**Episode 2 – Hibernate part 2**

**Greer:**  Hi and welcome back to Vignettes, the EWF storytelling podcast. My name’s Greer, and I’m the Program Coordinator at the Emerging Writers’ Festival.

I’m recording today on the unceded sovereign lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and the live recordings featured in today’s episode were also made on Wurundjeri country. EWF pays our respects to Wurundjeri elders past and present, and to the elders of all lands that this podcast reaches.

Today I’m bringing you the last two readings that we recorded back in June 2022 at EWF, from Luke Patterson and Polly Sara, responding to the theme of ‘Hibernate’. Like last week’s episode, I’ll hand over to my live-recorded self to introduce the artists, so that you can hear the applause that welcomed them.

(live)

This is Luke Patterson. Luke is a Gamilaroi poet, folklorist and musician living on Gadigal lands. His poetry has appeared in Cordite, Plumwood Mountain, Rabbit, Running Dog and The Suburban Review. He has also featured in the anthologies Active Aesthetics, Firefront: first nation’s poetry and power today and Best of Australian Poems 2021. Luke is currently a Wheeler Center Next Chapter fellow and Sydney Review of Books Juncture fellow for 2022. His research and creative pursuits are grounded in extensive work with First Nations and other community-based organisations across Australia. Please welcome Luke!

**Luke**: Thank you.

For me, hibernation – the first thing that came to my mind was, well, rest. Those structured rests that we have and the first thing that then came to my mind was Sunday, and creation stories – the big one that lots of people know, how God rested on the seventh day – and it got me thinking about creation stories more broadly, and creation beings that rest. Even here, closer to home, those that create the land, and then step off from a mountain into the sky, or create the rivers and go subterranean and rest. And so, I think, for me, it was very much about this emerging and effervescent ongoing potentiality of creation, which is always balanced by moments of respite and moments of action. And so this is where I sort of came to this poem called “Australia: a Creation Myth”.

Before old man Cooky on his boat: only darkness,

a fog of warring savage, a state of nature

for the taking. So they say, so history tells us.

The heavens spun chartless, earth’s heathen

children huddled by fire; ‘poor creature,’ the newcomers

thought, approaching the shores of another eden

to plunder. When old man cooky came on his boat;

two brothers, who are now legend, stood sentry

on golden sand and tasted their first musket

shot. The salt air turned foul like earth had opened

its bowels; an explosion signifying

what comes next: a well-oiled machine called death.

It came and swallowed the birds and their pearls

of laughter heralding sunrise, then shat out

a saviour. It came and swallowed

the beasts of the ground, untamed, exalted kin

then shat out the domesticated. It swallowed the trees

mountains and rivers that marked homelands

then shat out houses. It swallowed the flowering

medicines, sweet abundant sustenance, and shat out pox

and profit. It swallowed the stars, entangled with ancestors

then shat out city lights. It swallowed earth's

custodians, exquisite, ingenious, savage always savage

but could not consume them. It spat them out

and waited for the tide of history to wash

them from the face of the land. But the land's

face was their face. Death could not shoot

them dead, could not breed them out,

could not make em forget the songs and dances

spanning across the ice ages to the dawn

of consciousness itself. Since old man cooky

on his boat, just a fragment in comparison to what came

before and what will always be...

I’m gonna read um, three little tiny itty-bitty ones, just...an aperatif – is that what they’re called? – before I go to the last one which is a bit heavy. They’re in a form called a triolet – it’s not a triptych but there are three of them. It’s just a repeating structure, I think they’re quite cute and I wrote a lot of them in lockdown, so that’s the hibernation aspect.

Number 1:

Aunt points to the lagoon

where she was born.

The mud is thick, insects hoon

as aunt walks me to the lagoon.

The sun sets and even the moon

is listening to a story torn.

Aunt points to the lagoon

where she was born.

Number 2:

Between layers of silver bark

moth larvae traces

zigzags and circuitous arcs.

Between layers of silvery bark

a caterpillar feasts on scar

tissue. in the hidden place

Between layers of silvery bark

a moth emerges moon faced.

Number 3:

We walk, bird watching

their names bubbling from Country.

We talk bird, watching

Gidgidigaga hatchlings

amongst a wattle’s flame.

We call birds, watching

and practice their names

This last poem is called – it changes name every day, I feel like, it’s one of those poems that refuses to be named, but today it’s called “Letters From Land”.

you’ve given me a new name

in a dead language

air-dried and eaten by history

flattened the colour gone

pressed to the page

stored and studied

facsimile after facsimile

you so admired

the first razor leaf with cream covered

flowers flush pink red and the plumb darker side

of austral bracken possibilities

you chose stasis

left your indifference

in climate controlled coffins

absent uncirculating

unable to sing without returning

to regenerate to nourish to burn

I am an artifice and fact of thieves

found along the margins of rivers

and creeks where I ponder

your garden culture and self-imposed

enclosure written in the mundane

avenue woodlot windbreak and park

you have tasted my berries

acid sweet when ripe

without a thought for the seasons

you feel heartburn belly ache

and in a restless sleep you ghostwrite

dreams on tattered paperbarks

I have said my peace with ghostly whims of

distilled the tea-tree into forget-me-all oil

ornamental and yielding

 I have taken

in your bowery and bleeding hearts

said my peace with your intrusions

the silence in your sciences

where at the sterile apex tip

a black-ish stigma

taxa not included

no matter how you try to own

to possess my expanse and breadth

I hold you within my arms

and now my children come knocking

to retrieve the particles of me stolen

in so-called good faith

don’t be surprised when I rise

teaching again the first great archive

reigning all over you

**Greer:**  Thank you so much Luke. Next we’re going to hear from Polly.

Polly Sara is a Queer, Chilean-Syrian immigrant who makes art because BIG fucking love is simply too big to hold alone. A love letter to ache, to dreaming and all that runs bone deep, they perform, write or make whatever feels good. Their work is a hope prayer; a communion to all the queers, the migrants, the misfits and the ones with love too heavy to hold. May our time together be big, may it feel like a party, may it be fucking real and may it exist solely for us. Because of us.

**Polly**:

Déjala llorar

Déjala que llore
Porque si ella es buena, ¡caramba!
Algún día se viene

This song has occupied my body for almost a year and a half now.

In this time, I have found myself moving with ghosts again.

Existing in state of convalescence where only shadows meet

a forced reclusion

A hibernation

From what was, and what is yet to be.

Somewhere between night and morning,

Something came and stole my insides.

Without my knowing or asking…

They left me gutless

Asked me to fight for my life

Having no armour, no fire and no army.

No courage or drive

I was caught unawares

And asked to complete the impossible task of fighting for something that was no longer mine.

As everyone around me went about their day

As though nothing had happened,

I fought for my life, trying save something that without my knowledge, was already dead.

In the aftermath, I walked through my days as an outline… feeling myself as nothing more than a thin veil between the inside and outside world. Just as a winter creature retreats, I felt a cosmic shift drawing me out from the living world and into the abyss… the place in which to lick my wounds unseen and unheard.

I had occupied this space before… in a different life, in a performance realm where butoh masters directed that I yield to the dream space of nothingness- where life and death exist all at once. It’s not an easy thing, and takes a great purging within oneself, to dissolve into a space where dream life enters waking life… where waking life enters the realm of a dream…

These butoh masters would drink a special kind of broth to induce this state… and I remembered its taste as appetite no longer visited, as the dreaming plunged itself further and further into the real.

And just like that this strange demon had entered the waking world, and everything around me was strange and estranged… I walked around disembodied… Wondering why my body just hadn’t decided to die… How strange for it to happen as our physical world seemed to fracture too… I had no anchors to hold on to, nothing familiar or held in the ritual- all of it was gone and reality inside or outside made no fucking sense.

 I made no fucking sense, no matter how hard I tried.

I cried every day for a year and a half. Always at 3pm when work ceased, and my body seemed to catch up with itself…. that harrowing moment when it was time to go home. Partly because I no longer had a home to speak of, partly because grief and death and loss are so immense, that my little body just couldn’t hold it all without crumbling. I wailed and wailed and wailed wishing for it all to stop, to go back, to go home. But home wouldn’t have me. Not anymore.

I clutched onto music, to singers who understood what it is inhabit this kind of ache… or rather, to have this kind of ache inhabit you. To sing as a way of crying as Chavela Vargas puts it, simply because there is just nothing else the body can do. Because in the aftermath, after losing everything… music- singing as a way of crying- was all I fucking had.

So I would say to myself “dejala llorar, deja que la lloer” as a way of giving permission to something I did not want, did not choose, could not escape, something that clutched on to me and would not let go.

I made coffee for people this way, engaging in the idle chit chat we all perform when our internal landscapes quietly implode… I would silently sing to myself “dejala llorar” all the while flinching at any hint of the question “how are you today?” I no longer asked, and nor did I ever answer. I in turn would simply sing like a madwoman, sing as a way of crying, sing as a way of self-soothing, sing as a way of not dying….

 I knew I wasn’t alone, so many of us dragging our feet as exit wounds stained the cold concrete before us… as dreamlife now penetrated waking life, as cells vibrated, and hands moved whilst on fire, as all of us moved just trying to get through, shellshocked from what had just happened to us all in quiet corners where no one saw, and no one could speak.

 I yearned to have someone make sense of me, to pull me out from this place, this harrowing cave, to sing my song back, to hear it from another voice, a better voice, a more beautiful being than this rubble body that I seemed to inhabit. In the depths of deaths company, I yearned… to have someone say to me, I see you, I feel you, I’d give nothing more than to run my fingers along your lines, however thin. I won’t ever leave you.

Oh, to have you surge your electricity through my body, reviving it back to waking life, out from the depths of this death, this cave, this forced state of convalescence…

To have you sing to me “dejala llorar” as a radical celebration, a gesture away from death and towards hope. A song that awakens the fire within us all, draws us into the light, out from our caves, illuminating, the messy, imperfect, fallible yet beautiful creatures that we all are.

To celebrate the simple fact that after everything we have endured, we aren’t dead. That despite our very selves, our spirit, our fire, continues to burn.

To remind ourselves that after it all, when we have lost everything,

We can still choose to sing- and not only as a way of crying, but sing- as a radical way of living.

**Greer**: Thanks so much Polly, and thanks also to Luke, for reading for us back in June.

Thank you for listening to Vignettes this week, and please don’t forget to subscribe to the podcast and join us again next week, where we’ll hear stories of Fright from Katerina Gibson, Khalid Warsame, and Grace Chan. If you’ve enjoyed the podcast so far, please leave us a little rating or review! Vignettes is produced by me, Greer Clemens, and audio produced by Joe Buchan. Our theme music is by Thu Care. To find out more about the artists featured in today’s episode and about EWF itself, you can go to emergingwritersfestival.org.au.