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# TRAUMATA

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**traumata** (*plural of trauma*)

/trə'mætə/

**1.** *Pathology*

- a.** bodily injuries produced by violence, or any other extrinsic agent.
- b.** the conditions produced by this; traumatism.
- c.** the injurious agents or mechanisms themselves.

**2.** *Psychology* startling or distressing experiences which have a lasting effect on mental life; shocks.

[Greek: wound]



I wake up tense, nervous system switching onto the wild winds that have rattled the windows all night, making it hard to settle, trapping me in that thin top layer of sleep on which insistent thoughts intrude. I scan the room, tenderness at my temples, rise, and open the curtains. The branches of enormous eucalyptus trees dance out of time against the bruise-grey sky. The sun, breaking through, sparks off leaves. The power goes down.

Do I start with my mother's fear? My father's certainty? Or with the blackout rape I rarely think about that took place in a cheap Bondi hotel when I was a teenage alcoholic? I can still see the judgemental brow and hear the tone of the cop (you know the one: sneery, patronising, shaming) tasked with investigating after the police picked me up.

They're cruising down Campbell Parade in the early hours of a Sunday in 1981 and there on the side of the road stands a young woman holding the flattened side of a cardboard box against her naked body, having snatched it up while running through a fluoro-lit car park. Is it even necessary to tell that story? Haven't we heard enough? It occurs to me now I don't recall this rape ever coming up in therapy. It had some competition.

The poet Eileen Myles says that writers spend so much time 'processing, consuming [and] creating an alternative self that is

entirely composed of language so that there are precise speeds or toxins or organs in it that work in concert with the state that you are in and can only neutralize your own pain by vanishing into a song composed of exactly that timbre'. I think she means there is a place we go for the magic of disappearing and arriving simultaneously – some kind of dissolving communion. I was lonely then. Or maybe I should say I was lonely then in a way I'm not lonely now. That's how I came to be at a bar, on my own, aged eighteen, letting some guy buy me drinks till I was drunk enough to go back to a hotel with him and his friends. This is not a confession or a hard-luck yarn, though there is some hard luck in it. This is not about me, or only me, my me-ness. There's a reason I'm telling you this.

I understand you want to know what kind of book this will be and whether you can count on me. I'm thinking about how to respond.

Einstein and the new generations of quantum physicists have been telling us for years that the past, present and future are illusions. Time is not what it seems. I'm paying attention here to all of the times. It puts me on edge, splits me into fragments held together by these flimsy words, by the act of bashing imaginary ink into shapes and arranging them into more elaborate shapes and silent sounds you can decipher. A clue: the beginning is not the beginning. This is not just about rape, or *my* rape. It's about the big rape: patriarchy, with its endemic traumata.

Patriarchy seems like an old-fashioned word, a twentieth-century word. I feel I'm showing my age in invoking it, but there is no other word that gets at it. The Ancient Greek word *patriarkhes* denoted a society where power was maintained and passed down through elder males. In modern parlance, a 'patriarchal

society' generally refers to one in which men are predominantly represented in positions of power as head of the family unit, bosses in the workplace and leaders in government. Though some like to think 'the patriarchy is dead' (Hanna Rosin in *Slate*), and others view patriarchy as 'a term used by feminists, to blame men for all their problems' (*Urban Dictionary*), many feminist thinkers still use the word patriarchy to 'describe the society in which we live today, characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed' (London Feminist Network). In this rendering, the political, economic and social systems established over millennia function as a structural reinscribing of patriarchy, so that, for example, even when women are admitted into roles of responsibility and representation, including high-level leadership – such as Theresa May as Prime Minister of Britain or Hillary Clinton as US Secretary of State and presidential candidate – they are bound to, and by, the institutions and attitudes established by patriarchy, which continue to disadvantage women (and others on the lower realms in patriarchy social orders).

What do I mean, then, when I say this is a book about patriarchy and its endemic traumata? I mean I'm going to make the case that patriarchy is inherently traumatic, and that we might coin a new word – *traumarchy* – to denote the intersection of the two. Why, then, am I talking, in the next breath, of myself, my life? I have to speak from the inside out because patriarchy isn't 'out there'. Our skin is not an impenetrable barrier against its effects. It infiltrates our beings and shapes our lives – first from the outside in, then from the inside out.

The word memoir comes from the Latin *memoria*, recast into French, *mémoire*, during the fifteenth century. People think you have to be special to write memoir, but I, for one, am a cliché. This book exists not because trauma and shit going down in

childhood is exceptional or inherently interesting, but because it's chronic, commonplace, sometimes dramatic and often tedious in its stranglehold of repetitions, daily struggles, and predictable and unpredictable outcomes, and no one gets out alive. And then there's the question of my unreliable memory, my damaged brain. What does it mean to communicate a fractured, faded memory?

If I told you I've heard thousands of stories and witnessed the ravages in the lives of countless friends, acquaintances and passing strangers in detoxes, rehabs, support and therapy groups, you'd think I was exaggerating, but there it is, everywhere we turn: in news headlines and advertisements, on the street, behind every closed door. Course, not everyone lives in the slipstream of a familial clusterfuck of trauma, but even the most well-adjusted and loving of families aren't immune to tragedy, freak accidents and diabolical developments, and we draw generational straws in cultural clusterfucks such as fascistic, oppressive regimes, unjust systemic structures, economic depressions, and wars (military, psychological, domestic). Not all unfortunate events or even extreme sufferings are traumatic, but many are.

Some live with unimaginable clusterfucks. Syrian refugees rejected at every border. Survivors of concentration camps. First Nations people torn from family and country. In any event, clusterfuck is the turf we're on. We're on the trail of religious imperialism, notepads at the ready. We're investigating its misogynies and carnage. We're tracking the shadows of liberalism, that project of modernity and the Enlightenment. We're taking down the statistics, and plotting revolution. There are those who appear to come out unscathed, but few really are. A lot of people lie. You want to know what kind of book this will be. It will slip between viral shimmerings like photographs out of focus with ghostly figures in the background (they mean us no harm), part manifesto, part epic poem, part library, part love letter, always a conversation. Are you listening?

A note from my mother: ‘I carried you in fear because I had two miscarriages before. I tried not to, but in the trying was the fear. You were born sucking your thumb. It was a very easy birth as births go. You whimpered like a baby puppy for about three weeks. It used to break my heart. You would only open your eyes in the early night morning hours. It was three weeks before your dad saw them. I just loved you so much and always will. I was twenty-nine and my first Saturn return was happening. My own lack of nurturing was just emerging and we both suffered. There was love and fun also, and the process goes on ...’

When I was twenty-six and two years sober, one of the many self-help books I resorted to in desperation suggested gathering together photos of early childhood with a view to reconnecting with the ‘inner child’. I had no baby photos so I wrote my mother, whom I rarely saw during those years due to my tendency to freeze in a constellation of encrypted, overwhelming emotion in her presence, a state that expressed itself in less than loving behaviour. The overexposed black and white photo she sent, along with this note, written in her liting hand on powder blue paper, shows a baby not long in the world swaddled in soft cotton blankets in a latticed, frilly cot with an enormous bow on the side. Only a head of black hair is visible and a three-quarter profile of a small sleeping face with eyes closed tight.

This is the gestation story my mother told me when I was a child. She’d already had two miscarriages by the time I was conceived. They were trying for a girl and had just about given up; while contemplating adoption my mother fell pregnant again towards the end of 1962. When I was six months in the womb, some drama, the details of which died along with my mother’s body, sent her to the hospital. Doctors listened for a heartbeat and could hear

none. They thought the foetus was dead and prepared to remove it, but my mother grew agitated and refused to let them. In order to placate her they agreed to leave it until morning. When they came back the next day there was a strong heartbeat. A miracle! They ordered her to rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. I can't be sure the bit about the miracle is true. That might be the embellishment of a fanciful child's imagination, but one thing is certain, because one of her oldest and closest friends confirms it: my mother spent many months of the pregnancy confined to bed, reading, as she had done throughout her sickly childhood, fearful of losing me, fearful, as she had been for as long as she could remember. There are times I've wondered if I whimpered because I had some pre-verbal sixth sense that the world into which I had arrived was a deeply troubled one, and that I was in for a hell of a ride.

A big blonde moon sits high in the night sky and hundred-k gusts take another power line down. I sit in the dark.

When I came to in that Bondi hotel, I was groggy and disoriented, and being fucked by a guy who wouldn't stop when I struggled to get out from under him. I said I wanted to go and he said no. After, I lay on my back, rigid, looking at the ceiling, him lying beside me. I remembered being on the roof with him and his friends, then following him to his room, just the two of us. I remembered sitting on the edge of the bed next to him, talking. Then nothing – blank – till I woke up to the pounding. I didn't know what else he might do, and his not letting me go terrified me. I didn't know where my clothes were, but I was frantic to leave. I leapt up, made a break for the door and ran. At least I think that's what happened going by flash-bulb grabs of memory.

Those images dissolve as I reach for them. One moment I make out shapes as if viewing quivering, faded old film; the next they are gone – poof.

As a child I got swept up in the drama of Barbra Streisand crooning about memories illuminating the corners of the mind in her 1970s hit ‘The Way We Were’. Research, however, suggests that memories don’t just occupy or light up a given region of the mind, they *are* the mind. Reporting on emerging findings, Nick Stockton writes that ‘sensory experience triggers changes in the molecules of your neurons, reshaping the way they connect to one another. That means your brain is literally made of memories, and memories constantly remake your brain.’ Another way to describe it: the brain is ‘plastic’ – dynamic and capable of modifying itself. Stockton quotes neuroscientist Nikolay Kukushkin explaining that remembering a given memory involves reactivating previous connections between parts of the brain. These connections are fine-tuned at synapses, which are sensitive to the strength or weakness of signals. Kukushkin emphasises that memories haven’t been stored in a system, as if static or fixed in place – rather, memory, which helps us learn from the past with the aim of improving function in the future, is ‘the system itself’.

Light bounces off a face and its rays sharpen to a point on your retina. Your cornea focuses through the eye’s internal lens, converting the image to electrical impulses that speed along your optic nerve like a superhighway to the visual cortex in the brain; as if a camera has been clicked, the image is caught. Someone speaks, their voice making sound waves that travel through the canals of your ears. When the waves hit the eardrum it vibrates and a trio of tiny bones in the middle ear hammer the vibrations towards the snail-like cochlea in the inner ear, where they are transformed into electrical impulses by tiny hair cells and carried to the brain. You smell and chemicals in the

air make their way through your nose, sending a message to the brain by means of sensory nerves. You eat and your taste buds detect the chemicals in the food; they transport that sensory input to the brain, resulting in the perception of taste. You are touched and receptors in your skin and muscles race signals up your spinal cord to the brain. Your nervous system shoots impulses along a network of cells and fibres in complex conversations between brain and body. Hormones circulate in your blood and work your nerve cells, making you hungry or horny. This elaborate symphony and the way it makes you *feel* is in constant play with the environment and the beings and objects you encounter, registering information in more detail than can be consciously acknowledged. Your brain collects and connects it all via neurons and synapses, creating ‘mosaics from these milliseconds-long impressions’, as Stockton puts it. This is the basic process of how each and every memory is made. What’s particularly revolutionary about Kukushkin’s findings is that they suggest ‘your brain’s molecules, cells, and synapses can tell time’. His study concludes that the relation between neurons, molecules and synapses encode these combined sensations as imprints ‘in terms of the relative time they occurred’, packaging the memory into ‘a so-called time window’. It’s obvious how the making of memories might be disrupted or confused by excessive alcohol consumption, but what about trauma?

Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth says the problem of traumatic memory comes down to the inability to fully witness the traumatic event. A gap ‘carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory. The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding.’ This reads like a cryptic puzzle. It feels like a cryptic puzzle, this living with gap-like memories undone by the force of what incites them. Caruth explains that the event, not being registered and integrated in the normal way, cannot become, as Freud’s contemporary Janet called it, ‘narrative

memory'. *The event cannot become the past.* It never settles into its 'time window'.

People think of memory as being about the past, but that's a mistake. As Thomas J. Gross writes, citing neuropsychiatrist Daniel J. Siegel, it's more accurate to say it's about 'how the past affects future outcomes'. Biologically, this function of memory is, Gross says, the way in which we construct our reality based on factual knowledge of the world, the way we come to know ourselves as a self. Traumatic memory is a kind of past in the present that informs the future. Those who are significantly affected by it are trapped in a temporal whirl they can neither comprehend nor control. And those of us grappling with its mystifying workings need to heed caution.

Elizabeth Loftus, a researcher of 'false memory', says in a TED talk that most people erroneously think of memory like a recording device, but that in reality it is constructed and continually reconstructed. It is as vulnerable as a Chinese whisper. This is murky territory. We want to rewind memory, like tape, to imagine it as mediated, captured certainty. We want it to be true or false, sound or silence, but either way to be solid. We need to know we're not mad (or even if we are, that something really happened). Instead memory slides around inside us like blood and between us like a sticky mutating membrane.

As a child I coped with life in a 'dysfunctional' addiction-addled family by dancing. My parents separated when I was four, the same age I started ballet. I danced all through my childhood, rocking myself to sleep with fantasies of being a prima ballerina. Then, at the age of twelve, following several harrowing years of domestic violence between my mother and her defacto partner Albert, and in my final year of primary school, I started going to school early

and, by special arrangement, writing a novel in the staff room before the teachers arrived.

Though I had no way of knowing it at the time, this childhood attempt at novel writing was a kind of trauma testimony. The story told of a young girl lost alone in the bush, negotiating a host of scary trials and tribulations and triumphing against the odds. There was a fire in the summer and to survive it my heroine jumped into a creek and lay underwater holding her breath for a magic-realist length of time until the fire passed over her. There was a grisly old hermit, stern and distant, and it seems obvious to me now that he was my father. The project marked a shift from dancing and towards language and literature. This is how I became a writer. Unintentionally, while I was busy chasing other leads, pursuing other goals, imagining other lives.

I've been published widely and I've earned three writing degrees and I teach writing in universities, but I remain humbled by language and writing. In *Shadowlands*, the film based on the life of writer and scholar C.S. Lewis, a student recounts his father's adage that 'we read to know we're not alone'. And Jonathan Safran Foer once observed, in an interview promoting his debut novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, that writing is an attempt to not be alone. When I think back to the motivation of my twelve-year-old self, rising early to write a novel in an empty staff room, it is her loneliness that comes to mind – a loneliness born of the maddening disconnect of trauma.

Psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub cites massive psychic trauma as 'a record that has yet to be made'. This is his way of describing an experience that occurs too quickly or suddenly to be processed, that fails to leave a mark in thought and language but whose presence is felt and expressed in delayed symptomology. Caruth puts it this way: 'In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic

events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.' It lurks, transmitting down the line, rearranging cells and relationships. When it resurfaces (surprise!) it may or may not appear pathological. Some traumatised individuals are jailed (the addicts, crims and socioeconomically disadvantaged) while others are rewarded (the shame-driven high-achievers).

When it causes havoc we withstand it like bad weather, nursing child-like fantasies (imperceptible sometimes) of rescue by *deus ex machina*, that magic moment in a play, novel or film where some divine force descends on a seemingly hopeless situation, saving the day. In Ancient Greek theatre this God was literally lowered from the heavens via a device or 'machine', which is why it translates from Latin as 'God out of the machine'. I don't mean to sound defeatist when I say I have given up waiting for the God out of the machine and that I think the machine is swallowing us all up. It's true that like Nick Cave I don't hold with the notion of an interventionist God, but if I did it would be writing. In writing and reading, a touch of salvation is possible, a loosening from the machine, some kind of rising out of it, some kind of not being lonely, the balm of world-making words.

This book had its unwitting beginnings back in 2007 when I wrote about my experience of growing up with violence in a memoir essay titled 'The Exiled Child' for *Divided Nation*, the fifteenth edition of *Griffith Review*. It was later reprinted in *The Age*, where some tasteless sub-editor had rebranded it with the punny, cringeworthy title: 'Home Is Where the Pain Is'. It was shortlisted for the Alfred Deakin Prize for an Essay Advancing Public Debate in the 2007 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, up against Frank Moorhouse, Amanda Lohrey and Noel Pearson (Moorhouse won). I had never before had this kind of response to a published piece. I lost count of the number of people who tracked down my

email address and wrote to me. And several years later it proved the catalyst for my return to university to undertake a PhD on transgenerational trauma and its literary testimony. I'd already spent years coming to terms with how trauma played out in my own life, and I wanted to understand more about how it worked socially.

In other words, I had been writing a long time before I realised trauma was a grand theme. It's not a particularly original grand theme since most books, at least so far as poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction are concerned, deal with trauma one way or another. I have no unique claim to it. As trauma tales go there are far worse than mine: in many ways my traumatic experiences have taken place in a privileged context. I'm a white woman from a western, working-middle-class family. I'm not moneyed or financially secure, working as a sessional academic and teacher, one of the many anxious labourers in the rising new class of the precariat, but I am rich in social capital, and have benefited from good fortune. I write about trauma because I don't know how else to live with it, because I'm still coming to terms with it, still searching for connections, and because I know many others are too.

During my research and reading across continental philosophy, cultural psychoanalytic theory and poststructuralism, one of the works I found most compelling was a book of collected essays by Hungarian-French analysts Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török. Edited and elaborated on by Nicholas Rand, the essays emphasise transgenerational trauma by way of strikingly gothic conceptions. They speak of the 'crypt', the 'phantom' and 'psychic tombs'. Abraham and Török's thinking and writing about trauma are so poetic that reading them inspired a poem in homage:

**Writing a Dear John letter while reading Abraham  
and Török**

Dear [insert name here],  
You have eaten me

*Traumata*

(a me that stands in for another that is).  
They call it incorporation.

You swallowed me deep in your belly of  
unsobbable sobs, of  
unsayable to-be-saids  
in your belly of rotting sugar.

You kept me on a chain  
like a pet  
    you starve  
at the door of the crypt (of your child mother).

They call you a cryptophore, a poem, a poet.  
They dare to rewrite *Hamlet* and I dare to rewrite you.

Of course the secret,  
not just any secret,  
not just *a* secret,  
but a tomb, an enclave, a haunting ...  
your grandmother God in her cardigans  
giving you the gaps, giving you the fear,  
the wordless passing of the baton  
of shame, of shame  
and the silence of corpses screaming.  
They call it the phantom.

I want out your belly love,  
to stand with Hamlet in an ending ined,  
in an ending where  
only the dead  
    are buried.

‘Poetry has always been able to utter the will of free will, coming back to the memory of words and extracting its sense and time,’ says Julia Kristeva, the philosopher, literary critic, feminist theorist and psychoanalyst. What does the free will want but to be free, to live? Abraham and Török speak of working-through/mourning/healing as a mysterious but affirming force of psychic life, the result of processing everything from whatever’s in your field of vision (wind-shivery leaves) to your worst nightmare. It can be facilitated by therapy but is by no means limited to it. Reading and writing are among the many currencies in which it moves. This force has worked overtime on my anxiety and panic attacks, addictions, agoraphobia, and many-headed compulsions, which are never only mine. It does what it can under the circumstances and the circumstances aren’t always conducive. It’s alive and pumping, but it gets tired. In short, it’s chalked up some wins and some losses, though neither is absolute.

I spent hours that night at the police station, where I gradually sobered up. There were tests at the hospital, and my father appeared in the hallway, taking his place beside me on one of those hard plastic waiting-room chairs, with a sad, drained look on his face. His presence pained and intimidated me at the best of times, but I was grateful for his way of going quiet, of underplaying, in dramatic situations. What happened that weekend spooked me for months; there was an odd emotional hangover. There were drawn-out legal proceedings. I remember a series of long phone calls with my old friend Renee, talking it through from the Manly flat I was then sharing with my older brother.

I’d first met Renee when I was around twelve or thirteen through my friend Heidi. Heidi was a big-boned, pink-skinned blonde who befriended me on my first day at Glebe Primary School. She was a diabolical child and a treasure, and against the odds she grew up to be – so far as I am able to observe – a

functional and accomplished woman. Heidi lived around the corner in a rundown one-bedroom flat, little more than a bedsit, with a drunkard dad who worked in a factory and who, she told me once, was not her real father. It was hard to know what to believe with Heidi, but she didn't seem to be lying when she said that her mother had committed suicide when Heidi was a baby (the man she grew up with was, apparently, her mother's partner at the time) and that the bossy old battle-axe who lived down the road was her grandmother. There were a couple of half-sisters around. One was dour and dark-haired with a sour cast of mouth who would have been at home in a Chekhov play; the other was blonde, livelier, and worked in an office somewhere. Heidi had the bedroom, and when he wasn't at the factory or the pub Heidi's father, a child-sized elf-like man, slept it off on a filthy-sheeted single mattress in the lounge room with a small black and white TV blaring from the foot of the bed. On Thursdays, payday, he would come home extra-soused and pass out on the bed with five-, ten-, twenty-dollar bills falling out of his trouser pockets. We'd light-finger them out then take off up to Broadway shops for a Thursday evening shopping spree of whatever took our fancy.

I never did work out how Heidi got to know so many Glebe eccentrics and outsiders, but I mostly got to know them through her. When I was around thirteen or fourteen she took me to a plain double-storeyed house up around Cowper Street. I didn't know then (or rather I knew in that way of knowing and not understanding) that it was a Sydney 'colony' of the Californian cult The Children of God, later renamed The Family. A decade or so later the sect came to public attention amid accusations of serious misconduct, including child abuse and financial mismanagement. I don't recall being subjected to overt sexual abuse there, but I do remember the promotion and practice of a bizarre evangelistic method called Flirty Fishing, which involved members, often young women, using flirtation and sex to lure new members into the cult.

Heidi also took me to a dilapidated house up on Derwent Street where she introduced me to an old Bukowski lookalike named Jim, who wore Buddy Holly glasses and shuffled around, potbelly protruding from dull-white singlet, long curly grey hairs growing out of his flabby upper arms. Random young women – mostly lesbians or sex workers (or both) – came and went from Jim's at all hours. I took it at face value, grateful to have somewhere to enjoy Vegemite toast on white bread (not available at my house), bludge smokes for hours on end, kill time, and sometimes con Jim or one of the women into giving us money. There was plenty of sexual innuendo, rumours of porno film screenings at night after we'd gone home, and jokey suggestions that some of the women might have serviced Jim. Still, we viewed it, perversely, as a safe place where we could hang out, smoke and talk freely, away from home. It was there at Jim's that I first met Renee, though I had no way of knowing then that several years later she'd come back into my life and be my only friend at a time when I desperately needed one.

I was lonely then in a way I'm not lonely now. That's how I came to be at the bar of a quaint ye olde pub on George Street on a Saturday afternoon drinking with strangers. I'd not long returned to Sydney having fled to London in 1980 at sixteen, determined never to come back to Australia, eager to escape its provincialism, to have a bigger life, to be *there* rather than *here*. I had fantasies of becoming an 'actress' but that was really my mother's dream. She'd grown up in the age of the silver screen and had an encyclopaedic knowledge of old Hollywood. Greta Garbo, Vivien Leigh and Marilyn Monroe were her favourites and though she dabbled, appearing on *Beauty and the Beast* during the '60s, doing small-time theatre shows and working as an extra in '70s TV shows and films, if she had a missed boat a serious acting career was it. I had fantasies of being someone else, somewhere else, as if being in the

glitzy capital at the heart of a dying empire would somehow make me more substantial, more important.

How do I explain the circumstances in which an unaccompanied minor moves 10,560 miles across the planet alone? I can feel myself wanting to protect my dead mother, wanting to explain how headstrong I was, how persuasive I could be, wanting to stress that my pushing wore her down, but the fact is she let me go and she shouldn't have. Sometimes, when I see fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds – young people the age I was then – I am overcome with sorrow for my young self. As sophisticated as they may appear, whatever their adult veneers, they strike me as child-like and incredibly vulnerable, and I struggle to comprehend how the adults in my life failed to see me that way. To understand something of my mother's decision, you'd have to understand a mother-daughter dynamic in which on some vital level the tables were turned.

There were several contributing factors to my mother's poor parental decision-making. She had been stifled by an over-protective mother and longed all her life for freedom from those oppressive demands, so her permissiveness with me was, at least in part, the result of an extreme pendulum swing. She suffered terrible guilt about my childhood, about what I lived through in service to her addiction to pills and troubled men. I knew how to work that guilt to get my way. And despite her feistiness, she was never too far away from a crippling self-doubt that led her to hand over power to those around her, even her own children. This bred in me a sense of false empowerment and gave rise to a deeply ingrained over-responsibility that clashed with wanton irresponsibility in my youthful precociousness. I assumed a position of authority and leadership, especially so far as my destiny and liberties were concerned. As a Cold War baby, I was convinced that nuclear fallout would wipe Europe out in

my lifetime and that I needed to get there sooner rather than later, but mostly I went because I had to keep moving, because an imagined somewhere else was always better than the actuality of where I was. And I went because of my first cousin Jake, with whom I was besotted.

A debonair extrovert, Jake had moved to London to pursue a career in film. He seemed so cosmopolitan, even though he was only a few years older than me. His larger-than-life demeanour was a direct consequence of being the son of my Uncle Hugh, my father's elder brother and a renowned author in his day, and Hugh's second wife, Phoebe, an Elizabeth Taylor-esque beauty from the Macarthur-Onslow dynasty. Jake was warm and wild and had a to-the-manor-born air about him, but even the glorious Macarthur-Onslow birthright had its roots in a traumatic defeat.

The Macarthurs (historically known by various other spellings) were a distinguished clan in the Scottish Highlands and some make controversial claims that they were descended from King Arthur. The clan reached their zenith of power around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, boasting significant land holdings as the keepers of Dunstaffnage Castle until King James I had the Macarthur clan chief beheaded to keep their influence in check. The execution served its purpose, weakening the clan's political power base, but the Macarthurs refused to be snuffed out. Come 1746, John Macarthur of Strachur and his seven sons fought as soldiers in the Jacobite army in the ferocious civil war showdown at Culloden Moor. John and one of his brood were slain on the bloody battlefield. The surviving sons scattered in fear for their lives; Alexander Macarthur fled to the West Indies along with numerous other Jacobites, eventually returning to settle in England where his son John – named after Alexander's fallen father – was born.

John Macarthur grew up to immigrate to Australia with his wife, Elizabeth, who gave birth at sea only to lose the child before nursing John through life-threatening illness aboard the Second Fleet. Thanks to a generous land grant, and on the back of convict

labour and amid frontier wars, the Macarthurs became colonial aristocracy after pioneering a world-famous merino wool industry (John Macarthur's image appeared alongside a ram's head on the old two-dollar note, and the district is still named after him). Having made his fortune, Macarthur built a majestic Georgian manor called Camden Park House on the traditional lands of the Dharawal people, south of Sydney.

The story of Jake's forebears is a saga worthy of a melodramatic mini-series, and Alan Atkinson (no relation) has detailed it, at least so far as the public record in Australia is concerned, in a book titled *Camden*. Suffice to say that Macarthur's charms, ambition and successes were matched by flourishing flaws, turmoil and scandals; he was instrumental in the infamous Rum Rebellion, an attempted military coup, which resulted in his exile, and in his absence Elizabeth – considered by many, including some within the family, to be the real pioneer – managed the estate and expanded its business interests. After establishing his little empire, John Macarthur died insane and was buried in a family vault shaded by Chinese elms on a humble hill west of the mansion.

Five generations later, Phoebe, the youngest of Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Macarthur-Onslow's three daughters, became a local celebrity. In a 1950s spread in *The Sun-Herald* she stands in trousers and lipstick beside her father's Hornet Moth, wearing an expression of intelligent determination. She's only seventeen, already a successful model, and she's busy taking acting and flying lessons (she went on to become the youngest licensed female pilot in New South Wales). She tells the reporter about her plans to head to Hollywood before she turns eighteen. A 'Lord Strathallan' – a Cambridge graduate in Australia to 'learn the shipping business' – is noted as her 'constant escort'. But the film-star plans and hinted marriage to Lord Strathallan don't come to pass. Instead she meets my uncle, the dashing writer Hugh Atkinson, already married with two children, Damien and Aram. The rest, to twist the adage in on itself, is family history.

Trauma is tenacious in its tendency to transmit inter-generationally, and neither success nor beauty nor money can stop it. My toffy-voiced aunt Phoebe may have seemed to readers of yesteryear gossip columns the personification of Australian faux-royalty, but beneath her socialite glamour, renowned generosity and impressive hosting skills, the brutal losses of Culloden Moor continued to reverberate. And like the son of John Macarthur of Strachur who died at the hands of Hanoverian loyalist troops, Jake lost his battle too young.

I can count the number of times I've been to Camden on my fingers, mostly because my father and Hugh lived in different countries for much of my childhood, though they were close all their lives. I do remember a couple of family outings to what was then certified countryside and Jake coming to stay with us for a weekend when I was very young, before my parents divorced. After Hugh's career as an author took off, the charming couple jetted to the Northern Hemisphere, raising Jake and his sister, Rachael, in Malta, Majorca, Guernsey and London, hobnobbing with luminaries like Peter Finch and Phillip Knightley. (Hugh once warned me off becoming a writer by evoking a memory of watching a tortured Dylan Thomas labouring over troublesome words, though I'm not sure if this bears up: my father says that like all good fiction writers my uncle could be creative with the truth.) In the absence of this worldly branch of the family I heard occasional stories and saw the odd photograph in Mediterranean technicolour.

On Sunday visits to Seaforth, my grandmother waxed lyrical about the winning ways of the golden couple and their children, and I understood that they lent a kind of distant nobility to the family. A proud Scotswoman, she had looked down her nose at Australia ever since she had been forced to emigrate as a teenager with a fondness for the poetry of Robert Burns. She never quite

recovered from being ejected from Great Britain – still the centre of the universe at the turn of the twentieth century – only to find herself in a dusty one-horse town in central-west New South Wales. And though her own breeding was working-class, and she had willingly accepted the hand of my grandfather Clarence, a mild-mannered and handsome fellow from a family of Trundle master butchers, she believed herself married beneath her intellectual station. It was as if she saw her firstborn as her rightful heir, hobnobbing with the gentry in the opulent hotspots of 1960s Europe. I couldn't hope to compete with my pedigree cousins for her affection; I was inferior, a Sydney girl, the second child of her second son.

It wasn't until they returned to live in Leura, during my first or second year of high school, that I got to know Hugh, Phoebe and my cousins. Hugh and Phoebe separated not long after their homecoming, and shortly afterwards I woke up one morning to find Hugh passed out on our sofa. He and my mother began a relationship and over time I grew close to him, viewing him as something of a father figure. It may be more accurate to say my mother and Hugh resumed the relationship they began when I was a small child. My brother, many years older than me, swears he saw them kissing passionately in our childhood home before my parents' divorce, and one of my mother's closest friends confirms their affair, adding that Hugh, a suave author on the rise at the time, had bought my mother a car. Uncle Hugh was alcoholic, gifted, clever, cultivated and witty, which was a lot of fun so long as it stayed on the right side of acerbic and wasn't directed at you. I was mostly spared his withering gaze and vicious tongue, but not entirely, and my mother copped it plenty. His nickname for her was 'pygmy' on account of her being short and petite and, though many might take that as a slight, it demonstrated the more tolerable, affectionately mocking side of his verbal abuse. One of my mother's close friends says she once complained that he called her a cockroach, a term clearly intended to be demeaning and

humiliating. Even so, both my mother and I loved him madly, and after she died in 1997, only a few years following his death, I found a bundle of adoring love letters from Hugh to my mother. I read only the first lines of a few letters – enough to know it was not my place to read more – and in those words their admiration and desire for each other was palpable.

It was during the early years of my mother and Hugh's on-again-off-again defacto relationship, when I was fifteen or sixteen, that my crush on cousin Jake took hold. My mother and Hugh were shackled up in a humble weatherboard house just outside of Woy Woy and I was staying with them. I spent my days writing in a journal and riding my bike around Brisbane Waters, and sometimes Jake would visit. Bored with satellite-city living I moved back to Sydney just after my sixteenth birthday, and into the Glebe studio apartment my mother had acquired, the better to be closer to Jake, who was living in a house in Surry Hills owned by Phoebe. I passed the days of a Sydney summer listening to Double J radio and Neil Young's *Harvest* over and over, drinking with friends, daydreaming about Jake and finding excuses to make contact.

One day Hugh showed up on my doorstep, having been turfed out by my mother. We went on a bender around town with Jeremy, an ex-boyfriend of mine Hugh was partial to, and a couple of other friends, during which we were refused entry at the infamous Journalists' Club, despite Hugh's longstanding association, probably because Jeremy got around barefoot in an op-shop suit in breach of the dress code. It lasted for days, and somewhere in my timeworn, booze-soaked memories is a clear replay of lying next to Hugh on the floor, both of us drunk, half-asleep or both, and him groping me. I struggle to write those words, and to leave them be once written. I make myself write them against a force field of prohibition and shame. I imagine my

aunts and my surviving cousins reading them and dread sets in the gut. I am ashamed for him yet it is not *my* shame.

It only happened that once. I want you to understand (hear the rising panic in my voice?) that I do not believe he would have done it sober. At no other time in our relationship did I experience him as sleazy, or did I feel sexually sized up by him. I want to say these things. I want to make excuses. To be sure you understand the conditions. Shame is part of what drives alcoholism, addiction and abuse, and in so doing it reproduces and is transmitted. And shame is often transmitted, paradoxically, by shameless acts, acts in which one person's avoidance of shame demands another carry it. As Teresa Brennan points out, feminine beings – those who do not exhibit the valued, westernised signs of masculinity, whether because of their gender identity, youth, race or even species – are required to carry a disproportionate amount of shame, fear and other punishing affects. It is the way of patriarchy.

We feminine beings learn early on to take this load, to wear it as ours, to do the work, day in and day out, of enabling silence, denial, minimisation, unless we make a conscious decision not to, and learn how not to (and of course, children have a very limited capacity to do either). I force myself to write that one time my only uncle sexualised me and fondled me, tried to kiss me like a lover, when I was not yet the age of consent and he knew how much I looked up to him, because this is a story that plays out the world over. A 'good' man, a 'drunk' man, a 'talented' man, a 'trusted family member' or 'friend', a man whose family and community assume to be above it, objectifies and abuses a child in his care or a young woman in his presence. When it comes to light we ponder, discuss and engage in argy-bargy about what causes men in such numbers to do these things. There are many possible devils in the detail, but the bottom line is that when men do this they do it because they can, because they've been enabled and trained by aeons of patriarchy to do it, because deep down they've been imprinted

with the notion that they are masters of all they survey since the day they were born with a penis and thus bequeathed a gendered privilege (are we at risk of overusing that word; are we too preoccupied with identity point scoring?). And too often we protect men, protect ourselves and each other, from the truth of what they do and from our collective duty to examine how and why it is men reach that moment, and how best to intervene on this structural (there can be no other word for it) abuse. When my mother showed up unannounced shortly after the drunken fumble she found the studio trashed and empty and added me to her growing list of evictees. I did not tell her about the unseemly moment that had passed between her partner and me.

As a mature, educated woman, as a known feminist, I am expected to be the kind of woman who does not struggle to say that my long-dead uncle crossed the line, yet here I am: wanting to retract, to stay silent for my father's sake, my aunt's sake, my cousins' sake, my dead mother's sake, wanting to whitewash the memory of a man I revered and who has some bearing on my becoming 'a person whose most absorbed and passionate hours are spent arranging words on pieces of paper' – a writer – as Joan Didion once put it. Why do I imagine that what I seek to protect them from is theirs or ours alone? Why does it feel so personal, so singular, as if it's about an individual (him, me) when I know that what I protect against belongs to society, shameful and shameless by turns, to a history well beyond that of my family?

What I unwittingly, instinctively want to protect against is the shame that permeates patriarchy. It's what I've been trained to do. It's what we've all been trained to do, but protecting against this shame means protecting, colluding with, its shameful *and* its shamelessness, with patriarchy itself. 'I was very struck by all the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us "a shame at being human"', says the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in an interview with Antonio Negri. 'Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us

believe, but that we've all been tainted by it: even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive.' So it is that we make compromises, from the start, in order to survive, except that many don't, or do so wretchedly. We've been brought to a critical point in which the future of humanity and the planet itself is less certain than ever. Having reached the twenty-first century, we're on our knees with climate change, financial crises of false economies, unprecedented instability in western political leadership, and global terrorism operating in a context in which many countries have nuclear capability. There is no time left for decorum. One must say the words that need to be said, exposing the circulating shame that in hiding propagates.

The windows rattle and the wind howls. I try to sleep, surrounded by ghosts.

I can't remember how Renee and I reconnected in the aftermath of the seedy Bondi rape, but somehow she appeared in my world, no longer working as a sex worker, and we'd talk on the phone and occasionally I'd go visit her in her nice little flat and we'd sit around drinking green ginger wine and listening to Rodriguez singing about sugar men. What I remember most distinctly is the sound of her voice, on the other end of the phone, telling me that my problem was I saw two sides of everything. I didn't understand what she meant, and that bothered me. It felt like I was missing something important.

So I continued angsty over my feelings of guilt and responsibility, convinced I'd 'brought it upon myself'. At a bar on my own for hours on end; flirting outrageously; going off in a taxi with people I didn't know to I wasn't sure where; changing my mind about fucking mid-coitus (if I'd even made up my mind to start with); panicking and bolting; making a public,

pathetic spectacle of myself. I would have dropped the charges, but they weren't mine to drop: the cops had pressed them and now I had no choice but to have a court case hanging over me. I counted my lucky stars that I was not required to be present and I had no hesitation in electing not to attend.

The nagging guilt came with another feeling I had no words for. It had preceded the rape, which produced yet more of it. I'm not talking about the energetic movement of a necessary, transient humbling designed to regulate unchecked interest or hubris. I'm talking about the chronic presence of a noxious, transmissible traumatic shame. American psychologist and affect theorist Silvan Tomkins conceived of nine affects: shame-humiliation (inherently punishing), anger-rage (inherently punishing), fear-terror (inherently punishing), distress-anguish (inherently punishing), interest-excitement (inherently rewarding), enjoyment-joy (inherently rewarding), surprise-startle (inherently neutral), disgust (inherently punishing) and dissmell (a biological response of revulsion, to putrid meat for example – inherently punishing).

These are, according to Tomkins and his adherents, hardwired and present from birth, and in combination with life experiences they form an emotional memory that becomes the scaffolding on which much of the personality is built. Our less than fully conscious attempts to regulate affect (to maximise those we experience as positive and minimise those we experience as negative) results in what he calls 'life scripts', psychic and behavioural patterns that inform the way our lives play out. Tomkins viewed shame as the most pernicious of the affects. 'If distress is the affect of suffering,' he pronounced, 'shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation. Though terror speaks to life and death and distress makes of the world a vale of tears, yet shame strikes deepest into the heart of man.' It struck deep in my heart back then though I didn't know its name.

I was relieved when the guy didn't show for court and I got on with it, putting the sordid business behind me.

Fast-forward thirty-plus years to 2016. One of the sorry tales that circulated around social media was that of the Stanford rape case. Brock Turner, a twenty-year-old former Stanford University student and star athlete, was sentenced to jail for the attempted rape of an unconscious twenty-two-year-old woman behind a dumpster at a frat party in January 2015. The woman understandably chose to remain anonymous. Two documents generated reactions from around the world: a letter from Turner's father in defence of his disgraced son, and a victim impact statement of over 7,000 words addressed to Brock and read out by the woman during his sentencing hearing.

The outpourings by Turner's family are toxic examples of how the rotten apple falls close to the poisoned tree of delusional, closed-hearted, sexist entitlement. The words of the young woman whom Turner violated – not only in the initial assault but also in wilfully dragging her through a trial and attempting to shift the blame in self-serving denial – reminded me of that night in Bondi and its aftermath. I read her statement, cheering from the sidelines. I exulted in its length and strength. In its clarity and her capacity for articulation in the face of layers of abuse. She was everything I was not in the wake of that ill-fated bender. This was a young woman standing her ground against a society and a legal system that had failed her and claiming her right to a voice, to speak, to be heard (I want to think this signifies some kind of progress, but the power of her words is undercut by the fact that they exist in order to call out a culture that still produces and enables men like Turner).

A Brock Turner Family Support page was set up on Facebook, seeking donations and spreading propaganda and slander. While it was active it launched a #brockinallofus campaign that

featured posts protesting, ‘We’ve all made mistakes. Whether it’s failing to drive in the winning run in your little league game or oversleeping and missing an important test, or, like Brock and his companion, drinking too much and getting a bit too touchy-feely.’ Whoa. Wait up. We’re comparing a childhood sporting disappointment and a malfunctioning alarm clock to rape and blatant victim-blaming? Next to this text a black and white cartoon depicted three female figures each holding a placard marked by one of the following words: *We / Are / Brock*. The troubled Turner family ended this post by thanking supporters for their prayers. Jesus wept. Following persistent complaints, the page was eventually shut down, but not long afterwards Turner was released, having served only three months of his already lenient six-month sentence (the prosecutor had argued for six years). It’s an insufferable and seemingly circular crisis in which we live, an asylum run by lunatics, and we do our best to juggle in a mania of ‘isms’ and stress, soothed only by love and voices of support binding against the micro-aggressions and micro-transgressions that build to these horrendous moments made public spectacle.

Another petition in my feed that week protested the banning of Melbourne comedian and feminist commentator Catherine Deveny. Facebook had slapped a thirty-day lockout on her for an ‘offensive’ status, which read: ‘Here are the top ten causes of violence. 1. Men. 2. Men. 3. Men. 4. Men. 5. Men. 6. Men. 7. Men. 8. Men. 9. Men. 10. Men.’ It appeared Facebook moderators did not consider the Brock Turner Family Support page to be ‘violating community standards’ while a simply stated opinion by a lone woman was promptly deemed ‘inappropriate’ and penalised. When the World Health Organization announced in 2015 that the leading cause of death for young women aged fifteen to nineteen was suicide (the leading causes of death for young men of the same age were road injury and interpersonal violence), Professor Vikram Patel, an internationally recognised

psychiatrist and expert in global mental health, cited gender discrimination as the probable cause. ‘Misogyny kills,’ writes Jessica Valenti, the young (female) journalist discussing the finding. Valenti, an outspoken feminist commentator for *The Guardian*, withdrew from social media platforms in July 2016 after the rape and death threats usually directed to her were extended to her five-year-old daughter.

Controversial American academic and social critic Camille Paglia defends patriarchy, suggesting that second- and third-wave feminists (such as Deveny and Valenti) who call men out for sexism and misogyny are puritanical, punitive and demonising. ‘History must be seen clearly and fairly: obstructive traditions arose not from men’s hatred or enslavement of women but from the natural division of labor that had developed over thousands of years during the agrarian period and that once immensely benefited and protected women, permitting them to remain at the hearth to care for helpless infants and children,’ insists Paglia. Yet US-based historian Dr Amanda Foreman, in her four-part BBC documentary, *The Ascent of Woman*, states there is evidence suggesting that the development of patriarchy was not based on the ‘natural division of labour’ and nor was it as beneficial to women as Paglia claims. It was, Foreman asserts, surplus agriculture, as well as the development of a military to protect and expand it, that seems to have led to the advent of rigid patriarchal practices and attitudes, manifesting in a variety of ways across distinct cultures.

Donald J. Trump and his henchmen at the helm of the so-called free world demonstrate more starkly than ever before that government all too readily becomes less a system of democratic representation and more a corporatised, masculinist oligarchy, unhinged in its loveless lust for domination, and, as if poisoned by the fumes of their own toxicity, corrupted by the patriarchy it desperately seeks to reassert. Feeling their patriarchal power base slipping, they refuse to go down without

a gaslighting-us-on-the-way-south fight. In the aftermath of Trump's election to the US presidency, those who saw the rise to power of an ill-prepared demagogue as a devastating coup debated about which ushered in the unfortunate outcome: was it down to class, race or gender? Foreman's reading of patriarchy's beginnings would seem to support Marx's view of class as the dominant organising principle of society, in that production of surplus for profit gave rise to both early capitalism and patriarchy, but since sexist, racist and speciesist principles now dominate economic and socio-political operations in such an entwined way, arguing the toss is a waste of valuable time. This is why many are now adopting an intersectional approach as our best hope of making substantial and sustainable change. As Patricia Hill Collins puts it, class, race and gender (and I would add species) form interlocking axes of oppression within a matrix of domination; it is less useful, then, to determine which packs the biggest punch (the answer will always depend on who is answering anyway) than to understand the ways in which patriarchy drives the entire operation.

Even if Paglia is right to acknowledge the once-productive foundation of patriarchy and a biologically influenced 'natural division of labour' that enabled the survival of the human species in ancient civilisations, she glosses over the fact that the productive–destructive balance tipped towards the latter as modernity ramped up, and that, for all of patriarchy's achievements, women and the lower classes, the workers and slaves, have paid an unspeakably high price for those gains. Patriarchy was profoundly traumatising from the start, with its inequities and focus on war, devastating for men as well as for women, children and non-human animals. Paglia also protests that patriarchy didn't start out motivated by significant numbers of men hating, enslaving, exploiting, oppressing, or otherwise victimising women and girls, but according to Foreman it took almost no time before laws came into being

that amounted to, or paved the way for, just that. And despite many of those laws having been rewritten in light of challenges to the patriarchal worldview, it's hard to conceive of the kind of treatment received by the likes of Valenti as anything less than downright hateful.

It's difficult to reconcile statistics on violence towards women with Paglia's selective thinking on the glories of patriarchy and the shortcomings of modern-day feminists. Her logic comes across as one-eyed. For example, when she observes that 'it was labor-saving appliances, invented by men and spread by capitalism, that liberated women from daily drudgery', she disregards the pesky detail that men dominated the field because humankind evolved over aeons in which women were not generally permitted into public life and disciplines such as science and engineering. She also fails to acknowledge the many damaging inventions by men, and the threat of catastrophic climate change that many scientists link directly to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of consumerism and capitalist mass production dating from the mid-twentieth century.

There's another irony inherent to Paglia's argument: if patriarchy was a reasonable arrangement for much of human history, the very same advances she celebrates men for having made have also rendered it largely redundant, or have at least transformed the cultural landscape to such a degree that a process of re-negotiation has long been in order and in play. In her positive spin on patriarchy, Paglia makes no mention of the high price men themselves pay for the stubborn remains of patriarchy: according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2016 *Causes of Death* report, the number of deaths by suicide is three times higher for men than women, and the ABC's Siobhan Fogarty reported that the suicide rate of young Indigenous men in Australia is the highest in the world.

Fast-forward to October 2017. The Harvey Weinstein shitstorm hit the internet after *New York Times* investigative reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey broke the ‘open secret’ of his decades-long systematic and serial sexual harassment of women (reports estimate at least fifty women have come forth to accuse him). While Weinstein, one of the most powerful film producers in Hollywood and co-founder of Miramax, denied allegations, played with semantics, and fuffed about with a joke one-week stint of sex addiction outpatient treatment for show, the #MeToo movement went viral. Tarana Burke, an African-American activist, had initiated the grassroots Me Too movement in 2007 to help underprivileged, unrepresented or otherwise marginalised survivors of sexual violence feel less alone. The hashtag was introduced on 16 October when actor Alyssa Milano tweeted encouragement for women who had experienced sexual harassment or assault to follow suit.

Millions of #MeToos flooded feeds in the days and weeks that followed. And then the responses rolled in: #MenToo (men joining in), #ItWasMe (men owning up), #IWill (people vowing to take specific actions to combat sexualised abuse), but there were boycotters too. Amy Gray sent public love to those participating but declared to the world at large, ‘You don’t get to read my #metoo.’ Jacking up against disclosing her trauma ‘on social media platforms that continually silence women and protect their attackers’ for the passive consumption of many who ‘won’t read the articles, won’t look at the statistics, won’t physically campaign for reform’, Gray pulled no punches. ‘We’ve given you the evidence whether it’s through the courts, police, articles, or research papers. Either no one listened or we were censured for saying it. Some of the people who weren’t heard aren’t here any more.’

I found myself strangely conflicted. I was moved as woman after woman posted #MeToo; I felt obliged to stand with the womenfolk (and others who joined in), but I was torn between

wanting to be counted and a complex configuration of sympathy with Gray's unyielding, uncompromising stance and several perplexing reservations. It was not a question of eligibility. My inner cynic was wary of tokenism, suspecting this would be yet another temporary viral solidarity that failed to dismantle the hierarchical structures set in place by patriarchy. And there was also some other, harder-to-pin-down cause for pause, in which my innumerable lived experiences of sexual abuse, coercion and harassment resisted being contained to a six-character badge. In the end I identified as someone who qualified for #MeToo in the context of airing my reservations, which was either the honest thing to do or the coward's way out, depending on your view.

As the days and weeks wore on, I witnessed the value in terms of collective solace and it became clear that, far from being the flash-in-the-pan trend I feared it might be, #MeToo opened a floodgate, though to what ultimate effects and ends remains unclear. Beyond its social media moment, the testimonies kept coming from within industry after industry. Abusers were named, and stories were told that often included aftermaths featuring bribery and intimidation. Some of those named faced real-world consequences. A handful issued tricky image-control statements. Yet more hid under rocks. And the odd fellow fessed up with an actual apology. Penning the foreword for my academic book, *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*, in October 2016, days before the US election, American affect theorist Gregory J. Seigworth wrote about the women 'taking to social media to share the details of their personal encounters with male sexual aggressors' in light of Trump's 'sexually predatory behavior'. It turns out that was just a warm-up for the post-Weinstein explosion of what Seigworth described as women's voices reverberating 'across an already charged public atmosphere, forcefully speaking back against sexual intimidation, assault, and patriarchal power' (and yes, I know it's not just women, but women have been, and continue to

be, the drivers of this phenomenon). The eruption of #MeToo demonstrated that people abused by those who benefit most from patriarchy aren't just angry when they speak out: it takes courage to express that anger in a culture that protects your perpetrator/s.

But if we're talking courage we also need to talk class. In 'The People #MeToo Leaves Behind', published in *Reveal* some weeks after peak #MeToo, Bernice Yeung pointed out that the ability to participate is somewhat predicated upon privilege. Many of those who did so faced possible negative consequences, but those consequences didn't likely come down to not being able to feed the children. Working-class women, Yeung reminds us, such as those who clean hotel rooms or pick crops in relative isolation, are especially vulnerable to sexual assault, and usually aren't in a position to take action or publicly out perpetrators, either due to financial dependence on the employment with precious few alternatives, or because they don't realise they have a right to complain. Recognising that not everyone is 'empowered' enough to be a 'silence breaker', Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano joined forces with Unicef USA to launch #HerToo. In a *Guardian* article dated 21 December 2017, Burke and Milano described #HerToo as a commitment to supporting Unicef's efforts to 'end discrimination and violence against girls and women – and against all children suffering violence and harassment – worldwide, through education, protection and policy reform', though there were no details proffered as to what that might mean in practical terms.

Some wrestled with confusion, while others took their place on one side or another of starkly illuminated social schisms. The women of Hollywood turned out in black in symbolic protest, bringing to mind the wonderful line in Chekhov's *The Seagull*, in which Masha declares that she wears black because she is in mourning for her life. Several non-English-speaking countries started their own versions of #MeToo. I wasn't a fan

of the French phrasing, #BalanceTonPorc ('Expose Your Pig'), disliking its shift in focus and speciesist conflating of pigs – known for being highly intelligent and sensitive, and not given to inappropriate displays of sexual acting out – with abusive men. In January 2018, a hundred Frenchwomen, including Catherine Millet and Catherine Deneuve, signed off on an open letter published in *Le Monde*, which managed to make a couple of fair points amid a series of extremely problematic statements. Announcing that #MeToo had gone too far, and decrying a lack of distinction between rape and persistent or clumsy 'flirting', the women expressed concerns about trial-by-social-media public prosecutions and mob-justice mentality, according to the *New York Times* translation. The letter focused on #MeToo almost entirely in terms of sex (rather than relations of power or structural and historical gender politics), casting #MeToo as a puritanical relapse harking back to the Victorian era and accusing participants of enacting a 'witch-hunt', an unsavoury and horribly ironic metaphor given the literal meaning and history of the term. Reprisal columns were dashed off and promptly published, and the media reported 'counterblasts' charging the signatories with being apologists for rape and rape culture.

The deafening noise of the perpetual opinion wars can make it hard to hear yourself think, but the one thing that does not appear to be debatable is that almost all women (and many others) encounter the predatory behaviour and (often sexualised) aggressions of those men who most manifest the ugly underbelly of patriarchy's teachings, and many do so routinely. Sometimes even the strongest and healthiest among us find it's seeped in and done damage. Those chronically traumatised as children, by whatever means, become extra absorbent and vulnerable to deforming adaptations. Some become teenagers and adults who unwittingly soak up everyday abuses like sexual harassment and coercion, internalising pain and confusion that then seeps out in an array of paradoxical behaviours. Others

shut up shop, building a wall of defence such that none can get through, not to sex, not to heart, not to help. I turned it all inwards, became self-destructive and self-defeating, keeping company with people many years older and men with few scruples.

The winds calm to a hard whisper then pick back up to a tree roar. There are rumours of coming snow. Upon waking I open the curtains with anticipation, but the rumours disappoint and I go on with my day. During the afternoon a freak snowstorm hits. White flakes fall from all directions. I'm in the shaken winter fairyland of a snow globe, the kind I loved as a little girl.

The worst thing about getting a new therapist is having to tell your story all over again.

I followed Jake to London, aged sixteen, leaving the Sydney summer for the northern winter, arriving with an overcoat that was pitifully unequal to the cold. When I landed at Heathrow I was scrutinised at customs, where officials deliberated about whether to let a visa-less Australian teenager enter the country on her own. Men. Uniforms. Fast talk. I was accustomed to talking my way through hairy situations on the spot, working the system. I'd already crossed the Nullarbor and back alone, and hitched rides in semitrailers on the desolate stretch between Darwin and Cairns, scamming charities and collecting social security 'counter cheques' from town to town. I knew how to handle a couple of confused guys at a border.

Waved through, I caught a bus to the city and made my way to the YMCA. I slept the jet-lag off for the better part of two days before pulling out the scrap of paper with Jake's phone number and dialling it from a phone booth in the YMCA lobby. He was living in Chelsea, it was 1980, and London was at the

tail end of punk and swinging into New Romance. I did a lot of smoking and drinking at the kitchen table, depressed and overweight, and no competition for Giselle, the lithe and lovely dancer Jake held a torch for (they had been sweethearts back in Australia). That didn't stop Jake and me having an affair, and though I remember very little of it (I don't recall most of the sex I had as a teenager), I do remember a certain tenderness, and how painful it was for a girl already despondent and exhausted, wracked by acute feelings of inadequacy, and bewildered in a new land.

I pause to look up the definition of memory: the process in which information is encoded, stored and retrieved (where did all those fucks go?). The behavioural neuroscientist Jee Hyun Kim defines memory as 'a past that has become part of me'. Attention, she says, is critical for initiating memory formation. Short-term memories are made by neurons connecting, chemically and electrically charged, while for a long-term memory to develop the neurons need to talk enough to forge a protein pathway that makes a physical change in the brain (non-present, neuron-mute fucks).

When I left the Chelsea flat, having been outshone by Gigi, I moved into a shared bedsit in a boarding house in Islington I'd circled in the paper. My roommate was a Canadian punk called Bernie who spent most of her time working on her look in preparation for weekends at the Hope & Anchor. I got a job cleaning tables at the National Gallery, drank cups of Earl Grey tea, and established a network of doner kebab takeaways where I could get credit in exchange for flirtation when needed. There was an American boyfriend called Randy, who must have been in his thirties, but mostly I nursed a series of unrequited infatuations that dissipated upon the first sign of reciprocation. My paternal grandmother was born in Bishopbriggs, just outside Glasgow, and in those days an Australian could claim permanent residence if they had a British grandparent, so I

stayed in London for close to two years, being one of the more forgettable students in an Alexander Technique class, working shit jobs and drinking hard.

‘I’ve broken myself,’ Jake told me decades later, swinging between his brokenness and what was left of his boozy bravado during the time I spent with him as he lay dying of alcoholism at the age of forty-nine in a cottage on the Macarthur-Onslow estate. He gave me one of his rings and told me I’d helped him become a man (I’ve never understood what he meant, unless he was suggesting that he wasn’t as experienced back then as I had assumed). He knew I understood the compulsion that drives a person to drink destructively, and that I didn’t judge him. He knew I’d long stopped, but he didn’t want sobriety. Few alcoholics readily do: giving up drinking is generally a dreaded prospect to a problem drinker, and without some desire for freedom from enslavement there’s no hope of achieving it. Jake never got there. Even then, at the end, perspicuous and poignant integrity swung into defensive arcing up: he had received a letter from my father and objected to my father’s casting of him as an alcoholic. I left with a heavy heart. Jake had said during the visit that he was sorry, he should have protected me in London, but there was no protecting me from myself, just as there was no protecting him, or my other cousin Damien, who died from an overdose of sleeping pills in his twenties.

I wake up to find the sun melting the carpet of snow on the lawn. The moon is high in the finally blue sky and four wild cockatoos screech to a halt in the foliage of the now-sedate eucalypts.

I left London deflated, my delusions of international grandeur in ruins. I stayed with my mother in a flat in Kirribilli where I ate too much and moped around and felt like I’d failed and I

*Traumata*

didn't know why. On the morning of the Saturday when I ended up at the quaint ye olde pub on George Street, my brother had mentioned his band were rehearsing in the city. Bored, I had set out to go watch them when I got lost and found myself in one bar and then another.

I was lost and I didn't know why.

