

Serial Cities

Australian Literary Cities and the Rhetoric of Scale

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Matthew Condon, *Brisbane*
NewSouth Books, Sydney 2010
ISBN 9781742230283 RRP \$29.99

Sophie Cunningham, *Melbourne*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2011
ISBN 9781742231389 RRP \$29.99

Paul Daley, *Canberra*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2012
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Delia Falconer, *Sydney*
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Kerryn Goldsworthy, *Adelaide*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2011
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Eleanor Hogan, *Alice Springs*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2012
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Tess Lea, *Darwin*
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Peter Timms, *Hobart*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2012
ISBN 9781742233727 RRP \$29.99
(originally published as *In Search of Hobart*, NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2009)

David Whish-Wilson, *Perth*
NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2013
ISBN 9781742233673 RRP \$29.99

It is not surprising that Tess Lea should open *Darwin* (2014)—the final volume to appear in NewSouth’s series on Australian capital cities—with a vivid account of the night she and her family survived Cyclone Tracy. This moment wins instant recognition from Australian readers like me who have little experience of the Top End but can recall exactly where they were when news of the disaster broke on Christmas morning 1974. This virtual connection with strangers remote from oneself recalls Benedict Anderson’s account of the ‘imagined community’ of nation, a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ between fellow citizens one will never meet that is daily facilitated by the simultaneities of broadcast and print media.¹ The operative parameters of Lea’s *Darwin* are, therefore, as national as they are local. Yet nation remains implicit rather than articulated in the book, latent rather than activated. Rather than announcing nation as the governing frame or scene of reading, Lea’s narrative orients itself towards the dynamic, multifarious space of the city. Darwin

appears as a city among other cities, determined by its local region but situated as much within expansive, diffusing global networks as within the nation-state's territorial boundaries. Even so, Lea's tracing of Darwin's historical role as garrison town points towards what is otherwise hidden in plain sight: the capital city's service in the operation and maintenance of the greater nation state.

Narrating the city requires movement above and below the dimension of nation, from local stories to a larger geographic range that implicates region and globe. In order to shift between these different scales and perspectives, Lea recruits various modes of address, namely the poetic, the anecdotal and the analytic. Onto a sensually apprehended Darwin, Lea grafts a cogent analysis of the city's social production as urban space, its repeated obliteration and rebuilding from colonial times to the present, from the aftermath of cyclones to the bombings of World War II. Darwin takes form as a built response to the particulars of topography, climate and an elemental nature that extends from the mosquito, characterised as the hidden architect of the city, (84ff) to the cyclone itself. Yet the forces that destroy and create the built city are at once material and abstract, elemental and economic; that which fetters Darwin's growth also forges its character. Regardless of their precise combination, these disparate forces of creative destruction bring Darwin into alignment with modern industrial and post-industrial cities everywhere.

Lea's is the ninth and final instalment in a series commissioned by NewSouth Books editor Phillipa McGuinness. The initiative resembles other literary guides to cities, such as Bloomsbury's 'Writer and the City' series, in which evocative narratives are produced by well known writers with a personal attachment to their designated cities, by birth, residence or other circumstance.² McGuinness began by recruiting Peter Timms to write *In Search of Hobart* (2009). The 2012 reissue of Timms's book as *Hobart*, complete with updated content covering the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), brought it into conformity with the belatedly branded set. Matthew Condon's *Brisbane* (2010) and Delia Falconer's *Sydney* (2010) arrived soon after *In Search of Hobart*, followed by Sophie Cunningham's *Melbourne* (2011), Kerryn Goldsworthy's *Adelaide* (2011), Paul Daley's *Canberra* (2012) and Eleanor Hogan's *Alice Springs* (2012). The series was rounded out with David Whish-Wilson's *Perth* (2013) and Lea's *Darwin*. According to McGuinness, who is justifiably proud of the reviews individual volumes have received, the series is now complete

but its success has led to further publications focused on 'urban place-making' rather than 'straight' local history. These include Louis Nowra's *Kings Cross* (2013), pictorial and children's books, and a projected book about the inner Sydney suburbs of Redfern, Alexandria and Waterloo. In print as in life, Sydney and Melbourne jockey for position as the lead sellers of the set. McGuinness believes that while many readers buy only the volume relating to the city in which they live, some enjoy collecting all nine titles.³

The appearance of Lea's *Darwin*, to which I will return in due course, marks an occasion to consider the orientation and achievement of the NewSouth city books as an accomplished publishing event. Each volume packs a great deal into around 50,000 words, offering a self-reflexive portrait of an individual city that traces idiosyncratic yet familiar urban spaces, climates and topographies across various axes of space and time. The series as a whole responds to the growing interest in non-fiction writing that systematically focuses on urban place and identity. Hence John Birmingham's remark in his review of Condon's *Brisbane*:

There is no great tradition of writing urban history in Australia ... Our academics have tended to concentrate on the frontier, the labour movement, the Anzacs and, recently, on relations between the Indigenous and their colonisers. But of the cities, comparatively little has been written.⁴

Yet, as the author of *Leviathan: The Unauthorised Biography of Sydney* (1999), Birmingham must know that this is not true: his research for *Leviathan* drew not only on primary sources but on studies of Sydney's history and environment by historians, geologists, biographers, archaeologists and many others. A great deal of academic writing about Australian cities does exist. Fiona Allon, Graeme Davison, Terry Flew, Grace Karskens and Max Kelly are just some of those who have produced important work on urban Australia's past and present, building the now vast, interdisciplinary field of urban studies.⁵ Perhaps Birmingham's remark attests to a lingering anxiety about the cultures of Australian cities, the fear that they lack cosmopolitan complexity and are still merely provincial or suburban. This logic of avoidance has meant that at least some aspects of Australia's urban culture and experience remain under-examined. In Australian literary studies, for example, more scholarly and critical work is needed on the representation, role and diversity

of urban and suburban place in Australian writing.⁶ To their great credit, the NewSouth city books point us towards some of the ways in which the 'urban' and the 'suburban' can be rethought as mutually constitutive zones of representation.

If we approach the books as a set we can see that the serial form mirrors the serial structure of cities themselves; both individual cities and individual volumes acquire identity by virtue of belonging within a larger grid or matrix.⁷ Seriality likewise conditions the subject matter within each book which perforce addresses the tension between each city's condition of *singularity*—that is, the uniqueness of its history and the sensory particularity of its built and natural forms—and its *generality*—its membership within a set of Australian cities with familiar patterns of urban development and touristic appeal. For the reader, the question arises: are Australian cities locally unique or do the same patterns of spatial development recur? Likewise we might ask what comes into view and what falls from sight in consequence of taking the city as focal point?

Urban geographer Neil Smith enumerates the sequence of enlarging spatial scales that organise the contemporary world—from the human body, to home, to community, to urban space, to region, to nation and ultimately to the globe—all of which not only contain but also shape social activities.⁸ Similarly nested coordinates appear in James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist* (1916), when the school-aged Stephen Dedalus undertakes an exercise in self-location, and a further antipodean echo can be found in David Malouf's *Johnno* (1975) when Dante recalls scripting his address as 'Arran Avenue, Hamilton, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, the World'.⁹ In many ways fitting the scale of the city to the space of the book was the particular project of the high modernist novel. Modernist literary devices of non-linear temporal narration sought to reproduce the modern sense of simultaneity—the co-occurrence of events otherwise widely separated in space—and to embed individual consciousness within the spatial flows of city and globe. While these contemporary Australian non-fictional books about cities are nothing like modernist novels, they nonetheless harness literary sensibilities traceable to the modernist heritage. The mutual implication of city and book manifests itself in the long-established relationship between the urban scale of the city and the rhetorical means used to represent that scale—between the specifics of narrative form and design and the specifics of subject matter or content. To see how the modernist city aesthetic

persists, and what it occludes, requires attention to the elusive category of the 'literary' as it is reactivated across the NewSouth series.

—LITERARY WRITING AND THE CITY

If we take the *Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014) as a guide, we learn that the literature of the city from antiquity to the present is richly constituted through novels, poetry and drama. For the *Companion's* editor, Kevin R. McNamara, these literary works explore and map 'the interplay of urban environments and human behaviour'. McNamara observes that literary-city texts do not straightforwardly reflect real cities but rather document cultural ideas about the city through time. They do so by 'selectively composing'—or de-forming or de-familiarising—cities in an effort 'to stage the *process* of making sense of the city, whether it is perceived from above or within'.¹⁰ The NewSouth books thus implicitly thread Australian cities into a literary-city nexus already constituted within the Western tradition. In each volume, the narrative itinerary, however subjectively marked, entails a mapping of literary, artistic and cultural ideas about place. Timms's *Adelaide* alludes to the writings of Christopher Koch, Richard Flanagan and Peter Conrad, among others; Whish-Wilson's *Perth* weaves itself into a city already imaginatively constituted in the fiction of writers like Peter Cowan and Tim Winton; Falconer's *Sydney* is suffused with Kenneth Slessor's 'Five Bells' and sprawls outward to Patrick White's suburban frontier; Cunningham's *Melbourne* detours through Helen Garner's Fitzroy and gestures, albeit briefly, to Christos Tsiolkas's expanded suburban terrain with its implied geography of class.

But how is the 'literary' mode repurposed in these non-fictional representations of city space? As a highly fluid, heterogeneous category, the 'literary' is defined less by fixed attributes than by orientation and taste, by the privileging of voice or style and by a seriousness that, as Ken Gelder explains, performs an aesthetic, moral and political opposition to the more commercialised logic of genre or popular fiction.¹¹ Literary texts nonetheless always enter the marketplace. Through its packaging, the NewSouth series announces a certain kind of gentrified aesthetic consistent with what Simon During describes as 'the genteel leisure industry'.¹² Though available as ebooks, the city series is at its most appealing in bound hard-copy form. The books are beautifully designed collectables, intimately

sized with artisan-quality, deckle-edged paper, endpaper maps, and an earth-coloured spectrum of dust jackets, each with author and single-word title emblazoned across a moody photographic image conjuring the relevant city. The aesthetics of this branding gestures less to the distinctive character of any individual city than to the binding unity of the set. As literary texts, the books clearly comply with the commodity form while rhetorically performing an elite resistance to the consumerism and tourism that they otherwise enable.

Another clear marker of the 'literary' orientation of the series is the selection of contributing authors. With the possible exception of Lea who is by training an anthropologist, all are professional authors practised in writing for a broadly educated readership cued to literary festivals and prize circuits. Falconer, Cunningham, Condon and Whish-Wilson are established, acclaimed or awarded writers of fiction or non-fiction. Daley, who trained as a journalist, is the author of trade books on travel, history, biography and, more recently, a novel. Goldsworthy is a former academic turned freelance critic, writer and editor, and the inaugural chair of the Stella Prize judging panel. Timms, an art critic, and Hogan, a researcher specialising in Indigenous and human rights policy, have both produced novels or short stories as well as non-fictional works.

In the 1990s, there was a shift in the Australian literary market from an emphasis on fictional to non-fictional genres like autobiography, biography, memoir, life writing and the essay. For literary critic David Carter, this strand of literary non-fiction problematically reinstates a romantic model of the writer as public intellectual, favouring the moral authority of the amateur writer over the expertise of academics or scholars. In this literary-public intellectual mode, exemplified in Australia by the writings of Robert Dessaix, Inga Clendinnen, Robert Manne and others, ethical writing is 'always ready to turn into aesthetics, where the display of sensibility—cranking up the personal intensity—becomes the whole point'.¹³ Despite benevolent intentions, argues Carter, literary non-fiction tends to privilege white settler voices and covertly reinstate elitist literary values. Thus the commissioning of Dessaix to provide an introduction for Timms's *Hobart* activates its relevance for an established readership.

A decade on, however, Carter's otherwise salient criticisms appear to have lost some of their purchase with respect to a public sphere now far more pervasively

mediatised than ever before. Indeed, the 1990s now look like the last moment when print and broadcast media held sway. Literary-public intellectual discourse—no longer distinguishable, if it ever was, from celebrity culture—has been radically diffused across convergent platforms of print, broadcast, digital and social media with the result that civil discourse and its established aesthetic forms have been further sped up, democratised and segmented. In addition, nation has lost some of its capacity to configure the social imaginary. In the post 9/11 era, cultural anxieties are often focused on global contexts alongside or instead of internally directed national questions. Global threats such as terrorism, catastrophic climate change and environmental destruction shape national agendas, but they are crises that neither nation states nor the international community seem equipped to resolve. We have entered the global era of mega-cities, even giga-cities, in which intensified forces of urbanisation are restructuring physical and political space, further concentrating the wealth of a tiny minority and entrenching economic inequalities.

Enabling mobility and flexibility both below and above the scale of nation-state, cities are positioned as conduits for creative and economic energies that link regions into networked, globalised systems of urban production. Robert Dixon focuses on an Australian example of this phenomenon in Melbourne's successful bid for UNESCO City of Literature status. Strangely enough, as Dixon observes, this scenario represents a return to the nineteenth-century, pre-Federation times when colonial cities sought to affiliate themselves directly with the imperial centre, bypassing the territorially bounded, proto-nation state.¹⁴ The present return to the city reimagined as a node of global economic power does not, however, imply the demise of the nation state. Rather, according to Neil Brenner, cities are becoming hubs for global-capitalist-driven reconfigurations of new state power and control over urban space and territory.¹⁵ Meanwhile, social media and digital technologies foster the proliferation of virtual images of city-space through instant capture, archiving and proleptic memorialisation. The growing cultural interest in lost urban place is signalled, for instance, by the ubiquity of Facebook groups such as 'Lost Sydney', 'Lost Perth', 'Vintage Los Angeles', 'Vanishing New York', and the like. The rise of interdisciplinary environmental studies, of theories of urbanism and of place- and space-making, as well as renewed critique of urbanisation, are all subtended and conditioned by these developments.

In this context the NewSouth city books perform both the iteration and updating of earlier public intellectual-style, literary-public address. They continue to rely on the persona, cultural capital and skill—the niche celebrity—of the literary writer. Yet they also suggest that the postmodern sensibilities of place, culture and identity considered controversial during the 1990s are now accepted and internalised. So, for example, through caveat or other means, each narrative gestures towards the inevitable partiality of its own account of the contemporary city which is, by default, a multiple, contested, hybrid, shifting and decentered thing. Without exception, each writer makes a space for Aboriginal claims and ancestry as integral to the history and culture of place. Gestures like these certainly represent a continuation of the ethico-aesthetic rhetoric of 1990s literary non-fiction as defined by Carter. But there is also a break or shift in the rhetoric, tone and outlook of these nine writers: there is no sense of anxiety about the co-presence of academic and literary values *per se*. Scholarly-academic and literary-cultural resources are fluidly combined in these books. Even in the case of *Darwin*—in which Lea’s academic orientation is apparent in careful scholarly apparatus—the literary mode takes hold:

Darwin is a place that needs to be felt to be known. Its attractions are as primal as the dank smell of mould; as seductive as the mercury slipperiness of fresh spring-fed water, the honey of leaves bedded in streams so clear, so shimmeringly fresh, you can drink as you swim. (190)

The lyricism of this passage—fusing sensory memory and bodily immersion in place—equals any that can be found in volumes by the more obviously literary authors. The poetic register does significant work across the series so its role in representing and in producing urban space is something that warrants close attention.

—POETICS AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

In Lea’s poetic rendition of Darwin, as throughout the series, we recognise embodied attachment to place as the bedrock of literary narration. For Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (*La poétique de l’espace*, 1958), the house is the locus of primal objects and interiors, the chief source of potent, poetic images that sculpt the interior self.¹⁶ Likewise, the detailing of domestic interiors, furnishings and objects could not be more central to the history of the novel’s form. In some works of fiction, however, the focus shifts from the interior of the house to the street, to urban

panorama. To focus on the city is to shift the domestic interior to the background where it persists as a ghostly point of origin. The occluded house sits below the scale of the city, just as nation sits above it, the latter operating on a scale too big to be seen. No surprise then, that narrators of the city, among whom I include the nine authors of the NewSouth series, like to establish topographical coordinates, forging routes along streets, through suburbs near and far, taking us underground, climbing hills, circling monuments, following the course of rivers, venturing onto beaches and harbours or skirting swamps.

In fictional and non-fictional city texts alike, the narrator's traversal of the terrain is often what guides the reader's imaginative encounter with urban place. Literary critic J. Hillis Miller argues that fictional imaginings of real topography contribute to a reciprocal process of cultural signification, a back-and-forth crossing between fiction and reality that amplifies the meanings of place.¹⁷ In this model, fiction and landscape are not in fixed hierarchical relation but work to augment each other. Though their objectives differ, Bachelard and Hillis Miller are both concerned with the figurative yield of environments, whether built or natural. They provide analytical tools for tracing the poetics of space in relation to the self, rather than seeking to identify the ideological contours of place, as does Henri Lefebvre in his theory of the social production of space. Lefebvre understands the production of space as the chief conduit for socio-political forces that dispose the deep structures of everyday urban and suburban worlds.¹⁸ In this account, the production, command and control of space work at micro and macro levels, regulating temporal flows, pulverising and segmenting space to serve class power and economic hierarchies, effecting blockages and closures or, conversely, pointing to potential openings. In *Rebel Cities* (2012), David Harvey surveys the creative-destructive, capital-driven production of urban space from the time of Haussmann to the present era in order to show how the absorption of surplus capital drives urbanisation in a global process bent on abstracting and colonising place. Invoking a history that runs from the Situationist International to Occupy, Harvey argues that urban social movements must engage in collective struggle so that ordinary citizens, otherwise dispossessed by the global forces that dominate space, may begin to 'reinvent the city more after their hearts' desire'.¹⁹ Never far from the surface in these nine volumes is the ideal

city, the city of the heart's desire that needs to be rescued from rampant development among other evils.

The production of space is not only about buildings and infrastructure but bears upon disciplinary power and its discursive hierarchies, a point that brings us to recent debates about literary culture in the global era. Since the 1990s, the study of 'national literatures' has been challenged by the rise of 'world literature' paradigms allied to transnational fields and methodologies. These paradigms are responsive to and partly conditioned by the contemporary neoliberal forces of globalisation that have superseded Fordist and Keynesian economic structures and challenged the inward-looking centrism of the nation-state. Studies of world literature as a system by Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Wai Chee Dimock and Franco Moretti, among others, have prompted reassessment of the culturally nationalist frameworks within which Australian literature has typically taken shape as a literary field and academic discipline.²⁰ Though transnational perspectives are liberating, they also bring the risk of re-naturalising global space as a pre-given territorial container that works to reinstate rather than dismantle the hegemony of European and transatlantic centres of literary and cultural power. Drawing on contemporary critiques of globalisation theory, Robert Dixon observes that the 'focus in world literature has been on scale *per se* rather than on the *production of* geographic scale as a socially and politically charged epistemological frame'.²¹ Blindness to geographic scale, notes Dixon, serves existing disciplinary power relations and threatens to occlude perspectives that originate from the margins, whether these margins are the so-called literary provinces or, we might add, the diversely lived spaces of everyday life.

The transnational reorientation of Australian literature can thus be seen as correlated with the investment in cities as cultural and creative hubs that the NewSouth city series harnesses. As in the modernist example, the scale of the city continues to afford certain narrative amenities: it fosters multiple perspectives and provides a point of leverage between bodily immersion and the panoramic vista, between the specifics of regional localities and the global coordinates that can render them uniform. In both content and form, as in perspective and method, the NewSouth city books speak to the reframing of Australian literature in the post-national moment. They unbind canonical literary works from 'Australian literature'

and reconnect them with subnational, urban and regional scenes and places. Yet, even though the city books seem in this way to sideline nation, the series simultaneously bodies nation forth by virtue of attending to Australia's capital cities, a status it extends to Alice Springs as the symbolic and social hub of the continent's desert centre. Tagged as capital of the tri-state region known as 'Centralia', (25) Alice is deep inland, physically remote from the nation's other capitals, all of which, except Canberra, are located on the coast. Although Hogan conveys its anomalous status and defining distance from the 'nation' proper, the example of Alice reveals how the wider set both invokes national identity and opens cracks within its imagined community.

Janus-like, the city books simultaneously orient themselves to urban-as-regional and urban-as-global scales. The need to capture the city's flexing, scalar movements—its capacity to register the individual body and collective space, concrete particular and abstract generality, microcosm and macrocosm, immersion and panorama—makes conscious literary design indispensable. This context conditioned the design brief itself, in which authors were asked to eschew 'a comprehensive take on the place' in favour of 'personal and evocative' accounts in which intimate experience grounds the collective view.²² Throughout the series artful techniques of self-conscious narration enable the mapping of interior selves onto and through cityscapes, instigating the mirroring interplay of objective and subjective perspectives. Each book navigates the labyrinth of its titular city by means of a personal, autobiographical thread woven from lived, embodied or remembered details of place. This thread usually weaves into and out of other versions of remembered or fictively re-composed places summoned in works by key writers, poets and novelists, as well as by photographers, filmmakers and artists associated with their respective cities. Through these intertextual dimensions, the books not only access literary and cultural topographies that already layer the meanings of place but also draw into this framing aesthetic diverse materials from local histories and urban studies, archaeological and anthropological texts, geological and environmental accounts, and economic and demographic policy documents. This complex of divergent and often paradoxical scales demands aesthetic resolution not only through the poetic register but also through purposeful narrative design.

Each book bears the distinctive imprint of its writer's effort to register and resolve the city's contradictory scales and shifting spatio-temporalities. Cunningham's *Melbourne* and Hogan's *Alice Springs* cycle through the seasons to capture the rhythm of their cities. Like Lea, Cunningham begins with natural disaster: *Melbourne* opens with the Black Saturday fires of 2009 and ends with 2010's drought-breaking rains. Hogan's text is internally divided by subheadings taken from the Jukurrpa calendar that gesture toward Aranda knowledge of country and season. Timms's *Hobart* avoids linear chronology in favour of thematic clustering: 'The fabric of the city', 'Buying and selling', 'Sensory Hobart', 'The prison becomes a salon'. Falconer's *Sydney* is thematically organised with gerundive titles invoking the various moods of the harbour city: 'Ghosting', 'Dreaming', 'Living', 'Sweating', 'Showing off'. Daley's *Canberra* and Whish-Wilson's *Perth* scaffold temporal and spatial shifts via the narrator's episodic, bodily immersion in landscape: Daley walks his dog up Red Hill and Whish-Wilson recalls father-son fishing on the Swan River. Condon's otherwise continuous narrative of *Brisbane* is spliced through with scenes involving a young boy who is both a version of himself and doubles as his son. Goldsworthy's design for *Adelaide* is ingeniously structured through a series of carefully chosen artefacts. Beguiling perspectives on the city are curated around talismanic objects such as the Painting, the Statue, the Rotunda, the Bucket of Peaches and the Pink Shorts.²³

No matter the variety, each design stands as its author's provisional, aesthetic resolution of divergent, ever-expanding, incommensurable perspectives. Across all the city books, the dynamic reciprocity of small and large parallels a significant interchange between the resources of Australian literature and the meanings of place. To give but one example, Condon's *Brisbane* opens with a summer scene of 'the boy' playing in 'meagre light' under the house in a 'shadowed wedge' of darkness pierced by 'little coins and knives of [sunlight that] flashed through the *Monstera deliciosa* and spoon lilies that grew at the sides of the small box-shaped colonial'. (1) It will not escape readers of Australian literary fiction that Condon's scenario recalls *12 Edmondstone Street* (1985), David Malouf's elegiac memoir about his childhood home, a wooden Queenslander with an 'under-the-house' space that evokes the primal unconscious. Malouf's first novel, *Johnno* (1975), draws forth the lost urban topography of pre-World War II Brisbane, which Dante, the novel's

unreliable narrator, remembers as ramshackle, provincial and suburban at the same time that the lyrical language of his narration underscores the city's organic fecundity and sensory beauty. Into Malouf's ambivalent poetics of Brisbane space, Condon's narrator inserts his own childhood home: 'a modest three-bedroom brick home on a sloping block ... built around 1963 ... from some stock standard tableaux of designs favoured by a suburban developer'. (33) Condon's box-shaped suburban colonial both summons and diverges from Malouf's Queenslander and its erotic-uncanny architecture of desire. As mentioned earlier, Dante nestles his diminishing Brisbane home within ever-increasing global coordinates that mark out his future self. But for Condon's boy there is no wider reference point, for none is needed. Brisbane is experienced as an adequate corollary to any other urban space in the world: 'Brisbane was New York, or Rome, or Paris'. (35) 'Gently shaped by the grand monotony of suburbia', (35) Condon's narrator supplants Malouf's, recalling his precursor through an act of forgetting. Condon's engagement with Malouf's Brisbane is sidelong yet palpable, a swerve towards that is also a swerve away.

The intertextual production of space in these books augments strategies of temporal and spatial rescaling. Condon's 'boy under the house' is constructing a replica of his city, a model made from handfuls of loose soil, splinters of wood, gum leaves, little plastic animals and paddle-pop sticks. At the centre of his miniature Brisbane, the boy installs a handmade town hall clock: 'Every time he looked at [it] he remembered how the vibrations of the bell quivered through your body and how, as he understood later, that very moment in time, the time of your city, passed into you.' (2) Later, Condon-as-narrator describes how Brisbane's town hall clock standardised the city's unruly environment, bringing provincial belatedness into synchrony with the rest of the globe. It was 'a landmark for the residents of Brisbane for more than three decades, a spire, a maypole, a centre of gravity by which people could fix their locations, their place, in this hilly, disorienting city, with its curling river and its steep unpredictable hills. And it tolled in comforting harmony with Greenwich.' (60) But the blandishments of universal time, like the conquest of exterior and interior space promised by omniscient narration, are countermanded by events such as the 2011 Brisbane flood with its reminder that cities are subject to natural, climatic, social and economic forces that defy, and invite, both domestication and abstraction. The city is implicated economically and ecologically

in a dynamic in which local events and phenomena, whether market fluctuations or calamities of flood, fire and drought, are increasingly indissociable from and conditioned by global scales and systems.

In literary narratives of the city, a sense of the miniature often works in tandem with apprehension of the gigantic. In *On Longing*, her book about the rhetorical operations of scale, Susan Stewart observes the gradual transfer of the giant from a figure for natural landscapes in preindustrial cultures to its role in modernity as a figure for 'the order and disorder of historic forces', including the abstractions that veil the social world of material production and commodity relations. Ultimately, Stewart argues, the commodity masks 'the gigantic apparatus which is the nature of class relations themselves'.²⁴ The miniature, on the other hand, is perfect in the sense of being complete; it stills time and encapsulates space. But the miniature alternately encapsulates and is encapsulated by the gigantic. In Stewart's account, the viewer's relation to the gigantic inverts the view of the miniature. Importantly, both views emanate from the human perspective, both are conditioned by the scale of the body. Connecting Stewart's miniature–gigantic dynamic with Bachelard's meditation on the elephant emerging from a shell, Elizabeth McMahon observes a Tasmanian obsession with miniatures best exemplified in the 'Tazmazia' tourist attraction, a miniaturised built landscape adjacent to the colossal Mount Roland.²⁵ McMahon suggests that the scale-switching effected by the site's juxtaposition of miniaturising-culture alongside gigantic-nature corresponds to anxieties about the size and cultural heft of the 'island' state relative to the continental mainland, in turn mirroring Australia's relation to the globe.²⁶ The anxious dynamics of scale are confirmed by Timms's analysis of the challenges confronting Hobart, specifically the tension that arises between the need to preserve the artisanal scale of its Salamanca markets and the prospect of their economic commercialisation within Tasmania's ongoing gentrification as a boutique tourist destination for foodies and old-and-new art appreciators.

—INCLUSIONS, OCCLUSIONS

These observations about the rhetorics of scale in the literary-city series suggest the ongoing need, as Dixon argues, to develop 'scale-sensitive' procedures to map the social production of space in a variety of domains.²⁷ I have deliberately chosen not to

dwell for long on individual volumes but have instead traced implications arising from the collection considered as a set. Certainly each book stands as an individual measure of its city. As readers we gain a sense of Hobart's natural and social topography and the city's economic challenges; we cross the Yarra River and go into Melbourne's tunnels and drains in the company of the Cave Clan; we register Adelaide's unforgettable luminaries (like Robert Gouger) and note the strange propinquity of respectability and experimentation in its history; we glimpse, in palimpsest, Canberra as imagined by the Griffins, a utopia modified by generations of bureaucrats and people just getting on with their lives; we marvel at Perth's limestone and light, its Los-Angeles-rivalling suburban sprawl, and we follow Noongar woman Fanny Balbuk as she breaches the colonial fences that subdivide her country, so she can cleave to her ancestral track; in Sydney the slippages of Watkin Tench's spelling and the vagaries of inherited accent lead us to speculate on Yarramundi-Yellowmunde as the hidden Dharug origin of 'Yellow Mondays', the name of the cicadas that some of us hunted as children. Myriad stories produce the spaces and meanings of Australian cities. But for me the major impact of the series derives at least in part from seriality itself. Even though books-as-collectables are commodities for the literary marketplace, seriality is also what brings these big and small cityscapes into visible conjunction. What we glimpse is not singular but a series of sites in which Australian modernity repeatedly encounters the ghosts of its own past.

This observation returns me to Hogan's *Alice Springs* and Lea's *Darwin*. Hogan necessarily positions herself as a white settler sojourner in Alice rather than someone with local birthright or the cultural authority to know the place, as Malouf once put it, from the inside, from the body outwards.²⁸ *Alice Springs* runs counter to the relentless spruiking of capital cities familiar to us in the era of creative industry discourse, just as its unrelenting focus on the town's racial divide imposes a distance from the language of cultural tourism. Although Hogan admires the town's resilience and observes the community-building effected through sporting events, her narrative's overriding emphasis is on feelings of displacement and discomfort, of not knowing where to stand in relation to the legacy and present fact of colonisation. Indeed, her book has been criticised for the bleakness of its vision of ubiquitous, systemic disadvantage, abuse, addiction and racism.²⁹ Modernity notwithstanding,

Alice remains a frontier town and in this sense Hogan's book works in concert with Lea's in which Darwin appears as the nation's first line of defence, a militarised zone that panders to US security interests. Taken together, *Darwin* and *Alice Springs* present the complementary struts of the settler-colonial nation state: the persistent racial and class divides that continue to found and structure Australian urban place and the less-proximate military-industrial complex that positions Australian cities on a larger global map. Hogan's account of Alice Springs and Lea's account of Darwin make a profound contribution to the set insofar as they use the flexible scale of the city to make visible the relations of power that sit inside small and large urban zones, and within nation-states, that in turn nest within global structures and economies. In a passing gesture Hogan rescales Alice's vast distances, refiguring the township itself as a central business district, and redesignating the region's satellite Aboriginal communities and homelands as outer suburbs. (26) Alice Springs thus replicates and defamiliarises the urban pattern repeated across the seaboard cities of Australia. This serial repetition with a difference turns the single volume into a palimpsest of the series, one capable of disrupting the supposed boundaries of settlement in each and every urban place.

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—NOTES

- ¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 2006 (1983), p. 7.
- ² Bloomsbury's 'writer and the city' series included Peter Carey's *30 Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2001. See also Phillipa McGuinness's account of the project brief on the publisher's website: 'New South Publishing City Series', <<http://www.newsouthpublishing.com/city-series/>> (accessed 19 February 2015).
- ³ Quotes and details are drawn from a personal email communication with Phillipa McGuinness, 30 December 2014.
- ⁴ John Birmingham, review of *Brisbane* by Matthew Condon, *The Monthly*, no. 59, August 2010, p. 72.
- ⁵ See, for example: Fiona Allon, *Renovation Nation: Our Obsession with Home*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008; Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004 (1978); Terry Flew, *Creative Industries and Urban Development: Creative Cities in the 21st Century*, Taylor and Francis, Hoboken, 2013; Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2009; Max Kelly (ed.), *Sydney: City of Suburbs*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1987.
- ⁶ Brigid Rooney, 'Colonising Time, Recollecting Place: Steven Carroll's Reinvention of Suburbia', *JASAL*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2013, <http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/viewArticle/2784> (accessed 19 February 2015).
- ⁷ Anderson theorises 'seriality' in the context of nation states by differentiating between bound and unbound seriality. Benedict Anderson, 'On the Logic of Seriality', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis and London, 1998, pp. 117–33. In this context, however, I refer simply to the condition and rhetorical status of 'the series'. Susan Stewart uses 'seriality' in this way in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke UP, Durham and London, 1993.
- ⁸ See Neil Smith, 'Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale'. *Social Text*, no. 33 (1992), p. 66.
- ⁹ See James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Signet Classic, New York, 1991 (1916), p. 12 and David Malouf, *Johnno*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1975, p. 49.
- ¹⁰ Kevin R. McNamara, 'Introduction', in Kevin R. McNamara (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, p. 5.
- ¹¹ Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logic and Practices of a Literary Field*, Routledge, Oxford and New York, 2004, pp. 35–9.
- ¹² Simon During, *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 57.
- ¹³ David Carter, 'Public Intellectuals, Book Culture and Civil Society', *Australian Humanities Review*, December 2001 n.p., <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-December-2001/carter2b.html> (accessed 18 February 2015).

- ¹⁴ See Robert Dixon, 'Australian Literature, Scale, and the Problem of the World', in Peter Morgan (ed.), *Text, Translation, Transnationalism: World Literature in 21st Century Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, forthcoming 2015, n.p.
- ¹⁵ Neil Brenner describes these new configurations of state power and statehood as 'polycentric, multiscalar and non-isomorphic'. Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 4.
- ¹⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Jolas, 1964, Beacon Press, Boston, 1994 (1958), pp. 6–7.
- ¹⁷ J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995, pp. 9, 54.
- ¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, 1991 (*Production de l'espace*, 1974), pp. 38–9.
- ¹⁹ See David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, London and New York, 2012, where he argues that 'the traditional city is ... a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of overaccumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth', pp. xv–xvi, 25.
- ²⁰ See Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney, 'Introduction', in Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney (eds), *Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?*, Australian Scholarly Press, Melbourne, 2013, pp. ix–xii.
- ²¹ See Dixon.
- ²² Quotes from McGuinness, personal email, 31 December 2014.
- ²³ See also Goldsworthy's account of her chosen design in Sally Heath, 'Writing the City', *Meanjin*, vol. 70, no. 3, Spring 2011, p. 181.
- ²⁴ Stewart, pp. 85–6.
- ²⁵ See Bachelard, p. 108.
- ²⁶ See Elizabeth McMahon, 'Tasmanian Lilliputianism: Miniature Villages and Model Citizens on the Tourist Trail', *Southerly*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2001, pp. 70–84.
- ²⁷ See Dixon. Dixon draws for this concept and terminology on Nirvana Tanoukhi, 'The Scale of World Literature', *New Literary History*, vol. 39, no. 3, Summer 2008, p. 604.
- ²⁸ In his Blaiklock Lecture, subsequently published as 'A First Place: the Mapping of a World', *Southerly*, vol. 45, 1985, p. 3, Malouf introduces his account of Brisbane as 'the only place I know from inside, from my body outwards'. Kerryn Goldsworthy quotes this phrase in her book, *Adelaide*. (7)
- ²⁹ While *Alice Springs* is commended by Jennifer Mills in her syndicated review in the *Age*, 17 November 2012, p. 32, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 2012, p. 33 and *Canberra Times*, 17 November 2012, p. 25, *Northern Territory Times* reviewer Glenn Morrison argues that Hogan lacks warmth and balance, and misses Alice's true qualities. Morrison emphasises its author's non-local status and short-term residence. Ashleigh Wilson, reviewing the book for the *Australian*, 1 September 2012, p. 24, dislikes the

tone and limitation produced by Hogan's distanced view as outsider and somewhat gratuitously implies that this emanates from a disillusioned, urban leftist politics.

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