

Lynda Hawryluk

Southern Cross University

Blue berries

Biographical note:

Dr Lynda Hawryluk is a Senior Lecturer in Writing at Southern Cross University where she is the Course Coordinator of the Associate Degree of Creative Writing. Lynda lectures in Writing units and supervises Honours, Masters and PhD students. An experienced writing workshop facilitator, Lynda has presented workshops for community and writing groups in Queensland and Canada. She is the immediate past President / Chair of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, a Committee Member of the Byron Writers Festival and has been published in a variety of academic and creative publications.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Poetry – Landscape writing – Ekphrasis – Death – Grief



Fig 1. Hawryluk, L 2017 *Littoral rainforest remnant* [photograph], collection of the author.

Blue berries

Pearl sized, compact. Faded at the base.
On a stalk so tender it hurts.
Spider fingers support their weight
with frail limbs like old lady arms
grasping at air in palliative wards.
Fearing death's reach as it comes to them
when night falls.

I bring blue berries to your bedside
press them into your fading hands
your veins like spider-webs
sending thin streams of blood ever outwards.

Their flesh meets yours and splits open
bleeding arterial spray.
Siphoning life from the inside out
connecting you to country again.

Your tired eyes like blue berries
blink back the memory of home.
And a flicker of life shines bright just once
then fades and goes out for good.

Research statement

Research background

'Blue berries' is informed by research into Australian coastal Gothic writing (Tondorf 2016). Gothic narratives typically focus on 'horror, uncertainty and desperation of the human experience' (Turcotte 1998: 10), and the experience of dying is among these. Found only in sub-tropical coastal areas, quondong berries represent the transition between life and death, acknowledging the regenerative nature of quondong trees and their Indigenous Australian use as traditional medicine (JCU 2017).

Research contribution

Australian coastal Gothic writing continues the tradition of colonial narratives focused on hostile landscapes (Steele 2010). The image of quondong berries lying in a bed of littoral remnant rainforest in the Northern Rivers evokes the appearance of an elderly person's eyes as they enter the liminal space between life and death. This evocation occurs as 'photographic ekphrasis' (Barry 2002: 155), inspired by fungi found at the base of a quondong tree.

Research significance

'Blue berries' contributes to an emerging body of Australian coastal Gothic writing. The poem was read at the 2017 Writing the Australian Beach symposium (CQU Noosa) and projected onto a two-storey artspace within SCU's Library foyer during Research Week (both August 2017).

Works cited

- Barry, P 2002 'Contemporary poetry and ekphrasis' *The Cambridge Quarterly* 31 (2), 155–65
- JCU 2017 *Elaeocarpus angustifolius* (syn. *E. grandis*) *Discover Nature at JCU*, at <https://www.jcu.edu.au/discover-nature-at-jcu> (accessed 8 August 2017)
- Steel, K 2010 'Fear and loathing in the Australian bush: Gothic landscapes in bush studies and "Picnic at Hanging Rock"' *Colloquy* 20, at <http://www.colloquy.monash.edu.au/issue20/steele.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2017)
- Tondorf, C 2016 "'Lure" and "Does the coast have a place in the Australian gothic landscape?'" Masters thesis, Lismore: Southern Cross U
- Turcotte, G 1998 'Australian Gothic', in M Mulvey-Roberts (ed) *The handbook to Gothic literature* New York: New York UP, 10-19