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"It is Necessary to Understand That a Poet May Not Exist": The Case of Ern Malley

In his essay on Australian poetry of the early twentieth century, Nicholas Birns claims that the poetry of the given period was not at the time fully appreciated in the rest of the world, and that metropolitan centres placed low esteem on Australian poetic production (173). There was the lack, as he puts it, of "an efficient market", caused by various factors, including the remoteness and isolation of the country, its distance from the hotspots of political crisis, and its "perceived rejection of modernism" (Ibid). It was the Anglo-American experimental modernism that the young Australian poets rejected, composing verse that "tended to rhyme and obey metrical contentions" (Ibid, 174) or at least have a certain melodic quality. In its stylistic aspect, this poetry was rather traditional, and the themes used were also quite different from those explored by American or English modernist poets: exploration by sea and land, and the European explorations of Australia in particular, was a very popular theme, along with the descriptions of nature and typically Australian landscape (as was the case, for instance, with the Jindyworobak school of poetry). Australian literature of the first half of the twentieth century, as noted by Tom Englis Moore, a well-known poet and professor of Australian literature, was marked by "[t]he ideals of peace, freedom and social justice combined with a marked realism" (Waten 26). The anti-realist strain in Australian literature was rather weak at the time when poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound wrote their best works across the globe. The only group of poets truly infatuated with modernism gathered around Max Harris (1921–1995) and called themselves the Angry Penguins. The group that was stimulated by the literary magazine Angry Penguins, was founded in Adelaide in 1940 by Harris and is today probably best-known not for their attempts to introduce modernism into Australian poetry, but for the infamous literary hoax perpetrated by two poets of a more traditionalist orientation, James McAuley (1917–1976) and Harold Stewart (1916–1995). Their main purpose was to debunk modernist poetry as meaningless babble, but what they actually succeeded in doing, as this paper

eISSN 1847-7755; doi: 10.15291/sic/1.3.lc.2

aims to show, was advancing Australian literature beyond modernism into the kind of poetry that stylistically and thematically could be described as postmodern, and thus debunking not only the Angry Penguins' writing, but their own traditionalist verse as well.

Ern Malley was one of the earliest and perhaps most famous in a series of literary hoaxes Australia has seen , the impact of which was acknowledged worldwide. In 1944, Max Harris received a letter from a certain Ethel Malley, who also enclosed two poems written by her late brother Ern Malley, so that they could be evaluated by the editors of Angry Penguins. Max Harris, was at the time "beguiled by surrealism, anarchism, and Freud" (Heyward 67) so he immediately took interest in the work of the unfortunate Malley who died a young man, having left nothing except for a collection of seventeen poems behind him. This entire collection was soon sent to Harris by Malley's sister and sixteen poems were published in the Autumn 1944 edition of Angry Penguins. Ern Malley also earned a portrait executed by Sidney Nolan and placed on the front cover of the edition. Several weeks later, after some suspicion as to the genuineness of the poems had already arisen, a Sydney tabloid exposed the Ern Malley poems as a hoax and published the statement issued by James McAuley and Harold Stewart, who actually composed the poems and carefully fabricated the story of Ern Malley's life. McAuley used to be "fascinated by modernism, but had decided it was a mistake" (Ibid) while Stewart had always been interested in nothing but the traditional kind of art. McAuley was of the opinion that "a literary climate committed to endless experiment" (Ibid), such as was praised by the modernist poets and theoreticians, was the worst thing that could happen to art. Yet, the two still decided to perform "a serious literary experiment" of their own, as they announced in the statement (Harris & Murray-Smith 6). According to McAuley and Stewart, poetry had for some time been gradually moving towards complete decay of meaning and craftsmanship, and had even reached the point where it became "a collection of garish images without coherent meaning and structure" (Ibid). They claimed that the Ern Malley poems, published under the title The Darkening Ecliptic, had been composed in one afternoon from the material the two had at hand, including a dictionary of quotations, a Collected Shakespeare and a report on the drainage of breeding grounds of mosquitoes. The purpose of the experiment was to see whether the people who praised modern poetry (in this case, the editors of Angry Penguins) would be able to tell the difference between real poetry and what they called "deliberately concocted nonsense"

(Ibid). However, they managed to formulate three rules of composition, thus creating a particular poetics which was in absolute contrast with their traditional verse, and would also in due time appear to undermine those very principles of modernism they were trying to emulate. The three rules were as follows: there should be no coherent theme, “only confused and inconsistent hints at a meaning held out as a bait to the reader” (Ibid, 7), no care should be taken about verse technique and the poems should imitate the contemporary literary fashion as presented in “the works of Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece and others” (Ibid).

A literary hoax is not an unfamiliar practice, and the one perpetrated by McAuley and Stewart did not appear at first to be so appalling, although it received quite a lot of international attention. The New York Times, The New Yorker and the London Spectator and Times, for instance, informed their readers of the event, and the Australian press was decidedly on the hoaxers’ side while it published extensively on the progress of the hoax. Two things ensued, however, that appear more shocking than the hoax itself. First, despite McAuley and Stewart’s admission that their poems were nonsense, a group of artists and critics gathered around Max Harris persisted in claiming that they actually had distinctive literary value. The most persistent was Sir Herbert Reed, whose support arrived in a letter from England: “the whole phenomenon of parody is relevant [...] if, as in the present case, the type of art parodied is itself unconventional, experimental, then the parodist has exceptional freedom, and because of this freedom can end up deceiving himself” (Ibid, 9). And second, the publication of The Darkening Ecliptic resulted in the charges for obscenity raised against Angry Penguins and its editors by the Police of South Australia. The trial that ensued was rather confusing, as the single witness for the prosecution was Detective Vogelsang, who complained, among other things, that he found the word incestuous obscene and immoral, although he confessed to not knowing what incestuous means. The interrogation of a number of witnesses for the defence, on the other hand, was to a large extent unrelated to the issue of obscenity, and Max Harris later described it as “heckling perpetual interruption through a non-stop sequence of objections” (Ibid, 14). Be that as it may, Harris was found guilty and fined ?5. Interestingly enough, he “never lost his love of the hoax”, which he regarded for the rest of his life with “a mixture of pride and affection” (Heyward 68). The hoax that achieved great success also raised certain questions, such as who or what presented the actual subject to ridicule: the

publisher, the hoaxer poets or Ern Malley and his poetry; and what is the exact position of the Australian author in the contemporary literary scene. The poetry of modernism and high modernism had never actually reached Australia before 1944; it was a country, as Cecil Hadgraft noted, “never tolerant of the unorthodox” (226), and the poets gathered around Angry Penguins, together with Ern Malley, were probably the first to perceive and express the modernist sensibility which was at the time already on the wane in the rest of the world.

As explicitly stated in McAuley and Stewart’s statement to the press, there are poems in The Darkening Ecliptic which clearly imitate the style of the leading modernist poets. “Young Prince of Tyre”, for instance, uses the motif celebrated by Dylan Thomas: The eyeless worm threads the bone (cf. broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads […] file through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones in “Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines”). Probably the best example is “Documentary Film”, whose 42 lines strike as a parody of “The Waste Land”, encompassing many of the broken images which appear in Eliot’s poem (cf. Innumerable the images in Malley). Here is a brief list with only some of the examples: the sound track like a trail of saliva reflects the typist’s record on the gramophone in “The Fire Sermon”, the air of disturbed swallows that fly to the castle on the abraded hill evokes the change of Philomel, as well as the empty chapel from the last part of “The Waste Land”, the falling towers from the same part become The Tigris – Venice – Melbourne – the Ch’en Plain in Malley’s pastiche, Stetson from the first part of “The Waste Land” resonates through acoustic similarity with Malley’s Samson, while the syntactic structure of the famous lines What are the roots that clutch… is repeated in a clumsier What are these mirk channels of the flesh / That now sweep me.

Some critics, however, have claimed that the poems are not as devoid of meaning as their composers intended them to be . Apart from “Durer: Innsbruck, 1495”, the first of the sixteen poems that were sent to Angry Penguins, there are at least four others which bear certain clues for the interpretation of their origin and intention. The following lines from “Durer: Innsbruck, 1495” might be read as a premonition to the publishers, and also as criticism of the poetry of the Angry Penguins, which was in many cases simply imitative:

But no one warned that the mind repeats

In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still

The black swan of trespass on alien waters.

The phrase alien waters could refer to the poetic style of modernism, which was too abstract for McAuley and Stewart, or to the fact that much of the poetry promoted by Angry Penguins was modelled on British and American modernist poets. In “Sonnets for the Novachord”, Malley encourages a kestrel to:

Perform your high dance

On the clouds of ancestral
Duty.

The lines are indicative of McAuley’s belief at the time that the modern ways threatened to destroy “any creative spiritual principle” of the traditional values (McAuley viii). The same poem makes reference to our serious frolic, a clear allusion to McAuley and Stewart’s experiment. In between three largely incomprehensible stanzas of “Sybilline”, the second stanza stands out as clearly unrelated to these. It begins with the prophetic lines:

And now out of life, permanent revenant

I assert,
and goes on to state

It is necessary to understand

That a poet may not exist, that his writings
Are the incomplete circle and straight drop
Of a question mark.

The use of the modal may calls for two opposing, though equally probable interpretations. It is possible that the lines refer to the non-existence of Ern Malley, the permanent revenant who returns to life from his world of the dead through these poems. This would imply the possibility that the author (Ern Malley) does not exist, and this interpretation makes the poem self-referential, the lines being a conscious hint given by McAuley and Stewart to Max Harris. The second interpretation, however, focuses on another meaning of may and on the use of the indefinite article; the line would thus be read as: “It is necessary to understand that not any poet is allowed to exist”. The poem cleverly entitled “Palinode” appears to be even more comprehensible. The first stanza,

though, provides two loosely linked images of spurious seals upon a Chinese landscape-roll and Hyperion transmuted to a troll, which are just as bizarre as much of the images from other poems. The second stanza, however, claims that

… these distractions were clues

To a transposed version
Of our too rigid state.
It is an ancient forgotten ruse
And a natural diversion.

Thus all the absurdity of the poem's first stanza is presented as a distraction, and the process of making poems as a subterfuge and deception which by its definition strives towards concealing something. It would be expectable that this particular poetic diversion created by McAuley and Stewart is aimed at concealing the fact that the poems have no meaning at all. However, it is the rigid state invested with a new form (transposed version of our too rigid state) that has been subjected to diversion, and this rigid state could refer to the rigorously stale state of Australian poetry in general. The poem uses such forms as "we" and "our", thus creating the effect of unity and cooperation between the speaking voice of the poem and its interlocutor, presumably Max Harris. Interestingly, as Michael Heyward notes in his commemorative review of the hoax, "[t]here was a famous occasion in Sydney in 1962 when [McAuley and Harris] met for the first time, almost two decades after the hoax, and talked their way through the night with the assistance of a large volume of whisky" (68). It would not be difficult to describe this encounter using Ezra Pound's "A Pact", as Ern Malley already did in "Colloquy with John Keats": I have been bitter with you, my brother. "Colloquy with John Keats" continues in this manner: Yet we are as the double almond concealed in one shell, perhaps a cunning reference to McAuley and Stewart's joint process of composing the poems, but possibly also a recognition of the common aim the two shared with Harris: the establishment and maintenance of a truly Australian poetic voice.

Bearing in mind the Australian postcolonial context and a liberated antipodean voice that was yet to emerge, the above quoted lines from "Durer: Innsbruck, 1495" might be understood as self-subversive, simply if we consider them (I am still the black swan of trespass on alien waters) as Ern Malley's statement, not McAuley's or Stewart's. This, however, might be appreciated only in

retrospect, as they have since been included among the “most resonant and quotable quotes” (Ashcroft 2004, 31) of Australian literature. As a statement made by Ern Malley, the imaginary poet, they come to refer to his trespass into the world of living poets. McAuley claimed in the introduction to the 1963 selection of his poetry that the hardest problem a poet of his time confronted was “the struggle for an adequate symbolism” (viii). Paradoxically, it was not the imagery of his own poetry,

And mythical Australia, where reside

All things in their imagined counterpart (“Terra Australis”)

that eventually came to stand as a symbol of the land and its inhabitants, but rather the black swan which is, incidentally, a species native to Australia, the imagined counterpart of the European white swan. The imaginary poet Malley becomes the black swan who, unlike both traditional and modern poets in Australia at the time, does not try to imitate any British or American stylistic and poetic features, but trespasses into the as yet alien field of Australian poetry. The voice in which he speaks, however, does not belong to him, but to poetry itself since, as read in “Sybilline”, no poet is allowed to exist. The text he or she produces is the only living thing through which the life and glory of the poet can be asserted, or, as stated in “Boult to Marina”: I assert my original glory in the dark eclipse. It was precisely the phrase dark eclipse that inspired the title of Ern Malley’s collected verse. Focusing on the mystic connection between the hoaxers McAuley and Stewart and the hoaxed Harris, “Palinode” ends on a note that marks the defeat of them both:

I was a haphazard amorist

Caught on the unlikely angles
Of an awkward arrangement. Weren’t you?

It appears that the author here understands that, having struggled for the principles both were enamoured with, both the hoaxer and the hoaxed have failed and lost control of the remarkable situation they found themselves in. This, of course, actually did happen when Harris was prosecuted for having published obscenities, but it would be too much to claim that McAuley and Stewart could have anticipated that. It appears equally unlikely that as early as while composing the poems, they became aware that those poems might in the end have some value and that the only true hoaxer would be Ern Malley. Unlikely as it may be, this still happened. “Colloquy with

John Keats" brings forward the statement I have [...] become he that discovers meanings. This transformation into him is the birth of Ern Malley, or the mirror image of the hoaxers come to life: the becoming of "the other who resembles the self" (Ashcroft 2000, 170).

Many of the lines quoted from Malley's poems basically repeat what T.S. Eliot formulated back in 1921 as the Impersonal theory of poetry, and what would some decades later be echoed in Barthes's "death of the author". McAuley and Stewart used a medium, Ern Malley to convey their beliefs about modern poetry. The medium is, according to Eliot, what any poet possesses instead of personality. Eliot goes on to claim that "[t]here is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate" (42). This indeed was the case with McAuley and Stewart, who consciously attempted to create bad verse. In doing so, however, they simply reiterated a statement of modernist poetics that they had initially tried to undermine. And the most important part of it, the "escape from personality" (Ibid) was what they actually made quite substantial by inventing the figure of a dead poet, of whose personality there was nothing to be known except the few scarce lines written by Ethel. Ern Malley thus became the embodiment (if we may say so) of the concept of poetry's impersonality and, striving to comply with the three rules they set themselves, his creators were inevitably lead towards the poetics that had in the rest of the world already ceased to be experimental and had established itself as institutional art. Trying to ridicule the rising Australian modernism, McAuley and Stewart actually succeeded in creating one of the loudest voices of modernist poetry in Australia. At the same time, they managed to ridicule themselves and their traditionalism since, as long as there are Malley's poems that could be read as real poetry, McAuley and Stewart's rule that no care should be taken about verse technique is necessarily broken. As long as there are poems that could in their entirety be interpreted as meaningful verse (such as, for instance, "Palinode" or "Durer: Innsbruck, 1495"), they subvert the very first principle of composition given by McAuley and Stewart: that no coherent theme was to be found in any of the poems.

Among those few who have attempted to offer a serious analysis of the Ern Malley text are David Musgrave and Peter Kirkpatrick, who provided an interpretation based on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of a minor literature. Their analysis explores profusion, homoeroticism, incestuous impulses and the feminine empowerment, as they regard the poems as "the body […] irredeemably

social and at odds with the thinking of mimesis that permits what we may call Major Literature" (Musgrave and Kirkpatrick). Quoting Deleuze and Guattari, the authors state that a minor literature poses writing before content, eliding the figure of the author in favour of "an assemblage of linguistic and social forces whose heterogeneous, even revolutionary interaction can propel signification out of conventional channels onto unmarked space" (Ibid). Musgrave and Kirkpatrick hereby refer to the creators of Ern Malley, who broke the limits imposed by their conservative poetry by applying an automatic form of writing. It is, however, relevant to stress that "Australian poetry was marginalized within the old modernism" and that it "was produced to seek the worldwide modernist approval it did not get" (Birns 174). In a certain sense, Australian poetry of the modernist era was a minor literature that attempted to establish itself within the global context of modernism as the major literature. The efforts exerted by Max Harris and the Angry Penguins towards advancing Australian literature were not meant to represent a simple imitation of the European and American literary trends. Having detached himself from Jindyworobaks, a literary group which celebrated indigenous art and customs and fought against any alien influences, Harris sought to find modern Australian expression that would be derived from both Aboriginal ways and European heritage, but still completely unique. "He had envisaged a national culture which would combine the best of both worlds [Aboriginal and European] in liberated and inspired expressions" (Harris & Murray-Smith 29). In line with this, Bill Ashcroft interprets the Ern Malley affair (or, more precisely, the way in which Peter Carey presented it 60 years later in My Life as a Fake) in the context of "the intrusion of a rough Australian voice […] into poetry itself", the intrusion "that stands as the sine qua non of post-colonial transformation – the capacity to take the discourse of imperial culture and make it work for a local reality" (2004, 36). What links Ashcroft's postcolonial reading of Carey's novel with the thesis proposed by this paper, namely, that Malley's poems present a fine example of postmodern writing, is precisely the subversive element contained in both postcolonial and postmodern literature, the irony that "as a double-talking, forked-tongued mode of address […] becomes a popular rhetorical strategy for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time" (Hutcheon 133) and whose "inherent semantic and structural doubleness also makes it a most convenient trope for the paradoxical dualities of both post-modern complicitous critique and postcolonial doubled identity and history" (Ibid). Carey's and Ashcroft's brilliant interpretations reinforce the idea that what McAuley and Stewart actually achieved with their hoax

was precisely the thing Max Harris wanted, and they also confirm that the poems went beyond the poetic concepts of the globally spread modernism. It could be claimed that Australia's earliest attempts to apply contemporary trends acknowledged worldwide to their own literature actually resulted in the subversion of these same trends, since they showed the unsustainability of both global and institutional art. Fascination with Ern Malley was actually fascination with the postmodern, wherein the modernist "more traditional notion of the autonomous art work, with the construction of form and meaning" (Huyssen 21) no longer works as postmodernism strives to merge art and life, blur the boundaries between them, and trespass from the area of pure art into everyday life and vice versa.

Such blurring of the boundaries could not have acquired a better expression than the one given by Peter Carey in My Life as a Fake (2003). The novel is largely based on the Ern Malley hoax. The names of the hoaxer, the editor and the poet are altered (Christopher Chubb, David Weiss and Bob McCorkle respectively) but the hoax is recognizably Ern Malley's, and so are the poems Carey attributes to McCorkle. To show how postmodern transgression works, Carey does the opposite of what McAuley and Stewart did. The two used a non-existent poet to make verse; Carey uses his fiction to make the poet. The question of existence has actually been crucial ever since the affair took place. While quite a few of Malley's poems hint at the poet's non-existence and his fraudulent identity, it is still "the reiteration of his fraudulent identity, like the textual fabricating of his life, [which] serves to make the phantom author more real" (Ashcroft 2004, 31). Malley's non-existence is textually constructed, although paradoxically through this construction he becomes more real (Ibid, 32). Similarly, "Carey's main emphasis is on the process of storytelling itself and on its power in the construction of both reality and cultural background" (Kušnír 74). By applying postmodern narrative techniques such as metafiction, intertextuality and the mixing of genres, Carey constructs the identities of his characters, eliminating the distinction between the real and fictional in the process. McAuley and Stewart, as well as Chubb (who is, unlike McAuley and Stewart, a fictional character), created life from a complex web of texts, including the poems that themselves present a nearly unfathomable collection of intertextual references, and the letter supposedly written by the dead poet's sister, giving the only account of his short life. In this way, they proved that art can exist even though the artist is materially non-existent. Ern Malley is even nowadays anthologized in

most of the collections of Australian poetry, together with other authors whose bodily presence in this world has never been disputed. The words written in his poems, the text itself was what made him as real as any other author. As Carey puts it, "'I am Bob McCorkle', I repeated. And to prove it I began to recite my poems" (83). Having no other means of identifying himself, not even a birth certificate, McCorkle can only resort to his poetry to establish his identity. As Kušnír observes, the "literalization of McCorkle's identity and life means the act of granting fiction the importance and status of a real entity, which is closely connected with the idea of the construction of reality through narration" (75). The postmodern reading of the hoax, therefore, emphasizes the interdependence of fiction and reality: the reality of Ern Malley/Bob McCorkle is constructed through texts, while at the same time reality presents a text which could be read and interpreted in many ways. Carey shows how this process takes place in the case of Sarah Wode-Douglass, the editor of a British literary magazine who becomes engrossed in Christopher Chubb's story. "[A]lmost everything I had assumed about my life was incorrect, […] I had been baptized in blood and raised on secrets and misconstructions which had, obviously, made me who I was" (Carey 136). What happened to Sarah was that she had suppressed, or rather reshaped, the memory of her mother's suicide, which caused her to place the blame for her mother's death on the poet John Slater, whom she believed to have been her mother's lover. The reason for suicide was, however, her unhappy marriage to a man who had a rather conspicuous preference for handsome men. Sarah's story in My Life as a Fake serves to show that people can build their lives on false constructions and misrepresentations of reality. Moreover, having built her life in such a manner, Sarah does not search for any kind of stronghold in reality: "no matter what crooked road I had travelled, it led me to the moment when I first opened 'The Waste Land' and found the laws all broken, and in those dazzling eruptions and disconcerting schisms I saw a world whose dreadful harmonies I never guessed existed" (Ibid). What Sarah finds in "The Waste Land" is "both mysterious and true" (Ibid) and she goes on to work in the publishing industry, where the ultimate goal of any editor of a literary magazine is to publish a work like "The Waste Land" (Ibid 141). Basically, she finds more truth in poetry than in her own life, possibly because works such as "The Waste Land" reflect the brokenness and disconcertment brought about to humanity by the modern ways of the twentieth century. On the other hand, Bob McCorkle needs only one thing before he finally departs from his creator Chubb, and that is a child. This is why McCorkle kidnaps the baby girl who is presumably

Chubb's own daughter, and by doing so, he completes the process of becoming through his identification with the girl. "You never gave me a childhood", he says to Chubb (Ibid 154). "Can you imagine what it is to be born at twenty-four […] "I am a poet who does not know the names of things" (Ibid). In the process of identifying and describing the reality around him, McCorkle needs to acquire a language, together with the little girl who is simply going through a natural process of language acquisition as she grows up (Ashcroft 2004, 38). Without this child, and incapable of writing any piece that would resemble McCorkle's poetry, Chubb becomes a hantu, a ghost of a dead person whose reality is denied and who is ostracized and feared by every member of the community. He loses the child which was the only promise of life he had left after the poems he had fathered have been taken away by the very creature he gave life to. Having failed in both reality and fiction, Chubb becomes as non-existent as McCorkle was originally meant to be.

The image of McCorkle as a child is repeated several times in My Life as a Fake, and constitutes the recognizable metaphor which pictures poetry (in this case, the created poet too) as the offspring of its author. McCorkle refers to Chubb as his father (Carey 155), while he regards the editor, Weiss, as his mother: "David Weiss was like a mother, for he had brought me into the world, had given me life, had stood by me no matter what my enemies had said" (Ibid 81). As McCorkle the child grows up, the relationship with both his father and mother develops through the process of othering, filled with his desire to exist in their gaze and aimed at the establishment of his individual and independent personality. This is especially significant with McCorkle's relationship with Chubb (as well as with Malley's relationship with McAuley and Stewart). McCorkle knows no language apart from the words he was given when he was twenty-four, and these are the words given him by Chubb. As the father and creator, Chubb is the bearer of the Symbolic order of linguistic representation. It is no wonder that near the end of his life, McCorkle seeks Chubb and entrusts him with the manuscript he has been working on all his life. The process of othering here results in McCorkle's identification with the father: having successfully established his identity and become a person, he is now able to act as father and creator himself. The fact that he produced the manuscript entitled My Life as a Fake, "the human soul" as he puts it (Ibid 161), combined with the fact that he became a fatherly figure to Tina, the girl he kidnapped, finally make him a real and complete being. It is, however, Chubb who by regaining possession of McCorkle's work and re-

establishing contact with him as if he were a prodigal son, again obtains his soul and the right to claim ownership over the story. Still, neither Chubb nor McCorkle is complete without the other: "We are one, you and I" (Ibid 262), claims McCorkle, while Chubb ponders over how disgusting it was to be so intimate with McCorkle, "as unnatural and frightening as holding one's own vital organs in one's hands" (Ibid 260). And while the two are inseparably linked, in the same manner that McAuley and Stewart were with Ern Malley, it is interesting to notice that none of them would ever exist were it not for the text that constructs their identities. Sarah Wode-Douglass notes in retrospect: "And that is how I became a fake myself, pretending I would 'write him [Chubb] up'" (Ibid 86) and not knowing she would be completely lost trying to grasp the story of Chubb and McCorkle. For it is the story finally that transgresses any kind of historical reality. Be it the set of Malley's poems, the story of his life, the account of Max Harris, or Peter Carey's interpretation, the text is the ultimate hoaxer, for no reality could ever be known except the one that was written up.

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