittgenstein, L., *philosophical investigations*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953

His Voiceless Songbird attempts to disclose the difficulty of perceiving language as a means of expressing interior life, while revealing the potential for hope or fear to govern how we attribute meaning to the outer world; specifically in the relationships with our past. As Lud's judgment of language is governed by experience, just as Wittgenstein's changed with age, the symbolic manuscript enables three estranged versions of an individual's personal dialect to coalesce and communicate. The epigraphs from Wittgenstein signpost these two distinct and contradictory stages of Wittgenstein's linguistic and semiotic appreciation, which also differentiate Lud's personal growth; rife with phenomenological tensions.

NARRATIVE

PROLOGUE

Childhood recollection of 1922: Rewritten.

Whereof one cannot speak. Thereof one must remain silent.

- From Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

Papa's favourite bar is silent until the sun goes down and the red-rock earth lets the coal-miners free. Held above the fireplace, something dead makes the size and shape of a songbird. *Taxidermied*, Papa said once.

Lyrebird ruffles his feathers in the rafters. He's often there because he tells me he likes the echoes and *-not at all-* because he's scared of his stuffed cousin they'd put up on the wall as a decoration.

The dead bird's button eyes are glazed over like they're looking beyond the room. It's got pretty feathers, light and blue-blacks bounded by yellow. Even though it's beautiful, I know that it's dead. And I know that means something deep and quiet and scary as hell. Lyrebird does too, but he just makes sounds of kookaburras laughing when I say the word's name.

Papa is at his table with half-moons under his eyes. Mr Pastor is with him. A circle mirror hangs behind them on the wall like a huge saint's halo that's been thrown away. It's over by the pinned moths and beetles that have crumbled into small heaps of pretty dust at the bottom of their glass display cases. The tacks that impaled them now only hold their hollow shells, pale in the box.

Lyrebird begins speaking very slowly, very quietly, from the beams. I catch echoes—little mimics of Papa's conversation. It's not long before Papa and Mr Pastor have great slack frowns on their faces, wet with foam and sorrow and other passions I can't quite tell.

Papa's voice is loud, and he keeps laugh-crying and saying NO and TRUTH and LEFT AT ALL. Then I know its thick-tar-black-bad, not the regular kind. Lyrebird starts flitting from rafter to rafter, singing startled: "*now go to sleep, in valley deep...*"

My hands try to catch the lullaby's far off ceiling of words,
"*...With shadows all around you...*"

And I can't see him anymore.
"*...Though stone and dread...*"

Can't see Papa.
"*...may be your bed...*"

There's a crowd of people by the door calling his name.
"*...so sleep my little bird.*"

Papa?

Sinking into the sawdust floor, Mr Pastor kneels beside me. In his air, a sweep of sadness and rest came to drown. He's milky eyed and distant like the rain on the high tin roof. He grabs at my hand –tight, and I flinch. He breathes deep but I get up to run.

The door to the bar hangs open. From the rafters, all puffed up and rasping, Lyrebird said in Papa's voice:

ONE LAST TIME, LITTLE BIRD,
I'M FREE AGAIN.

1967, Bendigo

*I am, with blood burgeoning at my typewriter, rebirthing this;
the voice of my childhood*

*after my passage through the weir this August,
in the hope of some long-desired closure.*

*This night is a paroxysm of my childhood memory,
one I have often dreamt of writing:*

*I recall that night, when I am eleven years of age, in the Stoneborough, a
single roomed bar in the heart of Goulburn Weir, Victoria.*

*Its high ceilings are made of beaten tin, and there's a colonial
fireplace*

that a taxidermy bird lorded over, seeing all, but aphonic.
One of the wooden tables by the mantle was my father's. When he wasn't scribbling
in books on the verandah,
he would hold court there.

And I use the phrase not as an empty metaphor
but to describe the dignity by which he would wait for his adherents to
appear. As a middle-aged man now, myself,
I desire for people to hang, with reverence, upon my words, as they did to his.
In the early years, it was people from the town who visited him there.

Stockman who wanted advice,
letters written to the old country, others, reserved colliers, with
soot-dusted hands, in collared shirts seated around his table, wanting to hear a
story by someone who was self-taught in their language and skilled in the
art of narration.

Paterson, Lawson, Kendall; in the summer of father's life, before they stopped
coming, and father's speech went cold.

He would invoke the breath of a rain-starved drover's
country.

The townsfolk had liked that.

Stories, poems, repeated characters and intricate rhetorical questions
to the listeners, who, like children, would mumble an answer
then shyly laugh.

They all knew the bush ballads by heart:

'Loaded Dog' 'Clancy of the overflow' 'the Drover's wife'

but only he had the skill, or the right

to tell them. Listening

at the edge of the circle with my chin resting on the
bent back of a cane chair; I'd sit, silent as I watched him drinking from a glass and
wetting his drooping moustache,
or when he felt the rim of his akubra, considering a
move on the cribbage board.

He had a public dignity that was disproportionate there,
with the bar's country comings and goings.

but I can see myself still, at the edge of the circle, at the Stoneborough.

I would get so lost in the telling that I almost understood,
not the words, but the tune.

*His metaphysical contemplations were unpalatable, in a town where
tongues are marred by dust and coal.
So the people left him, and he withdrew himself into the
backwaters of his skull. He remained unknowable since I could not
find the elaborate lipping pronunciations that wrought connection;
close, even compassionate at times, when we read together on the verandah,
but a mystery.*

*At last, when the season came, the water-birds upped and left the weir;
flew off in groups, or in couples or alone,
to where they came from and lived in the other part of the year,
far out over the rim of the valley.
Like the birds, my Papa migrated to another place, another world;
How hard a thing it is to write but his song so sweet and wild it
pained me to see it caged.
But still, I remember trying to retain in my small eye some image
of the larger world so that my father and the birds could stay.*

1967, train to Goulburn

It was one of those sovereign days that never seemed intended for nightfall. A prematurely-aged prodigal son slouched home again on a train seat patterned with fleur-de-lys. It was Lud's forty-fifth year. The NorthWest train ran Axedale to Bailieston, smelling of dust and musty kapok; then rattled across the Kirwan to the Weir.

The station stood as he remembered; heaped earth, sandstone archway, the horizon gored by pillars of sand and coal-refuse from the abandoned mine. Lud swelled with bodily heat, still an intruder in his birthplace. His Papa's Akubra was pegged to the breeze as he stooped to rub orange earth into his paper-white hands. Sulphur-crested cockatoos heckled him from the eucalypts.

The street was boot grated-dirt and flagstones, and as Lud took his first steps onto its surface, bound for his childhood home, he imagined that the flannel flowers – it must be August– had come around, mosaic whites dappling each street down from the station. Once the town had been filled with rhythmic clouds of starlings that parted amidst mountain-bred buckskin horses and wives in cotton bodices waving the Barcoo salute. The boys with talent were picked off before Lud's eyes, to swing a pickaxe and chisel or else colour a wall a full-bodied red.

Now, a slat ribbed dog picked its way through the eaves of empty shop-fronts. Nothing raised Goulburn's head: no spark of the old, or sun-dark sheilas, no miners to fossick slowly through conversation on their barstools.

Chapter II

1967, Goulburn – Meeting Ma again

My difficulty is an – enormous – difficulty of expression...

I am most inclined to give up all my efforts.

- *Journal entry, 1st November 19314 p. 21*

Lud's childhood home had the improvised air of a house; a hidden industry of senses bounded by a one-story weatherboard. It stood on low stilts at the front, higher at the back; spreading as a nest of open rooms, unbroken by doorways. Thick foliage broke in at window level. The timber creaked as the day's heat seeped away, a gradual adjustment in all its parts, like a vast instrument being tuned.

His mother's room in Goulburn Weir lay silent; and it was a silence in two parts. The most obvious part was a hollow quiet, made by an absence of things. If there was a breeze, it would have sighed through the wind chimes made of bottle caps and brass bells Lud had erected as a child, and caressed his face as he rested at the foot of the bed.

The second silence was Lud's Ma. She lay in bed; fragile, sun-dark and leather-faced beneath the sheet. Lud's authorial life gave him no power to rewrite the prime cause of corruption in her. Lud had told the Medicos he'd have it straight: *there's not much to be done, but she'd be better off in Bendigo, in the spare room overlooking the camellias*. Lud picked at an ink stain on his thumb. *That'd be right*.

Ma opened her eyes, fluid and misty. She focused on him, and began to hum. Some long-forgotten rhythm from the span of his boyhood;

"...Now comes the storm, but you'll be warm, the wind will rock your manger, As rivers march through valley's arch, so sleep my little bird..."

...

Childhood recollection; two days before Papa's funeral, 1922, Rewritten.

Ma hums a lullaby with sun-tight arms lithe in dishwater. She smells like buffalo grass. I bob atop a kitchen stool, and *Lyrebird* picks at the peas dropped from my plate. He's speaking very slowly, very steadily, and he sounds like the time the Pastor talked to Ma. He says TRAUMA. He says a word I don't

know, *in-duced*. He coughs and spits and tries again: INDUCED. He says SOCIAL TRAUMA INDUCED REGRESSION OF THE VOCAL STATE. I try to block out the words. I breathe, and *Lyrebird* changes his tune.

Why did Robinson Crusoe leave the island, Ma?

The island?

Oh. It's from Papa's book. The yellow one.

You need to stop reading those, okay?

Okay.

Now eat your peas, Kiddo.

My fork pierces the greens and it drips and hits the plate with the tiniest sound imaginable. And I imagine that sound is me. A speck on the surface of the roaring weir.

Unhearable.

Papa's gone, isn't he?

Ma pauses at the sink. Then turns and stares at me like the songbird in the bar.

Yes. Out of the valley and far away.

How far is out of the valley?

Far. Clean your plate, Kiddo.

Okay.

Bendigo, 1967

*My mother had always struggled to get me inside something; into
shirts and shoes, into bed, the house, the valley. .*

*But I was a child then, and all mouth, trying in vain to collect and
swallow the images of the world and make them part of my anatomy:*

a tiny bower-bird on the track of the ungraspable.

*Until I perceived at last that in naming and handling things with
words, I had power over them.*

Then, I wanted to be inside books: inside the words themselves.

The ones my father had read to

*me on the verandah, or in dying lamplight.
Ma, like the town, encouraged normality –of course.
She dragged me away.
But without the prospect of living within those words, I was struck
by a terrible insignificance. It drove me to fury.*

*My mother, thus, was always struggling for me to get out; out of the sun or rain,
the weir, the books, out of the story of the world itself, it often seemed
to me. Then my mother locked my father's books away. And for a long time my
consciousness was limited to the full poor cell of my body.
It was largely due to her that as a young man
I believed
there was no story, no events that prove anything – no middle,
no end.*

*And then more than ever I longed to get out,
into the story of the world. That
afternoon I wrote a letter to my mother; fingers straining
over the errant, self-willed pencil,
and I left the Weir on a train to Bendigo.
Looking at my mother, as she lay in her bed, somehow I realised
my mother did all it to protect me. Shielding the patterns of
my developing life from the half of me bent
on seeking menace: the books, the imaginings, my
father– all of it.*

*Lud stole a glance at his desk mirror: the face of his teenage years stared back.
This has been the process of my deepest and most familial
Education.*

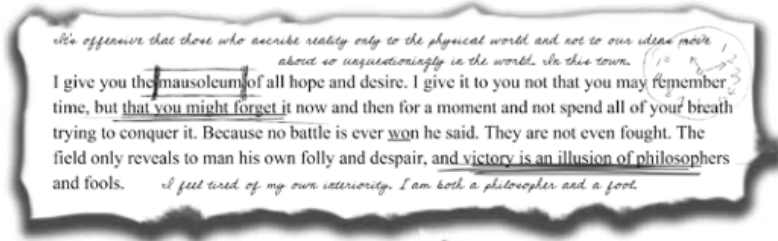
Chapter III

1967, Goulburn – Papa's word-wrought Mausoleum

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words.
They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical. -
From Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

The wooden crate lay before Lud from another age, just where Ma had banished it in his youth. Hunched inside the lumber shed, he prized off the sharp lid on the crate, revealing piles of his Papa's books. The first one was small, the size of a prayer book,

and with a cover the cockroaches had eaten; red, blotched with white. Inside, the margins were packed with familiar, neat annotations that inspired awe in his childhood. He remembered evenings on the verandah with his Papa, where time itself had a different consistency and they moved through it at a different pace:



A small bookmark lay within Faulkner's pages. Lud could see his Papa's grapple with the author, debating his own fight with time, in a world he understood only in abstract ideas and not in material existence. Lud placed the book back into the pile. He felt, too, his Papa's misplaced desire to conquer, through language and thought, what should forever remain unknowable.

Bendigo, 1967

Death, in the town, was a commonplace but solitary occurrence:

the black edged notices appeared in the Stoneborough bar beside the daily headlines.

The bell tolled. Everyone heard and knew. But they don't acknowledge it; the same was true for my father.

The town was its own world, complete and self enclosed. Its months only measured by the work that was appropriate to its occupants.

Even now, whenever the Bendigo church bells toll I still feel such creeping shame.

Years of boyhood bewilderment had, when I was old enough to see it, become a decade of fear and trembling.

How my mother suffered.

My father's fall from Goulburn Weir was so slow as to be imperceptible.

A long and cryptic decline. He was never rough or deliberately unkind.

If he had been, I would find it easier to make my peace with him.

After the war he just disappeared by degrees before our eyes, regressing

into a secret disillusionment
I could never understand.
My mother hid the drink from me out of fear I would lose respect for him,
turning herself inside out to protect him and then me.
And then father left us, and I grew up
in a hurry.

Childhood recollection; the funeral, 1922, Rewritten.

I stand. I am eleven years old, in a small ring of faces at the chapel. I can't read their eyes with words. Peeking out from behind black trousers at knee height, I look only to the sky. My Lyrebird is gone. A wind whips at a lack of leaves, and I am immeasurably, unbearably, voiceless.

Chapter IV

1967, Goulburn, -the Clergy house

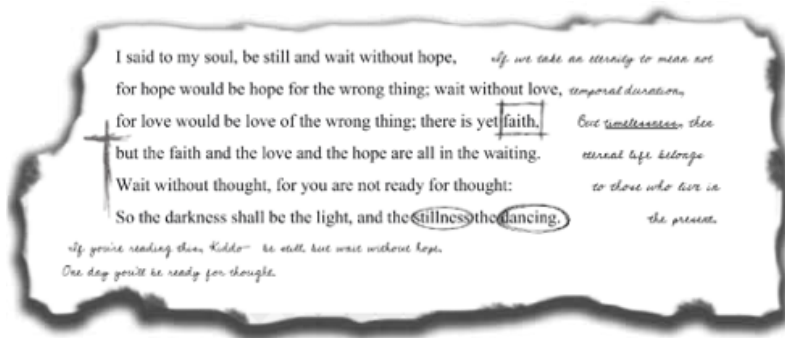
The logic of the world is prior to all truth and falsehood

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

At the mouth of the weir, Lud met *the Pastor*: it wasn't that his name was ill remembered, he simply embodied his occupation so fully that he himself became his title. He'd lived out of town since the war and emerged only on Sundays. The Pastor's shack, he called the clergy house, was built beside a boggy inlet in the granite that was fed by runoff from the Nagambie river. He had a clicker boat and some nets, a woodshed, a fish smoker and a handsome sunflower in front of his brightly painted tin house. He was cheerily inclined to company.

It was an overcast mid-morning, spitting with rain. The Pastor's immaculate compound was almost invisible in the lonely landscape of heathland and scribbly-gum extrusions. He was dredging in his yabby pots on a weed bank, trousers rolled up and wearing his clerical collar. Lud had seen his life as an ideal, although he had never seen him with a book; other than his red-letter Bible.

The pair came to sit, comfortably avoiding lines of sight on cast iron Coalbrookdale chairs, white paint flaking. A plastic tarpaulin above them sunk under the rain, streams of it hissing down to break the scrubby horizon. Lud slid a book across the table. The Pastor's deep-set eyes darkened, as he flicked through the pages.



The Pastor set the book down and took a dignified pause. Then he rolled his sleeves bare to the elbow, balling a filleting-knife in his fist. He reached into the tin bucket and pulled a yabby into the air; it's tiny pincers cracking with melancholy. He cleared his throat:

It's hard sometimes, Son. To tell what's really true.

Lud sat with steepled fingers as the Pastor held the yabby down and split it under the knife. A minute passed.

Your father found it difficult to see through the dark and we spoke many times; I told you that when you were young.

Fleshy shell split again under the knife. He broke off the gritty tail and threw it into a bucket of clear water. Once. Twice: it was slow. Mechanical.

If you're asking why- it's the wrong question-'keep you sinking into the swamp of it all.

Another few minutes passed, in which the rain beat slower.

I used to remind your father that he was only a man; and you shouldn't hide within yourself.

He stood, and began to wash the lucid blue blood from his hands.

He was my sad, sweet, unfinished friend, and it was okay for him to not be so alright. But I'm glad that you haven't been bogged down with what you can't understand. If I could reach through, n' give you something to believe in I would.

Cause son, you're only human.

He picked up the tin yabby-bucket and turned towards the clergy-house.

I only say this to affirm our time is short, but we've the will to carry on.

write, to tell myself now,
that his steadfast fate
cannot be
yours.

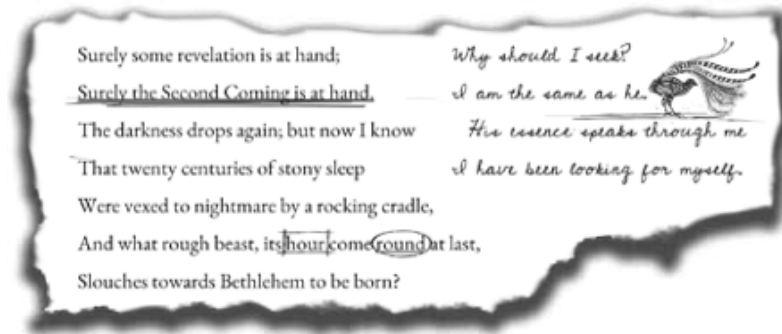
Chapter V

1967, clearing out the house

An entire bloodied and red symphony is stored within our language.
This is my conclusion. I have reached the bedrock of my life and my spade is turned.
-Wittgenstein's stream of consciousness, February 22nd, 1947

Lud sat on the tiles in a space dimly remembered as an arid kitchen with a rat-green cabriole lounge facing a sink and AGA. A shelf was raised full of whiskey miniatures and discarded bonnet ornaments: none of which were worth packing. Lud rose with a plastic carrier bag half full of exaggerated sentimentality he found he didn't need. The only thing of value was the found copy of

W.B. Yeats's poetry he'd hidden behind the jarrah bench as a child.



Flicking through the pages, his childhood self experienced something beyond desolation: lacking the words with which to express and interpret it, catching the sour tune of his father's loss.

1967, Bendigo

My youth Passes
Come closer now. Listen.
I can feel it's breath:

The product of my writing life.
 I pick over the water line, the weir of words that is
 my past
 with grim and calculated fascination.
 Thus, you are reading the phantom rhyme of Ludwig.
 Expressed, now, in the public dialect.
 At my typewriter now There is a silence.
 Save for his heartbeat, I'm sure I can hear it,
 the faintest pulsing, its varying tempo
 a metric modulation that falls with the beating of the typewriter keys.

Rain crawls down my window unto a quiet Bendigo street
 And it's inhuman breath mists in the sinuous rain-streaked glow; flowing into
 some pattern, some depth of sound and syllable I recognise from afar.
 Lacking language as a child, in my years of mutism
 I had begun to listen for a different meaning

I reach out a hand. I touch it. And something comes from the depths of my thoughts
 towards this point,
 and we stand to face one another. A bisection of two worlds; physical and internal.
 It stands there. Inside me, a stranger. A friend.
 And something in the child that is my reflection
 has risen up to
 meet it.

Chapter VI

1967, Goulburn –the last conversation with my Papa.

You do not immortalize the lost by writing about them.

Language buries, but does not resurrect

- Journal entry, 24 July 1948, p. 77

Beset by his Papa's annotations, Lud sat at a well-remembered table, lit red by an
 oil lamp hung from the beams. The bar lay empty, save for the songbird above the
 mantle, an image preserved as part of his pale sinew. In the palps of his fingers he held
 one of his Papa's half-formed poems, scratched into the last page of Wittgenstein's
 Philosophicus:

There's a taxidermy songbird
 on the wall at the Stoneborough bar,
 is an ambivalent part of the town.

I know, Papa. I was there.
 I saw into the great void of your soul;
 And as I piece together your words,
 you see into mine.

Through the symbolic aperture of words, Lud could see his Papa again; face aureoled by the circle mirror hung on the Stoneborough's wall. The closed space between them glowed with his breath, and he spread his hands as if to say:

I too, would dream
 of your deep language, older
 than man and humming of mystery.

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

But it almost drowned me in my own interiority
 as it did to you.

Lud opened a book at random—Dante's *Inferno*, and heard his Papa clear his throat, and say:

But the stars that marked our starting fall away.
 We must go deeper into greater pain,
 for it is not permitted that we stay.

My childhood frame
 hears the words SOCIAL
 and TRAUMA

Then: **SOCIAL TRAUMA INDUCED REGRESSION OF THE VOCAL STATE.**

I heard the Pastor say those words at your wake, Papa,
 two weeks after I started to say nothing and think more. I
 believed you- that interior reality was more
 perfect than
 the fear of imperfect expression and its poor reception,
 than the truths the skies above us bore.

Clearer than before, Lud saw his Papa without the light of idealised reminiscence. His hair was greenish-grey and it had fallen in locks over his face, blackened with grime that brought out all his wrinkles; a ring of dirt around a shirt collar. His Papa opened the folds of his mouth and said nothing: water spilled from his throat. *Papa?* The Weir churned below. So far below. Gazing down into the darkness Lud saw himself, as if

through the lifeless songbird's eyes. He heard a child crying, the tears were his own:

Before me Papa's Akubra floats ghostly white-feeble on the water. Tears fall into the weir and I'm waist-high in icy rippling foam.

Papa, please.

Wake up. Get up.

Please. I'm cold.

I'm so cold.

Papa?

Lud knuckled his forehead, his Papa's annotations and scrawlings laid reverently before him upon the notched pine.

I like to imagine he went out slow.

Sighing as he touched the water.

And baptised again in the weir, as I

had been totally immersed as a child,

at last he was born again into a

language only he could understand.

Dancing and undulating in this epilogue; in the last stages of his

swirling and bubbling breath,

to a tune no man can hear.

Lud stared out into sentimental nothingness. As he followed the rust trails of the Stoneborough's roof down toward the table, a small paperback book lay open before him; he'd bookmarked it earlier:

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -

That perches in the soul -

And sings the tune without the words -

I realise now that I have voice

And you, Papa, not I, are affixed above the mantle, silent.

You are my progenitor

And my voiceless songbird.

Lud closed the book. He thought he heard birdsong warble through the Stoneborough.

*Despite all this
sorrow,
there remains the ephemeral
beauty of the world.*

Chapter VII

1967, exiting the manuscript

I dreamt that I was mute and godless upon a desolate plateau. And my tongue was cut from my body. All of us are asleep, waking just enough to know that we are dreaming.

- Sourced from posthumous letters

*My childhood self moves, as if straining towards me
in each other's darkness. Slowly, and with grace, over the years,
as my mind circles back to his prison in the weir,
we move an infinitesimal space towards each other. He is misunderstood.
We are broken. And he longs to be whole: as if he sees in me
the potential lineaments of some final man,
for whose delight he has prepared
a garden, and who can only
be his creator,
his father.*

1967, Whitsun

Lud stood by a curve of the weir, shaded by fleshy gumtrees, bronze sap bleeding from the branches. Before him, lay a scene rent from his stitched thoughts: A pale and dying tree rising like a varicose vein, its peeling gut hanging over the weir-side.

His childhood form sat, expressionless and facing him; and Lud was filled with tenderness for it. It touched the surface of Lud, taking a small part of him back into itself. Lud didn't feel diminished. There was such a swarming in him, every drop of blood was pressing against the surface of his skin – every bead of it holding him by force of gravity where he stood. He had no wish to step on past this moment, to pull himself away into the next minute that waited to carry him on. Outside of himself, a single Striated Heron alighted from the sky; drinking in its burgeoning return to the

weir. The sensation on the mirror of Lud is one of solace, he felt the glass of himself become whole.

The language that Lud uttered then, that he was almost speaking, was a language whose every syllable was a gesture of reconciliation. He knew this language once: he spoke it in his childhood. But he mustn't stoop to lap up its dregs again. The silence with which they first communicated –Lud and this childhood-self– was deeply personal. It had seemed to him to be the truest language, the language he used to communicate with *Lyrebird*; some form of memory, intangibly there and barely inaudible, in his conversations with himself on the very edge of sleep. A language his tongue almost rediscovered, and which once revealed the secrets of the universe to him. Lud and his childhood form have spoken, he knows it, in a language beyond tongues, and beyond even the manuscript he exists upon.

1967, Bendigo

*Now my world is whole, my mind transcended with all its scars and contusions.
I could almost take a whole life to disclose how I feel about this moment.*

My childhood memory has ascended higher than dreams

And the voices, both of my Papa and myself

Do not subjugate themselves capitulating to ephemera.

1967, Leaving Goulburn

The borrowed ute had busied along to a known tune, and the laboured loaded breath of the remaining townfolk had followed them out through the street. They emerged, shuffling and sun-dark from years past to squint at them: avoiding potholes in the road. The ute passed them, those oracles of eternity and death, arrayed in the same flannel shirt-sleeves, leaning on wooden pillars for support.

A companionable cloud of dust rose behind the Ute as they passed fields of young canola, barley and wheat. The Pastor held the wheel while Lud sat beside him, his mother and in the back and the crate of Papa's books strapped in the tray.

Drive slowly, Pastor. Take care.

Great red sheets of water sliced the windscreen. Ma sat in the back seat, hands folded over a celluloid bag and a train ticket, eyes out the window.

1967, Bendigo

*There is no more physical no more than there is internal
We have passed beyond it all into the last reality.*

*I left the valley on that sovereign day, whole again, on a train seat patterned
with bottlebrush and desert flame.*

*and I began stepping so lightly
so painfully onward through the ghosts of my past.
Characterising myself in the third person to fade in
and out of some universal language*

*And I want so much, at the very end here, to be open to all that it
holds for me.*

Lud stretched fingers out to meet the finished manuscript in the typewriter, as if to touch a train as it rode past, then slid it from the paper rest.

I might call the child from within me.

I have the voice for that

He doesn't.

*For in calling him back I might miss the fullness of this moment as
it has now been
revealed.*

1967, Bendigo

The house sat in strangeness and tranquility, in tune with the oneness of things. An order to the world Lud thought he knew well. A rhythm that each gesture could be fitted to. He led his body into a picture of the Weir in his mind, by the Pastors shack, and Lud was walking on water's light. As he took the first step off its edge, he moved slowly away into the deepest distance, above the weir, on the air. Like a bird. It is spring. Ma is hanging clothes on the verandah lace. Papa is writing in a blue hardback on the old rosewood rocking chair.

And I am immeasurably, unbearably satisfied.

Lud lets his face crease into a smile. He thought he saw the sweep of a lyrebird's tail in the bush before him, a tune like his childhood looping in his head like a poem. Ma and him are in

Bendigo; he sits at the typewriter as she trims the camellias.

I am eleven years old. I am forty five. I am human. I am home.

Perfectly, always, everywhere, (me.)

So the silence shall be rhythmic, and

the stillness,

the dancing.