

Macquarie University

Marcelle Freiman

In Forster (Sand up the coast)

Biographical note:

Dr Marcelle Freiman is a Sydney poet. She is the current Chair (President) of the AAWP and is a senior lecturer in English at Macquarie University, where she teaches creative writing, post-colonial and diaspora literatures, and poetry. Her research areas are: theorising the educational discipline, pedagogy and research frames of creative writing, on which she has published several articles in *TEXT*; post-colonial writing and theory, the writing and theory of diaspora; the writing of J. M. Coetzee. Her most recent book of poetry is *White Lines (Vertical)* (Hybrid Publishers, 2010). Her first book of poems, *Monkey's Wedding* (Island Press, 1995) was Highly Commended for the Mary Gilmore Award, 1996. Her poetry has been published in literary magazines and journals over the past 20 years, read on radio and in performance, and translated into other European languages. She is a member of the Sydney poetry group DiVerse, which writes and reads poetry in dialogue with contemporary art and museum exhibitions.

Keywords:

ERA – creative writing – research – ekphrasis – migration – cognition

In Forster (Sand up the coast)

Pelicans still
 against the blue
mirrors of lagoons, or high up
 their wings
held by the constant wind –
a place so windblown, strange
to an immigrant: I stood
 on the beach
 as if I'd left
 my other wing
in another place –
not here, where the wind forces
the trees to lean
 downwards
and pandanus rough in the sand
has roots like legs pushed in
 against the sliding—
and I think of Eliza Fraser
 in her fringe of leaves
on an island of sand,
alien, harsh as salt
 and beautiful
the pools of water filtered clean
 through the grains—
how she had no choosing,
had to find in the straps
of the leaf bracts
 how to seek out
the toughness
and her feet scratched and bare
were pushing down,
 sucked into sand
 as the wind blew
 her green and leathery.

Research statement

Research question, field and context

This work engages with the possibility of ‘coming to know’ through the writing of poetry. The poem enacts this knowledge construction in dialogic response to works of visual art (Harding 2010) in a narrative of contemporary Australian migration and settlement. *Ekphrasis*, the poetic rendering of visual textual qualities, constructs a provisional sense of ‘being’ in place through a process of situated writing, in which embodied affective energies triggered by visual perception create the poem. Rather than starting with a preconceived idea, composition begins with ‘not knowing’: visceral and non-visceral sensations link cognition and emotion (Damasio 2004: 173) as imaginative and sensory associations generate the poem’s language and formal trajectory around a sense of instability and displacement.

Research contribution: innovation, new knowledge

The process combines an awareness of cognitive brain function research with creative writing practice. Knowledge construction mirrors Vico’s theory (1744) of ‘imaginative metaphysics’, where knowledge comes from ‘*not* understanding’—a process where the thinker ‘becomes’ things ‘by transforming himself into them’ (Leitch: 415), creating a layered sense of ‘being in the world’ in a local landscape. Australian art, memories of place, and literature (White 1976) position the work as a particular settlement narrative.

Research significance

This poem is part of a project exemplified in the writer’s recent book *White Lines (Vertical)*, an emblematic, fragmented exploration of South African migration to Australia and Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the Commonwealth. While this wider history has generated recent sociological, historical research (Tatz *et al.* 2007), the creative writing project’s insights gained through its processes, are new to Australian writing.

Works cited

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