

University of Southern Queensland

Nike Sulway

Behind the green door: a story about suffering and hybrid identity in the 1950s and 1960s

Abstract:

This paper provides explores the life and work of Elsie Ruth (Lyn) Palmer (1934-1969), an unpublished writer from Melbourne whose experiences as a lesbian writer during the 1950s form a framework for exploring a range of issues around failure, queer identity, and literary endeavour. By examining Palmer's life and work in the broader context of her times, the paper argues for a re-examination of the current fashion for celebrating or embracing failure, connecting this rhetorical pressure to 'embrace failure' with an outdated Romantic notion of the suffering artist, and with suffering as a pre-condition for artistic excellence. The paper explores the ways in which this problematic fetishising of failure ignores the influence and impact of class, gender and sexual identity in the structure of suffering, and its resolution.

Biographical note:

Dr Nike Sulway is a writer and academic. She is the author of several novels, including *Rupetta*, which – in 2014 – was the first work by an Australian writer to win the James Tiptree, Jr Award. The award, founded in 1991 by Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler, is an annual award for a work of 'science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender'. Her new novel, *Dying in the First Person*, will be published through Transit Lounge in 2016. She teaches creative writing at the University of Southern Queensland.

Keywords:

Creative Writing – Queer writing – lesbian – failure – suffering – 1950s

Near the beginning of a 2005 novel, Jonathan Safran Foer writes, ‘The end of suffering does not justify the suffering, and so there is no end to suffering’ (2006: 33). In Australia during the 1950s, lesbians often experienced suffering. In some ways, their identities produced, and were produced by, these experiences. Living on the fringes of society, they struggled to make sense of who they were in a society for whom they were morally and personally repugnant. The word ‘lesbian’ was a dangerous slur. Though no longer unspeakable, lesbian identity was routinely described as either unnatural or abnormal.

In December 1952, for example, an article in the Perth *Sunday Times*, reported that Mrs. Normanton, QC, president of the Council of Married Women, had made a presentation to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, stating that ‘Grounds for divorce should be extended to include a husband whose wife indulges in *abnormal* sexual practices ... Some really horrible cases of Lesbianism have been brought to my notice since the war, and everything has tended to prove these *unnatural* practices among women have greatly increased’ (10, Emphasis in original). In 1949, the Australian press in every state reported on the case of Margaret Laughlin Williams, a 21-year-old-woman who was eventually found guilty of murdering her husband and sentenced to death. The Australian press reported that Margaret had agreed to marry her husband while drunk, but that ‘Because of her abnormality she did not return his love’ and for the 80 days they were married she was ‘constantly drunk’ (*Barrier Miner* 1949: 8). When a lesbian-themed play was closed down in New York, the Australian press reported that: ‘the place for discussion and study of degeneracy is in the laboratory of mental wards, not in the theatre’ (*The Courier-Mail* 1945: 1). Even rumours of lesbianism could destroy a woman’s life, as was powerfully depicted in the 1934 Lilian Faderman play, *The Children’s Hour*. The play examines how a child’s assertion that the two women who run her boarding school are lovers destroys both of their lives. Although written in 1934, it wasn’t until the play was made into a film in 1961, directed by William Wyler, that the story gained an Australian audience.

In the face of such negative depictions of lesbian identity, Australian lesbians often adopted more socially acceptable secondary or binary outsider identities, such as those of artists, intellectuals, emigrants or political subversives. Adopting the identity of the Romantic artist – a politically and socially naïve outsider who ‘suffers for their art’ – provided both an alternative explanation for a range of (lesbian) experiences, and a possibility that suffering ‘now’ would be rendered meaningful – that is, justified – through the creation of works of artistic merit.

Elsie Ruth (Lyn) Palmer came of age in Melbourne during the 1950s, where one of her first jobs was working as a nurse at Kew Cottages, a mental asylum whose inmates included a handful of lesbians. Later, she worked at Val’s Coffee Lounge, ‘a place for identifying with other lesbians’ (Foster 2011: 160). In 1957, when she was 23, Lyn travelled to London, stating that she was seeking a place to ‘be herself, whatever that might mean’ (Anon 2012). Lyn’s experiences during the 1950s and 1960s form the basis for brief discussion of the ways her binary identity provided a narrative framework for seeking ‘justification’ of the suffering she experienced as a (lesbian) writer. For Lyn, this narrative identity was predicated on (eventually)

achieving literary recognition, which would both put an end to, and render meaningful, her own suffering and, in some measure, the suffering of other lesbians.



Fig. 1. The green door that led to the Gateways Club between 1930 and 1985, taken March 2007, by author.



Fig. 2. Behind the green door: Inside the Gateways Club c.1954

The door to the Gateways Club, in The Kings Road in London, was green.¹ It is remarkably unassuming: a single door in a windowless, unadorned wall. According to some, it inspired the 1956 hit song ‘The Green Door’, in which a male singer seeks entry to a mysterious venue:

There’s an old piano and they play it hot behind the green door
Don’t know what they’re doing but they laugh a lot behind the green door

Wish they'd let me in so I could find out what's behind the green door.²

Shortly after arriving in London, in 1957, Elsie Ruth (Lyn) Palmer paid the ten shilling membership fee and descended the stairs to the cloakroom. Gina Ware took her coat, and Lyn entered the long, windowless cellar-room of the club. It was smoky, dark and crowded with women drinking, smoking, dancing, laughing and talking over the music from the jukebox and the rattle of the fruit machine.

A great deal has been written about Australian women and writers in London, but Lyn's story offers a unique perspective. For practical reasons, many of the stories about Australian writers in London have focused on those who achieved literary success. We know the stories of Louise Mack, Christina Stead, and Charmian Clift, for example, because their literary works, as well as other evidence of their lives and work, have become treasured historical artefacts. But for every Australian whose literary ambitions were realised in London, there are many others who travelled 20,000 miles or more by boat, took the train from Southampton to London, found a cheap bedsit, set out their typewriter and paper, and disappeared.

Lyn's story provides an insight into what it was like to seek, but fail to achieve, literary success in London. Lyn was also a lesbian, and her story reveals that travelling to London could be as much about seeking and finding the fabled 'home' of a welcoming queer community as worldly success. In this narrative, her double identity as a writer and as a lesbian was interwoven in complex ways. The overwhelming majority of narratives from the time depicted lesbian lives as tragedies of almost unrelieved suffering, which ultimately ended in prisons, hospitals, mental wards and suicide. In the face of such negative depictions of lesbian experience, Lyn adopted a double identity: that of a lesbian/writer. Adopting the identity of the Romantic artist³ – an outsider who 'suffers for their art' – provided both an alternative explanation for a range of negative experiences, and a possibility that suffering *now* would be rendered meaningful when she created, and published, works of literary merit.

Lyn was a member of one of the last waves of Australians travelling 'home' to London after the Second World War.⁴ For her, the aspiration to go to London was informed by a wealth of historical and socio-cultural influences. As it was for the semi-autobiographical character of Teresa in Christina Stead's novel, *For Love Alone*, travelling to London was symbolic of a movement towards freedom, knowledge and self-determination:

She would sail the seas, leave her invisible track on countries, learn in great universities, know what was said in foreign tongues, starve in cities, tramp, perhaps shoeless, along side roads, perhaps suffer every misery, but she would know life (Stead 1945: 265).

Born in 1934, Lyn belongs to the same generation as many renowned Australian writers and poets who left Australia for London during the 1950s, including Peter Porter (b. 1929), Robert Hughes (b. 1938), Clive James (b. 1939) and Germaine Greer (b. 1939). Unlike those who had left for England immediately after World War II, these literary expatriates were too young to have fought in the war. Most of them had a university education and were members of Menzies' 'forgotten' middle class. Lyn

shared few of their socio-cultural advantages: born in working class Carlton to an unmarried mother and an alcoholic father, she had been raised by a foster mother who met her mother in a tea shop. As a young child, Lyn was often unwell – she suffered from chronic asthma – and melancholic; she always believed she would die young.

By her late teens, Lyn was determined to ‘justify her existence’ by doing ‘useful’ work (Anon 2012). She took a job as a nurse at Kew Mental Hospital. In a newspaper article published shortly before Lyn took up this position, a voluntary patient spoke of ‘fellow patients [who] seemed to be suffering from mental disorders of sexual origin and ... many cases of lesbianism’ (*The Sunday Herald* 1949: 6). Treating patients for a condition she herself ‘suffered’ from was traumatic. Despite securing a transfer to the ‘Children’s Cottages’, Lyn sank into depression, writing poems that reflected both her mood and her perceptions of her workplace and its patients:

The jungle of the living dead,
The vacant eyes, the slack lips ...
The thoughts that are,
but cannot be (Palmer, unpublished)

Later, she moved into a small flat in St Kilda, found work at the famous gay and lesbian coffee lounge, Val’s, ‘a place for identifying with other lesbians’ (Foster 2011: 160) and became part of the artistic, intellectual queer community known as ‘camp society’, though she grew increasingly dissatisfied with the possibilities offered by life as a writer and as a lesbian in Melbourne.

Many artistic or intellectual Australians saw their country as unable to sustain or nurture them. As Alan Moorehead wrote in 1947: ‘In Australia there is no climate for the mind ... Perhaps Proust preferred to work in a padded cell in the Faubourg St. Honoré. But could he have worked in a padded cell in Wagga Wagga?’ (139-43). For those like Lyn, who were doubly different, Australia in the 1950s was doubly inhospitable. While homosexual law reform was taking place in Britain⁵, in Australia the New South Wales police chief asserted that homosexuality was ‘Australia’s greatest menace’ (Delaney, ctd in Willett 1997: 123) and lesbianism was routinely described as either unnatural or abnormal. In the press, in pulp novels and serious literature, and even in banned plays, censored books and illicit literature, lesbians were depicted as damaged, violent and deranged. Moreover, as Graham Willett argues, the ‘primary dynamics at work in relation to homosexuality in the 1950s were not debate and discussion but silencing and oppression’ (Willett 1997: 122).

While she did not starve herself to get there, as the fictional Teresa does in *For Love Alone*, Lyn set her sights on London as a mecca of literary opportunity and sexual freedom. A close friend of Lyn’s writes that she left for London ‘with the hope of escaping haunting doubts and starting afresh ... searching for mental stimulation’ (Anon 2012). Angela Woollacott argues that it was the nature of the relationship between Australia and Britain that made crossing the globe possible for many earlier colonial women:

In the cultural logic of colonialism, Australian women’s attraction to London was naturalized as an understandable desire for the possibilities as well as the iconic sights of the imperial metropolis (2001: 51).

This desire for the ‘possibilities’ that London offered was perhaps even more powerful for lesbians, for whom, as Olivia Espin argues, ‘the crossing of borders through migration provides the space and the “permission” to cross boundaries and transform their sexuality and sex roles’ (1999: 5). For Lyn, as for many writers and lesbians at the time, Australia was not truly home, but a place of exile and estrangement. Going to London was not, therefore, as much about leaving home, as *going* home. As Alan Sinfield writes in his analysis of queer diasporas: ‘instead of dispersing, we assemble’ (2000: 103).

In 1957, at 22 years of age, Lyn set sail for England. In Australia, she had written poems and short stories. In London, she took a bedsit in Notting Hill Gate, a job as a typist, and began writing a novel, *A Spoonful of Honey*. The novel is incomplete: the writing repetitive and sketchy, rarely eloquent or beautiful, though there is extraordinary courage in writing an openly lesbian novel at a time when reviews of works with even a hint of lesbian content attracted hostile, dismissive reviews: ‘By any standards, Lesbianism is Lesbianism and can hardly be transformed into something rather beautiful, as the author tries to do’ (Stewart 1956: 35). While it is unclear what literary influences Lyn may have had, her writing itself, and the various drafts on file at the Australian Gay and Lesbian Archives in Melbourne, show that she was influenced by the detachment and impassivity of the European naturalists. She never apologises for her characters, or intervenes, as narrator, to soften or explain the blows that rain down on them. As an author, she is unflinchingly honest.

The work is intensely autobiographical, and develops many of the themes of Lyn’s earlier writing, including anxieties about lesbian and artistic identity. The two main characters in the novel are sometime lovers, though their relationship is far more complex than this suggests. *A Spoonful of Honey* is not a love story, but a portrait of two damaged and ambitious women. The main character, Marty, is an aspiring writer who meets Vicky – an actress – at the Criterion Theatre. Marty studies the way Vicky draws inspiration and energy from the people around her. As a writer, she begins to employ many of the same strategies, until she becomes:

a parasite. Not the healthy kind that prey on people’s money, but a mental parasite. You fasten onto people ... use your looks and charm to gain their confidence until they release to you all that is in their poor bruised hearts (*A Spoonful of Honey*: 58).

Towards the end of the manuscript, Marty has finished writing her play, and Vicky has agreed to perform in it because it will be good for her career, despite her misgivings about Marty’s sources of inspiration. Marty laughs at her, and Vicky, incensed, calls her former lover ‘a soulless monster’ with:

a dreadful blank fear inside ... sometimes you are so afraid you feel sick and lost. You want to run to someone and ask for their help, but you can’t, because you don’t know what it is that frightens you (*A Spoonful of Honey*: 77).

Later in the same scene, Vicky continues:

Someday, someone or something will penetrate to your cold little heart, and where will you be then, with your glorious illusion of superiority tumbling about your ears? You

will be reduced to the ranks of the majority, and out of the limelight you would become ordinary and insignificant. You wouldn't like that, would you?

You'll be a great writer, you'll be famous, but I wish to God it could happen to a better person (*A Spoonful of Honey*: 77).

This passage, in various slightly altered forms, is rewritten several times. The earliest version is a handwritten note, written in the first person. It would be dangerous to read it is a purely autobiographical passage, though the themes of self-doubt and ambition, hope and fear, recur in many of Lyn's works, across poetry, plays and fiction.

Perhaps what is most striking is the monstrosity of Lyn's portrait of a character who shares her own double identity as lesbian and writer: Marty loves Vicky, but early in the book she rejects any romantic attachment, unconvinced that love and literature can be mutually sustaining activities. Lyn, by contrast, had met and fallen in love – perhaps for the first time – with an English actress. They met through friends, and struck up a tentative, at first quite formal, friendship. Among her papers is a note dated 12 December 1958 accepting 'your kind invitation to tea on Saturday next (13th) at 6:00 pm'. Within a short time they had moved in together. Lyn wrote, while her partner pursued her acting career, but most of Lyn's time was spent as 'a non-entity forced to accept typing jobs in an enormous, impersonal city' (Palmer, unpublished papers). She was in love, and hopeful about the refuge such an emotional connection might provide, but though the relationship held, the happiness she felt within it was fleeting.

For one thing, the writing came slowly, and at great personal cost. She couldn't write at work; and the space she and her lover shared was small, cramped and cold. Sometimes, they couldn't afford any shillings for the gas-meter to heat the room. Even food was scarce. As Lyn writes: 'We search the dustbins round the West End, the smart hotels, we live on luxuries they throw away' (Palmer, unpublished papers). Her asthma was getting worse and it is possible that around this time she had the first of a series of heart attacks brought on by a combination of combining prescription drugs and alcohol. Late at night, when the words wouldn't come, she talked about wanting to die, or strode through the streets for hours, huddled in a too-thin coat, in a haze of purposeless, undirected fury.

In writing about many of the Australian writers who flocked to London during the early twentieth century, Peter Morton states:

There was no recipe for rising to the top in literary London other than native talent, a thick skin, the shrewdness to spot an opening in the market and meet it, and, underpinning all, a capacity for relentless, solitary work (2011: 101).

If this was, indeed, the recipe for success, then Lyn was ill-equipped for it. She had some 'native talent', but very little time or space within which to nurture it. She had received a basic education. While she was intelligent and observant, she was inclined to be negative, and too attuned to the hypocrisies and corruption she perceived in the world around her to grasp the opportunities it offered. Also, partly because of her illness, partly because of her struggles with depression, and partly for the simple practical reason that she had to work long hours just to survive, she had no real

capacity for ‘relentless, solitary work’. In this same city – and only walking distance from where Lyn was living – Virginia Woolf had written that in order to succeed as a writer a woman needed a steady income and ‘a room of one’s own’.⁶ Lyn had neither, and no means with which to acquire them.

For three years Lyn lived in London, struggling to make friends, to write and to find an audience for her work. She never found the community of like-minded lesbians she had once imagined meeting. She came to despise the Gateways club scene, which she saw as ‘crazy, trendy, shallow’ (Anon 2012), full of women who failed to truly connect with each other:

Jive little girl!
 Become a mindless robot
 Whirl and turn, whirl and turn
 And never look at your partner.
 (Palmer, *And Are We Born To This*)

In the end, Lyn returned to Australia. She had found a partner, but her failure to establish herself as a writer or to find a spiritual home – a vital, tolerant, intellectually-stimulating community in which she would be accepted, even celebrated, as a lesbian and as a writer – had left her bitterly disappointed. The once longed-for metropolis had become, in her eyes, ‘a second-rate country full of second-rate people ... a dead country’ (Palmer, unpublished papers).

In her writing, Lyn persistently evoked the Romantic model of identity in which an aspiring artist overcomes various social, financial and emotional difficulties. In Lyn’s work, the writer/lesbian must ‘live a life of lies and pretense [sic]’ so that ‘their poisoned barbs [cannot] enter to hurt us’ (Palmer, unpublished papers). Lyn struggled to maintain the belief that her suffering would one day end in triumph. There were plenty of examples, by Australian writers, of this archetypal story: a whole tradition of novels and memoirs that featured an early period of struggle in London followed by personal and professional success, including Philip Lindsay’s *I’d Live the Same Life Over* (1941), James Dwyer’s *Leg-Irons on Wings* (1949), and (though the ‘suffering’ is social and class-based, rather than economic) Rosa Praed’s *An Australian Heroine* (1880). Even the emotional and psychological challenges faced by Marty in Lyn’s own draft novel *A Spoonful of Honey* lead eventually to professional triumph. The reader is left in no doubt that Marty’s early difficulties are to be rewarded by a stellar career.

The dream of future success sustains many aspiring writers. For Lyn, it was doubly important. The dream of success as a writer was entwined with her dreams of success – of happiness and belonging to a community – as a person. The dream of (self) acceptance, of finding her way ‘home’ to a community where she belonged, was never going to be easy for a young woman whose first encounters with other lesbians were with patients in a mental ward. Like many lesbians of her generation, Lyn was attracted to life as an artist: being a writer had the potential to render some of her suffering meaningful. It gave it shape and purpose. The great poets of the past had starved in attics, been despised and neglected, locked up in prisons and mental wards, but in the end they had produced works of lasting importance and beauty.

In *A Spoonful of Honey*, Marty, like Lyn, is both a lesbian and a writer. Her suffering is inextricably linked to her double identity. For Marty, lesbianism is a kind of curse, but also natural, powerful, even inevitable. Thematically, the hurdles Marty faces render her love more majestic, echoing the iconic thwarted love stories of history and literature: *Troilus and Cressida*, say, or *Romeo and Juliet*. But Marty and Vicky's relationship is different: the lovers, as well as their opponents, doubt whether their love is pure and good. In this sense, Lyn's novel traverses far more interesting ground than traditional thwarted romances: unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, these aren't young lovers sure of the rightness of their love, convinced that family and society are wrong to try to keep them apart. These are lovers at war with themselves as much as with the world. A large part of their struggle is against the homophobia both of them have internalised. As Lyn writes, in a brief note slipped into the manuscript for her novel, 'To hate you is my goal; to love you is my fate'. As any reader of classical literature knows, fate will always win out in the end. It was not Lyn's fate to be a successful writer, or to find peace within a loving relationship.

While narratives of Romantic suffering may offer inspiration and comfort for a time, in real life, not all struggle ends in triumph. As the dream of literary success became increasingly distant, Lyn's hope faded. She wrote less, and drank more. She stopped producing new work, instead reworking – almost obsessively – the works of the past. Old poems were typed out again and again, sometimes with minor alterations. She rewrote an anti-war play (*Boys Throw Stones*) as a screen treatment, and then again as a fable set in a pseudo-Spartan past. She made notes for new stories, but none of them were completed. And the novel, still incomplete, foundered.

Lyn's experiences in London arose out of, and were reflected in, the double identity she adopted. This double identity provided a narrative purpose for the suffering she experienced: the poverty, depression, anxiety and discrimination, and even her illness and problems with alcohol. For Lyn, these experiences were part of a Romantic narrative in which suffering was the root and stem of great art. The efficacy of this double identity was predicated on achieving literary recognition, which would put an end to, and render both visible and meaningful, her personal suffering and, in some measure, the suffering of other lesbians. *A Spoonful of Honey*, had it been completed and published, may have also offered many lesbians a sensitive, complex portrayal of the challenges many of them faced in their daily lives, affirming them in their struggles, and in their complex identities.

While her double identity sustained Lyn, to some extent, during the dark years, the dream of success was fools' gold. It was no real salve for her suffering. Nor was it a dream available to those, unlike Lyn, who did not pursue lives as writers or artists.

When we tell stories about the past, we often construct or focus on narratives of redemption. Stories of failure, however, are also a large part of history. Paying closer attention to them can broaden our understanding of the past. In her 2011 book, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam writes that, 'Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (2011: 2). Halberstam goes on to give some convincing examples of cultural

representations of failure that can be read as subversive, interventionist, disruptive: as queer. And yet, Halberstam's analysis often falls back on the idea that failure is most usefully understood as both temporary, and a part of the history of transformation, or transcendence. She writes, for example, that, 'relieved of the obligation to keep smiling through chemotherapy or bankruptcy, the negative thinker can *use the experience of failure* to confront the gross inequalities of everyday life in the United States' (2011: 4). Here failure is something that people go 'through', not something we inhabit, or which consumes us. Failure, here, is a temporary state, and one which, in Halberstam's analysis, is only ever empowering or subversive when viewed from outside or beyond the moment/s of failure itself. In her brief analysis of the film *Little Miss Sunshine*, for example, Halberstam argues that Olive's 'failure, [is] hilarious in its execution, poignant in its meaning, and exhilarating in its aftermath' (2011: 5). Through Olive's failure (and her family's celebration of, and collaboration in, her moment of poignant and vulgar transgression) 'a new kind of optimism is born ... a little ray of sunshine that produces light and shade in equal measure and knows that the meaning of one always depends upon the meaning of the other' (2011: 5).

Olive's failure, here, and Halberstam's reading of it is not, I think, as radical or new as it at first appears. Here failure, or suffering, are rendered in much the same relation to success and 'light' as they were imagined by Oscar Wilde during his incarceration in Reading Gaol: as a temporary experience, and one that throws light forward into a future that is always already presumed to be transcendent, a place of success, of non-failure, of learning from and improving upon both the experiences that preceded failure, and the moment of failure. Failure, and suffering, for Wilde and for Halberstam, are largely understood as experiences we 'go through' in order to be able to 'use' the insights gained to transform ourselves and/or the world.

One thing we notice when we separate stories of struggle from stories of overcoming struggle is that struggle and suffering, in their own right, are not edifying or educational. They are not transformative. They are not necessary to the achievement of health, happiness, wealth or success, for individuals or communities. We can take pride in, and celebrate, stories of people and nations overcoming adversity, but it is dangerous to see weakness in the failure to thrive. Or, to accept that suffering is a natural, even necessary, part of the human story. It is important, moreover, to notice the careful way that Halberstam frames the discussion of failure: *under certain circumstances*, she writes, failure may be *used*. But there are other times – other circumstances – in which failure is not useful. Is not transformative. And does not offer us 'more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world' (Halberstam 2007: 2). Nothing is perhaps less surprising than the ongoing and even terminal failure of those whom our culture most persistently oppresses.

We can learn to accept the dark days of history, our past failures, our past suffering, but we should never make the mistake of believing that suffering is necessary. That it is the necessary ground of greatness, or even for more moderate success or wholeness. If for no other reason than that, for some, the dark days never end.



Fig. 3. Elsie Ruth (Lyn) Palmer, 1934–1969. Photographer unknown⁹

Endnotes

1. The actual entrance to Gateways, pictured here, was on Bramerton Street, though the club's address was 239 The Kings Road, Chelsea.
2. In an essay about the role of the Gateways club in lesbian subculture, Rebecca Jennings writes that this song, which was a major hit for Frankie Vaughan in 1956, was written 'by Joe Meek, an early Gateways member' (2006: 213).
3. The myth of the suffering artist first gained traction in literary and artistic circles in the Romantic era. One succinct expression of the trope appears in the painter Eugene Delacroix's journal, where he writes: 'What do you think has been the life of men who have raised themselves above the common herd? Constant strife. Struggle against the idleness that is common to them and to the average man, when it is a question of writing, if he is a writer: because his genius clamors to be manifested; and it is not merely through some vain lust to be famed that he obeys it – it is through conscience. Let those who work lukewarmly be silent: what do they know of work dictated by inspiration? This fear, this dread of awakening the slumbering lion, whose roarings stir your very being' (Pach 1938: 94).
4. One of the earlier and most explicit expressions of the trope of the suffering artist comes from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*. Written while the author was incarcerated in prison, the text proposes a metonymic link between the suffering of Christ on the cross, and the suffering of the artist. Wilde writes that, 'he [Jesus Christ] regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection' (2007), and goes on to equate his own experience of incarceration and the attendant suffering he experiences with Christ's suffering for 'our' sins. While Christ ascends to heaven, Wilde writes that 'to become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered ... there may come into my art also, no less than into my life, a still deeper note, one of greater unity of passion, and directness of impulse'. Here, Wilde's suffering is reconfigured as a source of both personal enlightenment and growth, and of the source of greater artistic skill. This suffering and resulting 'depth', however, are linked to notions of artistic genius and privilege. Wilde's suffering is temporary, and he knows that it is temporary: he writes explicitly about the time, a year from the time of writing *De Profundis*, when he will leave prison with both a home to go to, and 'enough to live on for at least eighteen months ... so that if I may not write beautiful books, I may at least read beautiful books' (2007). He also suggests that the suffering he endures could not be transformed into greater 'depth' or artistic insight by lesser souls, writing that 'Great passions

are for the great of soul, and great events can be seen only by those who are on a level with them' (2007). The nobility of suffering, then, and the ability to experience suffering as transformative and necessary, are at least partly acknowledged as functions both of economic and social privilege. Without the safety net of wealth (and wealthy friends), class and education, suffering is merely suffering.

5. In an online essay in *The Guardian*, author AL Kennedy writes, a little more succinctly than Delacroix, that: 'The myth of the suffering artist is part of the wider myth that sinking into abjection will somehow cleanse and elevate the poor and/or unconventional, eventually leading them on to glory' (2012).
6. According to UK Census data, there were 30,718 Australian-born citizens resident in England or Wales in 1951, many of them in Earl's Court, or near where Lyn herself settled in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
7. On 4 September 1957, the Wolfenden Report was released, recommending that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence'. Though the recommendations were not immediately implemented, the report – and the investigation leading up to it – opened up debate about lesbian and gay issues, and resulted in a range of positive changes. In 1958, for example, the Lord Chamberlain lifted the ban on plays with homosexual themes. For a discussion of this period in Britain see, for example, Miller (1995) and Jennings (2006, 2007)..
8. In 1928, in two papers delivered at Newnham College, and at Girton College, Cambridge, Woolf wrote that: 'Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor ... Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry' (1977: 116).
9. This photograph is located in the archive materials in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archive – with no credit or any other information.

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