

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES:

The Clemente Australia Anthology



M. Griffith J. Murray & P. Howard (Eds)

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Acknowledgements

The cover image was produced by Chris Barnick, resident at the Mission Australia MAC Centre in Surry Hills during the time that many of the Clemente units were running. The figure at the centre (John) is John the Lawyer, otherwise known as John McDonnell who attended several Clemente Literature units and produced some outstanding work some of which can be seen in this anthology. John, a former lawyer, is renowned amongst the community of disadvantaged as a caring, helping human being who always puts the concerns of others before his own.

This anthology is the result of a collaborative effort amongst Associate Professor Michael Griffith, Associate Professor Peter Howard (National Leader, Clemente Australia), Dr John Murray, Paul Waite, Jennifer He, Sr Maria Wheeler and Catherine Metcalfe. Dr Elaine Lindsay has meticulously edited the final text. All are staff of Australian Catholic University and feel privileged to share with all the insights of the Clemente students.

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Note on the illustrations and the art work on this anthology

Student work has mostly been published on-line in the form of BLOGS. The BLOG site in which they have written their work allows students to support their texts with visual images and designs. These form part of their creative presentation. All photographs included within the blogs are by the students themselves.

Acknowledging the Authors

The Australians who have contributed to this Clemente Anthology share with us their lives, thoughts and dreams through their life challenges across the years. They have used words and images to bring to the surface a lens of life that many other Australians rarely experience. Their poems, poetry and images teach us of the human spirit that often lives about us unseen. Their hope in the future, the opening up of possibilities and their key sense of that which is about them are their gifts to us. This Anthology opens our thoughts to the lives of others as expressed by them. Too often it is the third person who describes the lives of people encountering disadvantage...not here!

We are indebted to the courage of these authors and other Clemente students in the ways in which they lead us into their world as part of the broader Australian community. Indeed, their expressed thoughts and ideas shape our community and support us, as Australians, in knowing more about one another.

These authors wrote their works as students of Australian Catholic University as they undertook study in a number of literature based units in the Clemente program. The quality and insightfulness of their words and images are self-evident. They have shed light on some dark times and in doing so have moved and shaped the university towards a better understanding of the gifts and potential of people who are often not as valued as they should be within our community. For this we are all indebted.

To all those people, including university staff, lecturers, learning partners and organisations who together provide the learning opportunities for Clemente students I thank you for your ongoing efforts and commitment. This Clemente Anthology is a powerful testimony to what Australians can achieve in coming together for the mutual joy for all. Australian Catholic University is extremely proud of the part we play through Clemente in realising the hopes of people through life's challenges.

Professor Greg Craven
Vice Chancellor and President
Australian Catholic University

Preface

Clemente Australia is one of the very best things sponsored by the Australian Catholic University. Students usually come to tertiary education with many advantages — health, training, finely honed social skills, immense support from family and friends — but those who labour under disadvantages can benefit as much, if not more, when brought into a university community. This is particularly so with the study of literature. To read a fine poem or a splendid story is to move outside oneself and perhaps learn to see oneself in a new light, one that illuminates a path to be taken. And to write poems and stories is to make those abstractions that trouble us — social isolation, depression, the feeling of hopelessness — concrete. They are made to speak directly from a given situation that is real or imagined. In seeing on the page before one a poem or prose piece that embodies something that beleaguers us, one transcends one's distress to a certain extent. Sometimes there is simply a sense of relief, as though a burden has been lifted. Sometimes a burden can be viewed, the challenge it presents weighed, and it can seem smaller. Then one can move forward or if not forward then around what has been troublesome. One might not always be able to move on, to be utterly free of what has bothered one, but one can always move forward or sideways; and in moving forward or sideways, one is beginning to master one's situation.

In reading the poems and prose pieces in this anthology I am moved to ponder John McDonnell gazing out from his new flat in a high-rise complex and then acknowledging “But such a long way down.” Among the many possibilities that open before us each day are some that are dark, and to fail to recognize that fact is to become prey to those dark possibilities. It is not what we don't know that threatens us; all too often it is what we don't know we don't know that can cause grief. Jean Voisin tells her journal, “The paper is my audience / that is enough to fulfill me.” It's true: no one who writes is ever truly alone. The very act of writing presumes the possibility of someone else able to read what is on the page, even if no one ever does. Now here is the *Clemente Anthology* and so now many people can read what was once written with only oneself as an audience. Other people can be fulfilled by reading poems and passages of prose, but the fulfillment is never complete, never final: the act of reading what others have written is always a spur to write more oneself and to write better than one has done before.

Certainly nothing in this anthology was ever truly confined to one reader. Always there have been others reading what has been offered, and not only reading but encouraging the person writing. First and foremost, Michael Griffith has been reader, advisor, and supporter. Now he appears as editor of the anthology, and the work he has done is an inestimable good for the community.

Professor Kevin Hart

Poet and Edwin B. Kyle Professor of Christian Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia

Professor of Philosophy Australian Catholic University

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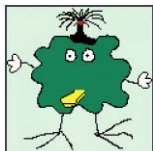
T H E S P A C E
A R O U N D M E

.....

SAMPLE

Anonymous : Bedsit

9th Sep 2011



Early in the day, when the sun is up, fingers of yellow light might find a chink between grimy beige curtains and deposit into the air of my room a slim lozenge of gold in which glowing motes swirl and jig. So morning might find me on my downy mattress on a narrow steel bed frame. A chaos of bed clothes covers me. Near my head, a tiny, circular table bearing a small television – little used – of black plastic. Take four or five paces and you would reach the far end of the narrow little room. There you would see a scratched, wooden door with a sturdy lock that exits on to the passage way. To the right of the door a set of cupboards and a diminutive kitchenette – filthy sink, cheap plastic kettle, chrome microwave (also dirty) and tiny refrigerator barely eighteen inches tall that reeks when opened. Against a side wall stands a round, faux-marble-topped table used as a work station. Against the opposite wall is a cheap, rickety wardrobe of dyed pine. There is a wall-to-wall carpet of some ghastly, out-dated yellow and blue design covered in a thick pelt of dust.

But wait, there is more. There is much more. On almost every bare surface and on the floor are countless mounds of books. Stacks of them, heaps of them, piles. Great mounds of tomes, vast masses of numberless volumes. There must be hundreds of them, thousands maybe. Fiction, non-fiction, semi-fiction, historical fiction, fictional history, biography, autobiography, science, philosophy, politics, literary theory, cultural criticism, poetry, drama, novels, short stories, books on art, architecture, music, dance. Endless genres, limitless varieties, an unbounded body of knowledge and erudition. The very universe in print. And all of these titles piled, stacked, heaped up into hills; towering mountains of books, perpendicular cliff faces of books, crumbling precipices of books large and small, old and new, thick and thin. Oh joy!

This is my room, my chamber, my cell.

John McDonnell

My New Place

26th Oct 2008

I have just been allocated a flat in a high-rise and my experience in the empty apartment inspired this poem

High rise blues

Sitting on the floor in the empty flat
Waiting for a caller who does not come
The power is off, not yet connected
So I am left alone in the darkness
To wonder and ponder
And watch the clouds in their gradual drift
And speak; my voice resounds across the room;
And wonder if my life too is nothing
But a dark empty shell.

I rise to my feet and my mood lightens.
Before me the sky stretches, limitless.
For now the beauty of the fifteenth floor
Is a bird's eye view of the countless lights
Maybe life's chances stretch before me so.

But such a long way down.

Comments



Michaelgriffith said:

That is a fabulous short poem John ... well done. It captures beautifully the mixed emotions, the joy, fear and possibilities of this new situation. What a beautiful way to christen this new stage in your life. Well done! and Thank You!!

Michael



necros99 said:

High rise

I bet the world looks different from fifteen stories up, the clouds are almost within arms reach. Good to see you are able to look at the bright side of the fence, often depression is caused just by our view on things, our surroundings may certainly influence us though, but again it is our perspective which affects our mood.

Paolo

Rhonda Barrett

The lone Wolf

Unlike people, they are never really alone because they keep their friends close by.



Daniel Smith

The Abstract Night

4th Nov 2008

Night has fallen

The black velvet abstraction is upon us.

Cooling, Calming Night

Blurring sight, objects merge

The leaves melt into the sky

Buildings are shadows with boxes of lighted life

And in that night the wolf moves

silently speaking into the night.

Comment



Michaelgriffith, 10th Nov, 2008 22:40

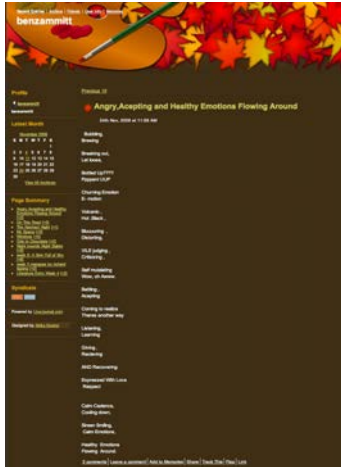
You are developing a fabulous lyrical style: “black velvet abstraction” is a powerful phrase that captures the physical and emotional feel of the experience. The image of the “wolf” is powerful and hints at layers of excitement and fear ... an excellent lyrical poem. Well done Daniel.

Michael

Daniel
Smith

Angry, Accepting and Healthy Emotions Flowing Around

24th Nov 2008 @ 11:58am



Bubbling,
Brewing

Breaking out,
Let loose,

Bottled Up????
Ppppent UUP

Churning Emotion
E- motion

Volcanic,
Hot .Black,

Bluuuuring,
Distorting,

VILE judging,
Critisizing,

Self mutalating
Wow, oh Awww.

Battling,
Accepting

Coming to realize
Theres another way

Listening,
Learning

Giving,
Recieving

AND Recovering.

Expressed With Love
Respect

Calm Cadence,
Cooling down,

Sireen Smiling,
Calm Emotions,

Healthy Emotions
Flowing Around.

Anissa
Chatt

I've given all I can it's not
enough but we're still on the
pay role. For a minute there
I lost myself

27th Oct 2008



Normally I am handed hate in a teacup.

But inside me, I'm handed shots of love by my bartender.

Retreating back into my home, into myself. Where I am
safe, loved. Nothing and no-one else can make me truly
happy like that. Only all the many things that make me
smile.

Babies with dribble down their faces

Shaggy dogs on a sniffing mission

Big men on small green bikes

Restaurants called Oscillate Wildly

Giggling toddlers on daddy's shoulders

Cocktails with exotic names and questionable
ingredients

Sugar on my tongue

Thunderstorms

Baking and other disasters

Chlorine permeating my skin

Literal hilarity

Arm dangling dead from the bed and trying to catch a
breeze in a curtain

Finally having myself back

John : The New Shoes McDonnell

At the beginning of the year, my friend John was hospitalised with a severe spinal infection and was unable to work for a couple of months. When he returned to his job as a casual cleaner, he was not able to do many hours so for a while he had very little money. He is not good with money – for more than one reason. With his first pay, he wanted to buy a pair of shoes; his old runners were nearly worn out. We went shopping and tried Paul's warehouse, where there was a two for one sale, and he could have had two pairs for ninety dollars. But he didn't like them; wrong brand. We visited various shops and looked at different shoes before his eyes really lit up. A pair of two hundred dollar blue Nike runners with exposed springs took his fancy. 'If it's not Nike, it's nothing.' He had to have them even though they should have been outside his budget. He was delighted with them and wore them to work. He soon found they were not really suitable shoes for his purposes and continued to wear his old ones. The first week he had a decent pay cheque he raced to the shoe shop and bought two new pairs of shoes - ASICS. Again two hundred dollars each but these were perfect; he was happy.

My friend Alan lives in the high-rise at Waterloo. Bedbugs were common down there and his flat somehow got infested. Houso moved him out while they were fumigating the flat. The 'bed bug men' arrived unexpectedly at seven a.m. and Alan had to pack his clothes in a hurry for his month sojourn away from his flat. He forgot to pack his shoes so he found himself with just an old pair of thongs he was wearing. That aside, he was delighted to find that Houso put him up at the Meriton serviced apartments, a dream compared to his 'shithole of a home'. The complex includes a pool and a gym. The only problem for Alan was that he could not use the gym because he had no shoes. Like John, Alan is no good with money; he is inclined to spend his on drugs.

Alan visited me the day after he moved and explained his problem to me. Later that day we ran into John and I introduced him to Alan. I explained Alan's problem to John and asked if he had any old shoes at home, thinking he might still have the old shoes from before he was sick. John and Alan both have large feet. He said he thought he'd thrown them out but we went to his place so he could look. He went into his room and brought out the blue Nikes. 'You can have these.'

Alan couldn't believe it. His eyes widened and he said, 'Are you sure?'

'Yes', said John, 'I never wear them now I've got the ASICS. They're so comfortable.'

'Thanks mate', said Alan.

The shoes were a little tight but Alan was able to go to the gym. It was fortunate he had them because a couple of days later his thongs broke and otherwise he would have had no shoes.

Coralie Hinkley

a lament for his life

16th Sep 2008

My mind today is on a man called Russell who is dying of cancer and my urge really today is to write a story about a part of his life, which he expressed to me yesterday. I did not see him today so I could not continue the story.

It is a very sad story how he sleeps in Centennial park and how he drinks bourbon and that is how I got into conversation with him yesterday. He put this bottle on the table and I said 'Hey what is that, you shouldn't be drinking that. Is that alcohol?' And he said: 'Yes'. And I said: 'You shouldn't be drinking this here'. And he said: 'you wouldn't understand'. And I said: 'Yes I would'. And he said: 'The reason why I have it is because of the pain'.

And then for the next thirty minutes he told me the story and slowly I got quieter, put my head on my hand and looked at the eyes in his face and I listened to his story. And he could see that I could sincerely understand what he was saying. He promised to meet me today up at Paddington, but he didn't turn up. And I am worrying, I hope he does come, because his story is really quite wonderful and it kind of touched me, affected me.

He spoke about the ducks in the park and continued to say intermittently: 'animals are better than people' and I can relate to that.

Comments



Michaelgriffith said:

Hello Coralie. That is a very touching story - I hope to hear more ... this is a beautifully crafted and sensitive piece of writing ... well done. You are up and running. So now I can also make you into a LiveJournal Friend - and you can do the same. Simply open your LiveJournal and then open my LiveJournal (<http://michaelgriffith.livejournal.com>) and then click on the line at the top of the page which says 'Add them as a friend'.

Good work

Michael



erikagroschup2 said:

coralie I don't like the word 'wonderful' in your story. I would say quite 'sad'. that's all. Bye bye from Erika



 aussielatina said:

great stuff

hey there,

My name is Candice and I am a second year at ACU I thought I would read your journal and let me say I liked your story. It is sad to realize, however, that sometimes we can jump to conclusions without knowing the story, you decided to listen and you learnt the truth instead of thinking that the man was simply a drunk. I hope to hear more about this encounter hopefully you can see him again, sometimes I feel that we as a society tend not to listen to those who are in need, who need to be heard, it was a good thing you did and thank you for writing about it.



 nancy_m said:

Your Story

Hi Coralie

I really like your story so far, so I hope you get to meet that man again, and I hope he tells you a little more. I also like ducks. I remember having two yellow little ducklings when I was a kid and I loved them very much. Sometimes animals are kinder than people, but there are also some good people too. I hope you continue to enjoy your English classes:)

Nancy



 ghattoman7 said:

Hi Coralie,

This little story has really affected me. I deeply hope he comes and talks to you too.

I understand what it feels like to have physical pain for long periods of time. But I guess if you're dying it doesn't matter what you do to your body. Physical pain is the worst, you'll do anything to get rid of it.

I got to say I love animals very intensely, and I too feel they are better than people. Animals can truly feel what you are going through. They love you so deeply. It's a gift to love and be loved by animals.

Bye,

Marc De Laconzi - Ghattoman 7