NOMINATION
IBBY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS
2024
COUNTRY OF NOMINATION: AUSTRALIA

WRITER CANDIDATE: GARY CREW

DOSSIER
Acknowledgements

Dossier compiled by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright on behalf of IBBY Australia, December 2022

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Information contained in the dossier has also been supplied by Gary Crew and has been drawn from other bibliographical sources, including the AustLit database, and records held at the National Centre for Australian Children’s Literature.

Contents of the dossier may be viewed by interested researchers and IBBY members, and is posted on the IBBY website. However, due to copyright restrictions on the reviews and articles by individual contributors, these cannot be copied or transmitted electronically.
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1. Biographical Information on the Candidate

**Gary David Crew** (23 September 1947-) was born and educated in Brisbane, Queensland, leaving school at sixteen to work as a draftsman. He attained a certificate in Engineering Drafting from the Queensland Institute of Technology in 1970 and continued to work in the field until 1973. Between 1974 and 1983 he worked as an English and history teacher at several Brisbane high schools, while also undertaking a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland. In 1979 he completed a Master of Arts in postcolonial literature at UQ. Crew was appointed Head of English at Aspley High School and was later appointed to the same position at nearby Albany Creek High School. From 1990 he has worked as a freelance writer and lecturer first at the Queensland University of Technology, and since the 2000s at the University of the Sunshine Coast where he developed a number of creative writing courses as a senior lecturer, and Professor. He is currently Emeritus Professor at USC. [Source: *AustLit*] Crew’s teaching experience ‘made him aware that traditional text selections were not relevant to many of his students. This made the task of encouraging close reading very difficult. He began writing novels for adolescents in the 1980s in an attempt to provide material relevant to a wider range of high school students.’ [Source: *AustLit*]


His more than 50 picture books, include the groundbreaking *Lucy’s Bay* (1992) with Gregory Rogers, *First Light* (1994) with Peter Gouldthorpe, and *The Watertower* (1994), *Beneath the Surface* (2004) and *Caleb* (1996) with Steven Woolman, crossing genre boundaries between science fiction and gothic mystery. Crew also collaborated with another acclaimed artist Shaun Tan on *Memorial* (1998) and *The Viewer* (2012). Many of his picture books have introduced debut illustrators to publishing and he has mentored many collaborators. He has also worked with some of Australia’s most established illustrators.

Crew has edited a number of collections and was series editor for Lothian’s *After Dark* horror novellas. He has published short stories in anthologies such as *Spine-Chilling: Ten Horror Stories* (1992), *The Lottery* (1994) and *Nightmares in Paradise* (1995), and also published a collection of his own short stories, *Dark House* (1995).

Gary Crew is an outstanding writer for children and would be a highly deserving recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2024.

[See also 5. Awards and Other Distinctions p 11.]

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
2. Portrait Photograph of the Candidate

Photo courtesy: Quest Community Newspapers Sunshine Coast, QLD

[See copy in Appendix C. CD contained in dossier.]
3. Statement of Candidate’s Contribution

‘Someone has to pave the way, to shove aside convention, and in Australia, through the nineties, it was Gary Crew.’ (Roy in Tyle 2009, p 18)

Gary Crew has been awarded or been nominated for over fifty national and international literary awards. He is one of Australia’s most awarded authors for youth, winning the Australian Children’s Book of the Year four times; twice for his novels, twice for his illustrated books. As developer and Program Leader of the highly regarded Doctorate of Creative Arts (Creative Writing) at University of the Sunshine Coast, he has mentored many creators during a career in which both creative and academic achievement have combined to make him a luminary in both fields of endeavour.

Experimentation in Genre:

a) Post colonial Fiction:
From the publication of his award-winning Strange Objects, Crew’s exploration of post colonial themes has been a distinctive aspect of his work. This was followed by later novels such as Angel’s Gate and No Such Country and picture books such as The Viewer, Memorial, The Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie and The Valley of Bones. He has been interested in re-visiting scenes from the past and breathing new life into them; in interrogating historical truth and in identifying the marginalised voices of our historical records. He has said that ‘People should be looking for absences and try to understand and close absences.’ (McKenna and Neilsen, 1994, p 17) He has added that ‘the issue of ‘otherness is crucial to an understanding of these novels’ (p 18).

He once wrote that Australia was a different place from which to write history, for ‘In this country, if we would turn back to look for our past - whether it be personal or collective - we must search among the absences, the seemingly bright and airy spaces, wherein lie the illusive dust motes of memory.’ (Crew, ‘The Architecture of Memory’, 1992, p 154) He makes a case for the writer’s capacity to unearth and articulate silences and absences, which have included our country’s foundation and identity myths. His work has always been about exploding and/or exploring such national mythologies.

Another facet of his work is playing with literary genres of the past in his fictions – the Victorian melodrama in Edward Britton (with Phillip Neilsen) a novel based on the imprisonment of young convict boys at Point Puer, at Port Arthur in Tasmania, the romance genre and the soap opera in Inventing Antony West, and the gothic in Gothic Hospital. These were followed by the Sam Silverthorne series which explored Boys Own Adventure tropes via the prism of such thinking. He enjoys the concept of playing with literary history as much as with social history.

Finally, his immense contribution in Mama’s Babies and other works is equal to that of historians of childhood such as Brenda Niall, Ian Britain and Robert Holden, who have resurrected diaries and records which offer a real taste of the Australian past. Crew’s imaginative replays of these often-forgotten pasts have restored a part of our history which was threatened by extinction – the history of our children.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
b) Macabre:
Crew’s experiments with plot and characterisation in the macabre has attracted young readers to his themes of identity and alienation. Paulsen and McMullen (1998) acknowledge that his work ‘is rich in symbolism and metaphor, and whatever genre Crew chooses to write in he explores important human themes such as search for identity, the mystery of life, the awe of the universe and the mortality of humankind’ (p 158). [Source of quote: AustLit]

c) Fantastical:
The study of fantastical magic realism and Todorov’s theories (McKenna and Neilsen, 1994, p 21) were important in Crew’s evolution and he has emulated these concepts in his work.

Groundbreaking Picture Books:
His groundbreaking work in picture books evinces his interest in innovative design, close collaboration with both debut and established illustrators, and in complex, multi-level texts which require the application of close reading or ‘looking’ and critical literacy skills.

Stylistic Experimentation:
The fragmented text of Strange Objects heralded Crew’s interest in playing with different forms of text, in employing multiple narrators, and in experimenting with language. This is also evinced by his picture book collaborators who have challenged traditional formats by using innovative typography (The Watertower and Beneath the Surface), collage (Memorial), paper engineering (The Viewer), comic/graphic novel format (Tagged), a faux-antique cover (The Boy Who Grew into a Tree) and many other innovations.

Crew’s work is carefully crafted and rich in literary metaphor and symbolism:
‘I tend to think of him as a craftsman – an artisan in the old sense of the word: an uncompromising master of his trade, and of his tools.’ (Eaton in Tyle 2009, p 19) For example, ‘She looked very beautiful; the moonlight on her face, her dark hair out and spilling down her back, her white nightdress falling in straight folds like marble.’ (Angel’s Gate, p 1)

Creative Non-Fiction and Faction:

Respect for Audience:
Gary Crew’s work demonstrates his determination to offer young readers a challenging and yet entertaining reading experience. His distinguished secondary and tertiary educational background has deeply informed his work as well. The breadth of topics, styles, formats, and genres he has tackled provide ample evidence that he is one of Australia’s most influential and significant wordsmiths.
4. Essays, Interviews or Articles

This dossier contains copies of the following three articles in Appendix A:


Key Sources:

The following two sources have provided in-depth information about Gary Crew, some of which has been included in this dossier.


Other Biographical and Critical Sources Include:


IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew


Davison, Liam and Scutter, Heather ‘Two Viewpoints on Gary Crew’s ‘Angel’s Gate’ Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults, Vol 1, No 4, Summer 1993, pp 16–18.


‘Gary Crew’ Ford Street Publishing <https://fordstreetpublishing.com/authors/gary-crew/>


IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew

Mills, Alice ‘The Uncanny Lurch in Shaun Tan’s The Viewer and The Lost Thing’ CREArTA: Journal of the Centre for Research and Education in the Arts, Vol 6, 2006, pp 64–74.

Mills, Alice ‘Written in Blood: ‘So Much to Tell You’ and ‘Strange Objects’ Papers: Explorations into Children’s Literature, Vol 4, No 1, April 1993, pp 38–41.


[See AustLit for extensive listing of articles and reviews.]

[See also list of reviews of 5 books submitted, p 27.]

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
5. Awards and other Distinctions

**International Awards Arranged per Award Category:**

**INTERNATIONAL AWARDS**

**Edgar Allen Poe Mystery Award, USA:**
- 1996 Shortlisted *Angel’s Gate*
- 1994 Shortlisted *Strange Objects*

**Hungry Minds’ Review, US Children’s Book of Distinction:**
- 1994 *Angel’s Gate*

**IBBY Honour List:**
- 1996 Peter Gouldthorpe for *First Light* written by Gary Crew

**International Youth Library, White Ravens Awards, Germany:**
- 2012 *Damon*
- 2003 Special Mention: *Old Ridley*
- 1998 Special Mention: *Tagged*
- 1997 Special Mention: *Caleb*

**The Royal Geographic Society Whitley Award:**
- 2004 *The Extinction Series*

**United States School Library Association Best Book of the Year:**
- 1997 *The Watertower*

**AUSTRALIA**

**AWARDS FOR PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT**
- 2006 awarded a $10,000 National Australian Learning and Teaching Council Carrick Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning (equivalent to the current Outstanding Learning and Teaching Awards) for ‘Leadership in the creation and ongoing development of a professionally productive Creative Writing department in a new regional university’.
- 2006 awarded the Vice Chancellor’s Medal for Outstanding University of Southern Queensland Researcher.
- 2010 awarded Outstanding Alumnus of the Year: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, USC, the endorsement reading (in part): ‘Not only does Gary have an

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
extraordinary talent for writing, he is also a highly acclaimed academic, responsible for establishing the Creative Writing department at USC.’

- **2015** nominated for an AQT (Advanced Quality Teaching Award) for ‘encouraging students to achieve success by demonstrating it is possible to do so through the publication of his own works. His experience and knowledge in the (publishing) industry is invaluable to Creative Writing students’.

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**CHILDREN’S & YA BOOK AWARDS**

**Australian Awards Arranged per Award Category:**

**Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature Children’s Literature Award:**
- **1994** National Children’s Book Award: *Angel’s Gate*

**Australian Book Award:**
- **1991** *Angel’s Gate*

**Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction, Children’s Division, Short Fiction:**
- **2013 Short Listed** *In The Beech Forest.*
- **2013 Short Listed** *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree*
- **2005 Shortlisted** *The Mystery of Eilean Mor*
- **2004 Winner** *Beneath the Surface*
- **2002** Honourable Mention *Old Ridley*

**Australian Publishers Association (APA) Book Design Awards – Best Designed Children’s Fiction Book:**
- **2016 Shortlisted** Ryan Pemo *The Visions of Ichabod X* written by Gary Crew

**Australian Wilderness Society Award for Children’s Writing:**
- **2009 Nominated** *Cat on the Island*
- **2004 Winner** *The Extinction Trilogy*

**Books I Love Best Yearly (Bilby) Award – Early Readers:**
- **1995** *The Watertower*

**Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award:**
- **1999 Honour Book:** *Memorial*
- **1994 Winner** *First Light*
- **1995 Winner** *The Watertower*
- **1992 Shortlisted** *Lucy’s Bay*

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Book of the Year: Older Readers Award:
- 1994 Joint Winner Angel’s Gate.
- 1991 Winner Strange Objects

Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Books:
- 2011 CBCA Notable Book: Serpent’s Tale
- 2005 The Mystery of Eilean Mor
- 2005 Young Murphy
- 2004 In the Wake of the Mary Celeste
- 2004 I Saw Nothing
- 2003 The Diviner’s Son
- 2001 Edward Britton
- 1999 In My Father’s Room
- 1998 Troy Thompson’s Poetry Book
- 1998 Mama’s Babies
- 1997 Tagged
- 1996 Bright Star
- 1995 Gulliver in the South Seas
- 1995 Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie
- 1994 Caleb
- 1992 The Blue Feather
- 1991 The Viewer
- 1991 Troy Thompson’s Prose Folio

Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Crichton Award for New Illustrators:
- 2007 Shortlisted Aaron Hill Automaton written by Gary Crew
- 2006 Winner Jeremy Geddes The Mystery of Eilean Mor written by Gary Crew
- 2002 Shortlisted Marc McBride The Kraken written by Gary Crew
- 1998 Joint Winner Shaun Tan The Viewer written by Gary Crew

Ditmar Awards:
- 1998 Shortlisted Shaun Tan for The Viewer

Ned Kelly Award for Crime Writing:
- 2002 Shortlisted Edward Britton
- 1997 Winner The Well

NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children’s Literature:
- 2005 Shortlisted for Beneath the Surface

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
New South Wales Premier’s Literary Awards, Ethel Turner Prize:
  • 1991 Winner Strange Objects

Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards (later Queensland Literary Awards):
  • 2000 Shortlisted Memorial

Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction:
  • 1991 Winner Strange Objects

Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards:
  • 1998 Shortlisted The Blue Feather

The Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children’s Writing:
  • 2004 The Extinction Series

YABBA Young Australian Readers Award:
  • 1995 Shortlisted The Watertower

International and Australian Awards Arranged per Year:
2016 Shortlisted Ryan Pemo Australian Publishers Association (APA) Book Design Awards – Best Designed Children’s Fiction Book The Visions of Ichabod X written by Gary Crew
2013 Short Listed Aurealis Awards: In The Beech Forest.
2013 Short Listed Aurealis Awards: The Boy Who Grew into a Tree
2012 IYL White Ravens Award (Germany): Damon
2011 CBCA Notable Book: Serpent’s Tale
2009 Nominated for Australian Wilderness Society Award: Cat on the Island
2007 Shortlisted CBCA Crichton Award: Aaron Hill Automaton written by Gary Crew
2006 Winner CBCA Crichton Award: Jeremy Geddes The Mystery of Eilean Mor written by Gary Crew
2005 Shortlisted Aurealis Award for Speculative Fiction: The Mystery of Eilean Mor
2005 CBCA Notable Book: The Mystery of Eilean Mor
2005 CBCA Notable Book: Young Murphy
2005 Shortlisted New South Wales Premier’s Award: Beneath the Surface
2004 Winner Aurealis Award: Beneath the Surface
2004 Notable Australian Children's Book: In the Wake of the Mary Celeste
2004 The Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children’s Writing: The Extinction Series
2004 The Royal Geographic Society Whitley Award: The Extinction Series
2004 CBCA Notable Book: I Saw Nothing
2003 CBCA Notable Book: The Diviner’s Son
2003 White Ravens Award (Germany) Special Mention: Old Ridley
2002 Aurealis Sci Fi and Fantasy Awards, Honourable Mention: Old Ridley
2002 Shortlisted for the Ned Kelly Crime Fiction Award: Edward Britton
2002 Shortlisted CBCA Crichton Award: Marc McBride The Kraken written by Gary Crew
IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
2001 CBCA Notable Book: Edward Britton
1999 CBCA Picture Book of the Year, Honour Book: Memorial
1999 CBCA Notable Book: In My Father’s Room
1998 White Ravens Award (Germany) Special Mention: Tagged
1998 CBCA Notable Book: Troy Thompson’s Poetry Book
1998 CBCA Notable Book: Mama’s Babies
1998 Joint Winner CBCA Crichton Award: Shaun Tan: The Viewer
1998 Shortlisted WA Premier’s Award: The Blue Feather
1997 White Ravens Award (Germany) Special Mention: Caleb
1997 Ned Kelly Award for Crime Writing: The Well
1997 United States School Library Association Book of the Year: The Water Tower
1997 CBCA Notable Book: Tagged.
1996 CBCA Notable Book: Bright Star
1996 Shortlisted Edgar Allen Poe Fiction Award, USA: Angel’s Gate
1995 CBCA Notable Book: Gulliver in the South Seas
1995 Shortlisted for the Yabba Children’s Choice Award: The Watertower
1995 CBCA Notable Book: Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie
1995 Bilby Award for The Watertower
1995 CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award The Watertower
1994 Edgar Allen Poe Mystery Fiction Award USA Winner: Strange Objects
1994 CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers (Joint Winner) Angel’s Gate
1994 Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature Children’s Literature Award: Angel’s Gate
1994 Notable Australian Children’s Book: Caleb
1994 CBCA Picture Book of the Year: First Light
1992 CBCA Notable Book: The Blue Feather
1992 Shortlisted CBCA Picture Book of the Year: Lucy’s Bay
1991 CBCA Notable Book: The Viewer
1991 CBCA Notable Book: Troy Thompson’s Prose Folio
1991 CBCA Book of the Year: Strange Objects
1991 Victorian Premier’s Award: Strange Objects
1991 New South Wales Premier’s Award: Strange Objects
1991 Australian Book Award: Angel’s Gate

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
6. Complete Bibliography

**PICTURE BOOKS:**


2018 *Leaving the Lyrebird Forest* [with Julian Laffan] Lothian, Hachette.


Sydney.


2011 *Damon* [with Aaron Hill], Hachette.


2010 *The Serpent’s Tale* [with Matt Ottley], Lothian, Hachette.


2006 *Stolen Children of Quentaris* Lothian.

2006 *Automaton* [with Aaron Hill], Lothian.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
2005 *The Lantern* [with Bruce Whatley], Hachette.

2005 *Young Murphy* [with Bruce Whatley], Lothian.

2005 *The Mystery of Eileen Mor* [with Jeremy Geddes], Lothian.

2005 *Pig on the Titanic* [with Bruce Whatley], Harper Collins.

2004 *In the Wake of the Mary Celeste* [with Robert Ingpen], Lothian.

2004 *I Said Nothing; the Extinction of the Paradise Parrot* [with Mark Wilson], South Melbourne Vic., Lothian Books.

2004 *Beneath the Surface* [with Steven Woolman], Hodder.


2002 *Quetta* [with Bruce Whatley], Lothian.

2002 *The Castaways of the Charles Eaton* [with Mark Wilson], Lothian.

2002 *Old Ridley* [with Marc McBride], Hodder.

2001 *Arno the Garbo* [with Craig Smith], Lothian.

2001 *The Rainbow* [with Greg Rogers], Lothian.

2001 *The Kraken* [with Marc McBride], Lothian.

2000 *Valley of Bones* [with Mark Wilson], Lothian.

2000 *In My Father’s Room* [with Anne Marie Scott], Hodder.

2000 *Gino the Genius* [with James Cattell], Lothian.

1999 *Leo the Lion Tamer* [with Leigh Hobbs], Lothian.

1999 *Troy Thompson’s Radical Prose Folio* [with Craig Smith], Lothian.

1998 *Memorial* [with Shaun Tan], Lothian.

1998 *Troy Thompson’s Excellent Poetry Book* [with Craig Smith], Lothian.

1997 *Tagged* [with Steven Woolman], Era.

1996 *Bright Star* [with Ann Spudvillas], Lothian.

1996 *The Blue Feather* (with Michael O’Hara), Reed.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
1996 *Caleb* [with Steven Woolman] Era Publications.

1995 *The Figures of Julian Ashcroft* [with Hans de Hass], UQP.

1995 *Gulliver in the South Seas* [with John Burge], Lothian.

1994 *The Watertower* [with Steve Woolman], Era [reprinted 10 times]

1994 *The Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie* [with Peter Gouldthorpe], Lothian.

1994 *First Light* [with Peter Gouldthorpe], Lothian.

1992 *Lucy’s Bay* [with Greg Rogers], Jam Roll Press, UQP.

1992 *Tracks* [with Greg Rogers], Lothian.

**YA NOVELS:**


2006 *Sam Silverthorne: Menace*, Hachette.

2006 *Stolen Children of Quentaris* Lothian.

2005 *Sam Silverthorne: Quest*, Hachette.


2005 *The Plague of Quentaris*, Lothian.


2001 *Gothic Hospital*, Lothian.

2001 *Cruel Nest*, Lothian.

2000 *Edward Britton* (with Philip Neilsen), Lothian.

1999 *Dear Venny, Dear Saffron* (with Libby Hathorn), Lothian.


1994 *Inventing Antony West*, UQP.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
1993 *Angel’s Gate*, Hodder.


1990 *Strange Objects*, Hodder.


1986 *The Inner Circle*, Hodder.

**JUNIOR FICTION:**


2014 *Cornfield*, Illustrated by Aaron Hill. Windy Hollow, Melbourne.


1999 *The Bread of Heaven*, Lothian.


**EDITED SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGIES:**

1997 *Crew’s 13* (compiling editor and contributor) ABC.


1996 *Dark House* (compiling editor and contributor) Hodder.

**SHORT STORIES IN COLLECTIONS & MAGAZINES:**

2015 ‘The one they sat alone a valediction; Demanding mourning’ *Social Alternatives* Vol 34, No 3, pp 67–8.

2015 ‘Dr Lovechild Regrets’ in *Rich and Rare* edited by Paul Collins. Ford St, Melbourne.

2015 ‘A Step Behind’ and ‘The Staircase’ in *Story Wizards* Macmillan (in conjunction with the Department of Education, Malaysia).

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
2003 ‘[Title?] in It’s Alive [Compilation], National Museum of Australia Publication.

**PUBLICATIONS ON CD/AUDIO TAPE:**

2003 The Diviner’s Son, Bolinda Audio Books.
2000 Strange Objects, Bolinda Audio Books.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
1999 *Angel’s Gate* [read by Stig Wemyss], Bolinda Audio Books.

1998 *Crew’s 13* [read by Richard Roxburgh], ABC Studios.


1995 *Angel’s Gate*, Louis Braille.

1995 ‘The Watertower’ in *Winners* [read by Roger Cardwell], ABC Audio.

**ADULT FICTION:**


**NON-FICTION:**

2005 *Me and My Dog*, Lothian.

**SELECTED REFEREED JOURNAL ARTICLES:**

Crew, G. ‘Voicing the Dead’ *TEXT Creative Writing as Research*, Special Issue No. 27, October, 2014.


Crew, G. ‘Ideas behind the writing of the creative nonfiction novel *Strange Objects*’ *TEXT Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, No 1, April 2000.


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**SELECTED CONFERENCE ADDRESSES:**

Crew, G. ‘Parallel Narratives’ Historical Novel Society Australasia. Swinburne University. 8 – 9 September, 2017.


Crew, G. Keynote: ‘Writing the Australian Coast: Shipwrecks, Castaways and the Origins of a Nation’ Stories of Place Conference: Linking History and Geography through Story. History Teachers Association of Western Australia in Association with the Shipwrecks Gallery, Fremantle and the Western Australian Museum. 22 July 2016.


**FILMED INTERVIEWS:**

‘Interviews With 10 Australian Authors, Ch 6: Gary Crew’s Strange Objects’ *ABC Education* 30 November 2021.

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/interviews-with-10-australian-authors-ch-6-gary-crews-strange/13581804>


*Australian Literature Gary Crew,* (dir. Les Vickers) Brisbane : Queensland Distance Education College, Media Centre, 1990 *film/TV interview."

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
7. Translated Editions

**The Viewer**
- 2023 *The Viewer* to be published in China.
- 2012 *The Viewer*. [with Shaun Tan] Elliot Edizioni (Italy).
- 2003 English Language Overseas; Simply Read Books (Canada)
- Chinese simplified translation; Beijing Poplar Culture Project Co Ltd (China)
- 2006 Chinese traditional translation; Muses Publishing House (World excluding China)
- 2005 *Guan xiang jing / Gelei Kelao wen; Chen Zhiyong tu; Jian Yijun yì* 視像鏡/ 葛雷.克勞文 ; 陳志勇圖 ; 簡怡君譯 *The Viewer Chinese* (Hui ben guan 25 Series) Taipei: Liao si chu ban you xian gong si.

**The Watertower**
- 2023 New edition of *The Watertower* to be published by Hachette.
- 2011 *The Watertower*, [with Steven Woolman] Crocodile Books, USA.

**Memorial**
- 2023 *Memorial* to be published in China.
- 2011 *Memorial* [with Shaun Tan] Elliot Edizioni Italy.
- 2003 *Memorial*, Simply Read Books, USA.

**The end of the line**
- 2008 *The end of the line / by Gary Crew; illustrated by Gregory Rogers; cover illustration by Serg Souleiman; librarian reviewer Marci Peschke; reading consultant Elizabeth Stedem. (Shade Books) Minneapolis, Stone Arch Books.

**Sam Silverthorne Series**
- 2007 *Sam Silverthorne: Victory*, Pestlazzi, Germany.
- 2006 *Sam Silverthorne: Menace*, Pestlazzi, Germany.
- 2005 *Sam Silverthorne: Quest*, Pestlazzi, Germany.

**Troy Thompson’s Excellent Poetry Book**
- 2004 *Troy Thompson’s Excellent Poetry Book*, Kane Miller, USA.

**Dear Venny, Dear Saffron**

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
• 2000 Dear Venny, Dear Saffron, Floris, Scotland.

The Well
• 1999 The Well, Hachette Livre, Paris, France.
• 1999 The Well, Franklin Watts, London.
• 1996 The Well, Elex Media, Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Bent-Back Bridge
• 1996 The Bent-Back Bridge, Elex Media, Jakarta, Indonesia.
• 1995 The Bent-Back Bridge, G&G, Vienna.

Mama’s Babies
• 1999 Mama’s Babies, Mondaroori, Italy.
• 1999 Mama’s Babies, Annick Press, Canada

Angel’s Gate
• 1998 De bshkinderen / Gary Crew Angel’s Gate. Dutch. Antwerp, Houtekiet, 2001,
• 1994 Angel’s Gate, Simon and Schuster, New York.

The Barn
• 1998 The Barn, Elex Media, Jakarta, Indonesia.
• 1997 Bright Star, Kane Miller, New York.

Tracks
• 1995 Tracks, Gareth Stevens. Milwaukee.

First Light
• 1995 First Light, Gareth Stevens, Milwaukee.

No Such Country

Strange Objects
• Film Option Agreement and Assignment; Light Corporation Pty Ltd

The Inner Circle
• 1986 The Inner Circle, New Windmill. (Heinemann Educational) London.
8. Ten Most Important Books by the Candidate

- *Damon* Illustrated by Aaron Hill. Sydney, Lothian, Hachette Australia, 2011.
9. List of Five Books Sent to Jurors


10. Published Reviews of Works

The following is a list of ten reviews, two of each of five books, copies of which are contained in this dossier in Appendix B:

**Crew, Gary Strange Objects, Sydney, Hachette Australia, 2011; Sydney, Scepter, 2001; Sydney, Hachette Children’s Books, 2003; Port Melbourne, VIC., Mandarin, 1994; Port Melbourne, VIC., Mammoth, 1991; Hodder, Port Melbourne, VIC., William Heinemann, 1990.**

Freeman, Pamela ‘Essay: Strange Objects’ Reading Australia 2014

**First Light Illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe. Port Melbourne, VIC., Lothian, 1995, 1993.**

Hunter, Linnet ‘[Untitled review: First Light]’ Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults Vol 1, No 4, Summer 1993, p 38.


‘[Review: The Watertower]’ Kirkus Reviews January 1, 1998


Pantaleo, Sylvia ‘[Review: The Viewer]’ CM Review Vol X, No 20, June 4, 2004
<https://www.cmreviews.ca/cm/vol10/no20/theviewer.html>
‘[Review: The Viewer]’ Publishers Weekly
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781894965026>

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
11. Reproductions of Selected Book Covers

Editions of *Strange Objects*:

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Other Novels:

1. **No Such Country**
   - Gary Crew

2. **Angel's Gate**
   - Gary Crew

3. **The Truth about Emma**
   - Gary Crew

4. **Voicing the Dead**
   - Gary Crew

5. **The Inner Circle**
   - Gary Crew

6. **The House of Tomorrow**
   - Gary Crew

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Novels (Cont.):

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Novels in Collaboration:

Collections:

Other:

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Series:

**Sam Silverthorne Series:**

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<th>QUEST</th>
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**Windmill Trilogy:**

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**After Dark Series:**

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IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Picture Books:

With Gregory Rogers:
With Shaun Tan:

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
With Steven Woolman:

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
With Bruce Whatley:

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
With Mark Wilson:

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IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew

With Marc McBride:

With Peter Gouldthorpe:
And with: Craig Smith, Matt Ottley, Leigh Hobbs, Paul O’Sullivan, Hans de Haas, Anne Spudvilas

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
And with: John Burge, Gillian Ward, Suzy Boyer, Annmarie Scott, Michael O’Hara
And with: Den Scheer, Ross Watkins, Robert Ingpen, Aaron Hill, Julian Laffan, Naomi Turvey

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
Appendix A. Articles


Writing on the Edge: Gary Crew’s Fiction

Alice Mills

Gary Crew is a prolific writer of literature for adolescents and younger children, distinguished by the darkness and mystery of his themes and by the exceptionally wide range of literary forms in which he writes. His teenage novels range from the contemporary social issues of The Inner Circle to Strange Objects’ mixture of historical recreation, horror, social realism and the supernatural. His collaborative picture story books are still more diverse, from the quirky retelling of book I of Gulliver’s Travels to the study of guilt and grief in Lucy’s Bay, from the comic-book melodrama of Tagged to First Light’s account of a fishing trip in which almost nothing seems to occur. Crew has ventured into satire with his send-up of teen romance in Inventing Anthony West, and into earnestly moral tales of talking animals. Only in his short stories is he predictable, favouring a novice policeman as his main character and mysteries that border on the macabre.

With a few exceptions like the talking animal books, each of which has a happy ending, almost all Crew’s works of fiction are characterized by doubt. Whatever the format of his books, they rarely offer consolation; rather, they disquiet. It is often unclear whether characters are eccentric or extraordinarily cunning, or mad, or in touch with an alternative, equally valid reality. Crew’s novels and short stories tend to finish with no resolution of the narrative, the fate of the main characters uncertain, the mysteries unsolved. During the second half of the twentieth century it has been common for teenage literature in the Western world to present grim themes and dubious or disastrous outcomes. Literature for younger children, however, is still dominated by the formulaic happy ending, as it has been throughout the twentieth century. Crew repeatedly denies the readers of his collaborative picture story books the reassurance of a straightforwardly happy ending, so much so that these books are frequently categorized in libraries as teenage fiction also. While he has won an impressive list of literary awards, his books have also been attacked on the grounds that they are too difficult, demanding and black for an audience of young children (Haigh 1991, p. 1).

For those readers who can relish uncertainty and bleak endings, Crew’s works offer the sophisticated pleasures of explanations that confound the problems they fail to explain, of margins never quite established and boundaries never decisively crossed. Crew rarely produces fantasy fiction as the term is commonly understood; that is, fiction that goes decisively outside ordinary consensus reality. Yet the strange events, characters and objects that he writes about defy realist explanation. If fantasy is understood according to Todorov as the upsetting, rather than transcending, of ordinary consensus reality (Stone 1992, p.31; McKenna and Neilson 1992, p.21), Crew is one of the masters of fantasy in contemporary Australian literature.

The influence of Poe is evident in his stories of mystery and the macabre. As with Poe, madness and the supernatural stretch and subvert the everyday lives of his characters, who struggle to understand, even to survive, in a world where few can be trusted and little can be relied upon. Crew keeps open the possibilities of rational, realist explanation more completely than Poe: the supernatural may be at work, miracles and demonic possession may afflict his characters, but much can be accounted for as mere coincidence. To keep this span of interpretation open for the full length of a novel is Crew’s achievement at his best.

Fiction that takes the form of riddle always tempts its readers to provide answers and force the indeterminate into definite form, to choose either a commonsense or a supernatural solution for each mystery, to decide if a puzzling character is trickster, madman or demon. At his least satisfactory, Crew himself succumbs to the pressure to explain and reassure his audience. At his strongest, he brings to the reader’s notice the human need for a satisfactory story, the human need to make sense of the world. The power of his fiction derives not from meeting such needs but from playing upon them.

Crew’s first novel for adolescents, The Inner Circle, is his most straightforward. Two Australian teenagers, the white Tony and the Aboriginal Joe, meet and transform one another’s troubled lives. The book traces their psychological and social development. Alternate chapters are recounted by Joe and Tony, (a technique that foreshadows the multiple narrators of Strange Objects), but in this first novel both narrators are fully reliable.
their accounts complementing and confirming each other. There is no reason for the reader to doubt or distrust until the closing pages. By this point the Aboriginal character has found an exceptionally promising career opening in the white world, and that character has been welcomed into an Aboriginal family; their problems are thus given a sentimentally idealized solution, until in the last pages it is reported that Tony has disappeared.

He is the first of many young male characters in Crew’s fiction who behave oddly, uncharacteristically, even disappear mysteriously at the end of a story. Tony’s disappearance is not rendered plausible either by anything in his previous behavior or by direct narration from Tony himself. Remote, distanced by two layers of reporting, the event momentarily opens the possibilities of an emotional breakdown or suicide. In later books such possibilities would be left open, but in this instance the mystery is no sooner posed than resolved. Tony is safe and well and has left in order to discover who he truly is. 

The Inner Circle is (to date) the only one of Crew’s novels in which such total reassurance is possible, though at the cost of totally plausible characterization.

The temporary mystery of Tony’s disappearance is an aberration in The Inner Circle. In contrast, The House of Tomorrow abounds in ambiguous clues, secrets and suspicions. Its strength lies in strategic silences. Doubts multiply around and within the main characters, haunted by a past and future that manifest in their dreams, the books they read, the voices they hear. The teacher, Mr Mac, troubled by dreams of his dead wife and dead baby son, tries to compensate for his lack of family by becoming a father to all his students. During the novel he is forced to acknowledge his inadequacies as a father figure, and he eventually suffers a breakdown. When one of the students is found dead at the foot of a waterfall, it is never absolutely clear whether he has jumped in despair or was pushed. Another schoolboy dies in a fire — or did he too commit suicide?

At the centre of The House of Tomorrow’s complicated story is Daniel Coley, a schoolboy obsessed with accounts of the dead returning to speak to the living and claim them. He has ‘heard voices’ (p. 4) — or is this enigmatic comment at the end of his English essay just an exercise in creative writing on his part? From the moment that Daniel is brought to Mr Mac’s attention, the teacher’s responses are inadequate. When the boy behaves oddly in class, Mr Mac concludes that he is looking for attention and bullies him into conformity. When Daniel performs superbly in the school musical to please his teacher, Mr Mac barely acknowledges him for fear of being branded homosexual. When the boy keeps a personal journal for Mr Mac as a form of therapy, the teacher first breaks confidentiality, then neglects to read and respond to later entries. When Daniel eventually dies in a fire, the reader is primed to suspect suicide, and to blame Mr Mac’s neglect and cruelty.

Perhaps, though, Daniel’s death is only an accident. His last communication to Mr Mac is affectionate and graceful rather than bitter (pp. 179-180). If the statements in his letter are taken as the entire truth, Daniel’s story can be read as a successful rite of passage through the problems of his adolescence, marred only by extreme bad luck. However, after the fire Mrs Coley writes a letter which provides at least one more layer of interpretation of Daniel’s life and death. According to her letter, he is not her son but the adopted son of a part-Asian woman and her husband’s brother, the man known to Daniel only as Uncle Keith, a soldier missing in action in Vietnam. The boy’s obsession with the dead returning to claim the living can now be understood as a sign of his half-conscious awareness of his true parentage, or as a supernatural manifestation, the voices of his dead parents revealing his heritage, summoning him to join them.

If Daniel’s death is suicide, none of his rival fathers is blameless. Mr Coley, his adoptive father, tries to mould the teenager into a living death of obedience and repression. Daniel is loved, betrayed and emotionally damaged by Mr Mac, who longs to be the boy’s father and yet shrinks from him in his need. If Daniel’s voices are understood as ghostly phenomena, his blood-parents are summoning him to join them forever in death. Daniel’s story can be read as a failed rite of passage, an ordeal set up by those terrible parents who together bring about his death.

“Terrible parents” is too strong a phrase, though. Mr Mac tries to keep a safe distance from any vulnerability of the heart. Mr Coley may rage and curse his son, but Daniel
temporarily blossoms in spite of him. Daniel’s voices, at first linked to stories of drowning, by the end of the novel accompany visions of earth’s wonders in his grandparents’ house.

... where his Euro/Asian identity is reconstructed — not from the limiting flaw and blood presence of his ancestors but from the dreaming ephemera of moonlight and lace and raffia and limel and doopost.

(Crew 1994a, p. 150)

None of these parents, then, can simply be judged instrumental in Daniel’s death.

Crew claims that the two main voices, Mr Mac’s and Daniel’s, are symmetrically balanced. (McKenna and Neilson 1992, p.20) but the teenager’s voice is everywhere subordinated to Mr Mac’s privileged voice as overall narrator. Daniel’s passionate intensity is muffled by a multitude of adult reflections and judgments on his behaviour, reducing any disturbance for readers from the book’s themes of shame, grief, love, suicidal despair, obsession and the visitation of the dead.

As Pearce points out (1990, p.54) the calamities of the narrative are partly balanced by images of rebirth. A distressed teacher finds peace in a Buddhist community, another marries happily, and Mr Mac ends the book enjoying his retirement at the beach. His narration concludes: ‘... but that was years ago ... No. I cannot think of the past’ (pp.184-5). Even here, though, Crew’s phrasing disquiets. Mr Mac ‘cannot think of the past’, yet he has done nothing but think of the past throughout his narrative. Is he claiming here, none too convincingly, that his current happiness outweighs all the previous despair and death? Or is he trying to repress his story from memory, with its upsurging evidence of his weakness, cruelty and treachery? The book ends, as it has proceeded throughout, balanced between contradictory possibilities.

Crew’s next novel, Strange Objects, also abounds in framing devices and troubling themes, but here each new unhelpful clue and contradictory comment intensifies the book’s potential to disturb. The difference is partly due to the different outcomes of the main characters’ lives. Daniel dies; Joe, Tony and Mr Mac live on in hope; the fates of Strange Objects’ Wouter Loos, Jan Pelgrum and Steven Messenger are unknown, but must probably terrible. There is no comfort to be found in the book’s two narratives, either. Loos and Steven Messenger are unreliable narrators, their motives for writing down their stories suspect, their truthfulness questionable, Steven’s sanity in doubt. Crew invites the reader to pass judgment not only on the narrators but on almost every character in the novel, to speculate on almost every event: to judge, however, is to fall into a guilt trap (see Mills 1993a). In the two narratives and their accompanying commentaries, virtually every character and event is given several conflicting interpretations, each one morally charged. To choose any particular reading — that Steven is a psychopathic killer, for instance, or that Loos is a penitent murderer — is to have that reading challenged within the text or by a telling silence, either of which calls into question the reader’s own morality. The Inner Circle reassures; The House of Tomorrow distances; Strange Objects offers little reassurance and no comfortable distance.

The twentieth-century plot of Strange Objects begins with the Australian teenager Steven Messenger’s discovery of a ‘cannibal pot’ containing a journal and a mummified hand wearing a ring. By theft or accident Steven acquires the ring, and according to his account it gives him supernatural powers of time travel, levitation and flight. The ring attracts — or generates — a second Steven Messenger, though he may equally well be Steven’s schizophrenic hallucination or a manifestation of the ring’s seventeenth-century owner, the psychopathic killer Jan Pelgrum. Steven despises, fears and (probably) murders an Aboriginal elder who knows that he has the ring (see Mills 1993a, p.199). Finally Steven disappears; murdered for the ring, perhaps, his dead body eaten by ants, or perhaps supernaturally possessed, or perhaps terrorizing the highways as an insane mass murderer. Almost every event in Steven’s story similarly disintegrates into unpleasant, incompatible possibilities. At the very end of the novel his mother reveals that his father died on the road months ago, a fact consistently denied by Steven himself. At this point much of his odd behaviour can be reinterpreted as symptoms of crazed grief; however, this does not explain why he should have
assembled and posted the package of incriminating documents that make up Strange Objects. With the complex, enigmatic character of Steven Messenger, Crew enters fully into the territory between rational explanation, madness and Gothic horror presided over by Poe.

Together with the ring and severed hand, Steven discovers the journal of a seventeenth-century sailor, Wouter Loos, cast away on the West Australian coast with the teenager Jan Pelgrim in punishment for their part in the Batavia massacre. Historical records exist for the wreck of the Batavia, the mass murder of its survivors and Loos’ and Pelgrim’s punishment. The journal itself, though, is made up by Crew, mingling fact and fiction, archaeological, anthropological and geographical detail, supernatural phenomena and the story of what might have happened if Loos and Pelgrim had sunk instead of washed ashore. Having somehow managed to meet the Aborigines and been accepted into their society. Setting aside the supernatural elements, Loos’ Journal is a post-colonial text, exposing the prejudices that, like the first (historically uttered) European settlers of Australia, Loos and Pelgrim brought to bear on the Aborigines, and the overpowering advantages afforded them by European disease to which the Aborigines had no resistance. Even the ring’s supposed supernatural powers, when it bestows a halo upon the murderer Pelgrim, can be read as a parody of Christ’s powers to redeem, as preached by white missionaries intent on uprooting Aboriginal beliefs and ways of living.

Strange Objects’ allusions to earlier English literature are equally destructive of their sources. The ring, so precious to Pelgrim and Steven, alludes to Tolkien’s ring without the consolation of Tolkien’s moral universe: ‘there is a dead end fantasy game or quest that occurs there’ (McKenna and Neilsen 1992, p. 22). The fragmentary style in which Loos’ journal collapses, resemble the closing pages of Stephen Daedalus’ diary in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; but where Joyce’s Stephen ends with a triumphant welcome to life, having broken free from the old forms, Loos ends his story of grief and honor by faltering into silence. Crew’s allusions to works such as Alice in Wonderland, The Pied Piper, King Solomon’s Mines and The Coral Island, ‘sending up, or satirising, or nudging out of of the main stream the dated European fantasy context’ (McKenna and Neilsen 1992, p. 22) in no way celebrate his European heritage of story. The book’s reworking of past literature into a set of dead ends, like its parody of Christian miracle and its refusal to narrative closure, is a post-modern exercise in meaninglessness.

Strange Objects undermines not only Western literary and religious traditions but a range of other Western authorities also: the courts, the police, parents, scholars, historians, the printed word. Doubts are first cast on authority in the book’s opening pages, purportedly written by a Dr Hope Michaels, Director of the Australian Institute of Maritime Archaeology, who ends with an appeal to the reader:

\[I trust that any reader who may have information on the whereabouts of Steven Messenger, or of the historic ring, will contact either myself or the police without hesitation.\] (p. 4)

All this is enough, perhaps, to leave a nagging uncertainty in at least the first-time reader’s mind that she might really exist, that the story she introduces might be fact, not fiction.

Doubts over the narrative’s fictional status extend to the book’s extracts from psychology, criminology and history texts and newspaper cuttings. The effect of such doubts is to attack the authority of written texts in general. History, when understood as a single, indubitable account of events, is further attacked whenever one of Strange Objects’ multitude of voices contradicts another, whenever doubt is cast on the narrators’ reliability (Crew 1991c).

As a postcolonial text, Strange Objects ridicules and attacks the traditional view of Australian history as seen through European eyes and judged by Judeo-Christian values. Crew does not, however, disparage oral and pictorial history as practised by Australian Aborigines. He gives a place of honour to Charlie Sunrie, keeper of the Aboriginal sacred site, teller of the old stories. Steven refuses the chance to become initiated into Aboriginal secrets when he (probably) kills the old man (see Mills 1993a). Crew argues that at least one aspect of the book’s ending offers hope of a better understanding between the
nces, when the Murchison District Aboriginal Council invites the local white policeman into their sacred site (McKenna and Nielsen, 1992, p. 18).

Part of Crew’s indictment of Western culture as patriarchal, repressive and murderous is the powerlessness of his female characters. Dr Michaels, observing and analyzing as a researcher, uses her scholarly authority to address Steven. Outside such Western systems of authority, women in Strange Objects are almost mute. Like Daniel’s mother in The House of Tomorrow, Steven’s mother finds an occasion to reveal the truth about the teenager’s missing father only at the end of the novel when the man has had his say. In Loos’ account, a female castaway from a separate shipwreck, Ela, speaks very little, functioning mainly as object for Loos’ desire and the rapist Pelgorum’s lust. In his treatment of male characters, Crew almost forces the reader into moral discomfort by the excess of contradictory evidence and conflicting judgements. In contrast, the female characters’ lack of words could easily be taken for granted. In refraining from any explicit commentary on Ela’s muteness and Mrs Messenger’s long withheld testimony, the author runs the risk of being understood to endorse the silencing of women.

Ela’s dead finger carries the ring across the centuries to Steven Messenger, on a hound severed not by her murderer Pelgorum but by the Aborigines. According to Charlie Sunrise, the seventeenth century Aborigines preserved the dead woman’s hand as an amulet to ‘keep away evil spirits’ (p. 15). Despite their intentions, Strange Objects’ Aborigines transmit the ring’s malignancies from one white male murderer to another. It would be far easier to accept a version of these events in which Pelgorum himself mummifies Ela’s hand and puts it in the cave for Steven to find, but the book’s evidence all points (unsuspectingly) to the Aborigines. Responsibility is thus put on Pelgorum’s victims, Ela and the Aborigines, for providing a literal ‘dead hand of the past’ (Mills 1993b) to haunt the book’s present. The distinction between victim and unconscious coauthor becomes very shaky at this point.

Like Strange Objects, Crew’s next novel, No Such Country: a Book of Antipodean Hours, tells of the killing of Australian Aborigines by white settlers. No Such Country’s atrocity is modelled on historically attested Aboriginal massacres and their temporary concealment in communal silence (Zahnleiter, 1991, p. 17). Somewhere in tropical north-eastern Australia, close to a fictional volcano, in the fictional town of New Canaan, the white townsmen are collectively guilty of murdering the local tribe of Aborigines, all but one survivor, the pregnant Hannah. The crime uncovered by a visiting anthropology student, Sam Shadows, and two local teenagers, Rachel and Sarah; their explorations of the community’s secret make up much of the book’s plot. Sam turns out to be Hannah’s son, the last living member of the massacred tribe to come to New Canaan to dig up his personal past along with an Aboriginal steal midden.

Most of the story of the massacre and its discovery is plausibly realistic. The teenagers who dig up the bodies are as ordinary as New Canaan’s repressive society and Sam’s mysterious parentage allow, and they struggle with sexual attraction and jealousy in everyday teenager fashion. The long expository section in which Sam reveals his past, however, shifts the book’s register from realism to adventure romance. The volcano erupts at the novel’s climax in good adventure romance style, freeing the town from its guilty past. This is Rider Haggard territory, full of convention in the disposal of characters, coincidence and theatricality on the part of the scenery.

Overlaying the story is a weight of Biblical allusion, amounting to a sustained attack on the Christian church as a colonial instrument of oppression, abuse and murder. The town is tyrannized over by a white-robed Father, punitive, hypocritical, sexually abusive, served by a local lout nicknamed Angel. Biblical references are similarly twisted throughout the book, much as in Strange Objects. In No Such Country, however, truth can almost always be known, good and evil can be simply distinguished and evil overcome. Each chapter is named after an incident in Christ’s birth and childhood, from ‘signs and portents’ through ‘naivety’ to ‘massacre of the innocent’ and ‘in the temple’. Such references function allegorically rather than symbolically: the significance of ‘in the temple’, for instance, depends on the reader knowing the New Testament. Similarly, only a reader acquainted with the Bible will notice the ironic presentation of Sam as a
secular Christ, a man of common sense rather than miraculous powers. Sam turns out to be the Father’s unacknowledged son. At the novel’s end it is the Father, not his son, who dies in atonement for the people’s crime — another ironic twist dependent on the reader’s knowledge of the Bible.

As allegory, *No Such Country* transposes Christianity’s black and white, good and evil, so that the white Angel is the most monstrous of its characters, the dark-skinned Aborigines the town’s innocent victims. Crew does not pursue a totally rigid set of allegorical correspondences, however. Sam finds a second loving mother in the white director of the boys’ home. He is educated, Western style, at university. By the novel’s end, having found his racial identity, he chooses to go back to the white-suit scientists’ world of Western science (McKenna and Neilson, p. 19). Not every aspect of the white world, then, is represented as corrupt.

Though it does not simply categorize all white characters as black of soul, *No Such Country*’s allegory, like its adventure romance, is morally unambiguous. Characters are either innocent or guilty, loving or incapable of love. There is no doubt about what happens, either. The volcano definitely erupts, the Aborigines are indubitably massacred. Crew moves onto more doubtful ground (Poe territory between madness, lies, and the supernatural), where the Father is concerned. This character cannot simply be allegorized as a figure for the corrupt church; still less, as Crew claims, as ‘a paradigm of apparently ageless Empire’ (McKenna and Neilson, p. 22), for he always exercises spiritual, not secular, authority.

Whether as con-man, megalomaniac or God, he is curiously peripheral to the story. He is said to dominate the town’s people’s lives, but he does not (according to his Book of Hours) instigate the massacre. In the course of the narrative he does little but lurk threateningly, behaviour far less shocking and fascinating than Pelgrin’s murderous antics or Steven Messenger’s experiments with death. Ultimately the Father’s disturbing ambiguities are swallowed up in *No Such Country*’s mixture of adventure romance and allegory (and so the closed ending of those literary genres prevails over the open-endedness of the Father’s post-modern presentation). Equally well, his death functions as a sign of divine retribution. The lava that literally swallowed him ‘spits’ like the tongue of a serpent’ (p. 202), a simile which suggests both the devil’s trick to claim his own and the Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent taking revenge. These possibilities are incompatible, but they are not as disturbing as the multiple readings of Steven’s fits in *Strange Objects*, partly because this man’s final fate is known, partly because he is a remote figure for most of the book, not its narrator, skulking in the margins that in this novel never threaten to take over the map.

In *No Such Country*, conflicts between good and evil, sinner and innocent, black and white, are mainly fought out between men, with women as their silent victims and co-adventurers, helping to bury the murdered Aborigines and then enduring the Father’s private visits. Half way through the book, Sam recognises another force, that of the planet: ‘a strength that is [God’s] equal, yet not so cold; a cooler, warmer god of earth. A woman, even? A womanowed-down deep in coils of fire?’ (p. 96). From the sea’s depths comes a monster that terrifies Angel for the rest of his life. From the earth’s core comes the volcanic eruption that destroys New Canaan’s bonfire, and with unconvincing suddenness seals the town’s guilt. Crew has commented on the Feudalian implications of the book’s symbolic landscape, in particular the phallic cone of the volcano, that is ‘symbolically the white father’ (McKenna and Neilson, p. 22), penetrating the upper air as the spire of the Father’s church (a totemic erection) feebly imitates it below. In so far as the Father has been the instrument of engulfing (not piercing) retribution, it is symbolically feminine. The contest between patriarchal authority and female anger, between the Father and the teenager Rachel, between Rachel and Angel, cannot be won by the book’s female characters in their own right, with their own bodily strength and will-power. Their anger takes symbolic form in the lava that flows and engulfs the Great White Father and his Angel. Sarah and Rachel are the most fully developed and sympathetic of Crew’s female characters (so far), less fully contained within the patriarchal order than their mothers, less fully silenced than the mothers of *Strange Objects* and The House of Tomorrow. Though they defy the Father long before the volcano erupts, it is only by the symbolic
killing of their patriarchal tormentor, enacted guiltlessly by the volcano rather than by their hands, that they can find freedom.

Three years later, in the novel *Inventing Anthony West*, Crew reconsiders the relationships between man and woman, again in terms of patriarchy and female rage, and again one literary genre overpowers another. *Inventing Anthony West* is the most accessible and playful of Crew’s longer works of fiction, parodying the conventions of the teenage love story and horror film, but its denouement is much more sinister than the Father’s death and the town’s instant redemption in *No Such Country*.

Two teenage girls, stuck indoors for a weekend, amuse themselves by creating their ideal male teenager, ‘Anthony West’, from cut-out magazine images. Kate’s ideal is intelligent, slim, perhaps a writer; Libby’s is athletic, able to wield an axe. In turn the two girls daydream about meeting this image in the flesh; but daydream turns to nightmare when Anthony West proves a coward, betrayer and patriarchal bully. His intellectual version abandons Kate in a crypt and the athletic version leads Libby towards ritual death inside a volcano. The girls wake in horror and eventually decide to burn the doll, but they succeed only in charring its paper hands.

At the start of the book it seems as though Kate and Libby are half-seriously practising witchcraft, but Crew retreats from his story’s potential horrors, explaining it all away as bad dreams. Then, in the final short chapter, back at school, the girls meet their new neighbour — Anthony West — his hands burnt and bandaged. Parodied romantic fiction gives way to Gothic horror — or is this to be explained rationally as mere coincidence, or psychologically as an external projection of Kate and Libby’s combined inner rage, the two teenagers functioning as each other’s doubles? Has female sexual desire, female rage, been powerful enough to manifest and mutilate a lover supernaturally? Will the flesh and blood Anthony prove as unpleasant as the dream-figure, and are the girls’ nightmare relationships about to recur in their waking world? What has been a slight, amusing, clever send-up of both Frankenstein and popular escapist fiction ends with a touch of gore, all the more powerful because of the previous explanations that it was nothing but a nightmare.

Between *No Such Country* and *Inventing Anthony West*, Crew published *Angel’s Gate*, an orthodox realist novel with a reliable narrator and a fully resolved murder mystery. *Angel’s Gate* is also a psychological study of the murdered man’s two children, who flee into the Australian bush and become partly feral. *Angel’s Gate*’s teenagers attempt to be wild with limited success. The feral children are captured and imprisoned within the welfare system, while the doctor’s teenage daughter attempts her own mild form of wildness, seeking out a part-time job and enjoying her boyfriend’s company in defiance of her father (one of Crew’s least effusively patriarchal). ‘They get us all sooner or later’ (p.2) is her comment when the first of the feral children is captured; but at the novel’s end she continues to defy her father and subvert the future he has chosen for her (see Davison and Souter 1993 for contrasting reviews of this text).

Of all Crew’s longer works of fiction, *The Blue Feather* is the most consoling and the least ambiguous. (According to Sharyn Pearce [1997], its hope and promise are due to a process of collaboration with Michael O’Hara.) The troubled teenager Simon is an habitual runaway who is regularly recaptured by welfare officers, but ‘they’ do not get him in the end. Simon is sent for rehabilitation to a sanctuary for rapists, to work for its owner, Greg. Simon’s habit of cracking his head to see (to compensate for the loss of one eye), his sense of being trapped and longing to run, are very similar to the behaviours of the damaged, caged birds of prey. When Greg and his former lover, the photojournalist Mala, invite him to a wilderness trip in search of a giant bird, he is simultaneously being invited to go in quest of his own healing and to undertake a rite of passage from adolescence to manhood. The expedition searches for visible, photographable evidence of a nest or food-remnants to determine whether the bird is mythical or exists in ordinary consensus reality; at the same time they are tested spiritually, required to trust, believe and surrender. They end by finding nests for themselves; Greg and Mala together, Simon with a new mother figure. The quest is almost fully successful for all three.

For a while, though, *The Blue Feather* hints at horror. One of Simon’s eyes is missing, and he does not reveal
until late in the book ‘how, or why, or by whom it had been gouged, cut or peeled from its socket’ (p. 14). Such phrasing (misleadingly) suggests a history of child abuse, and Crew and O’Hare may be alluding throughout the novel to another Simon, in Eriult’s The Borne People, victim of horrific physical abuse. Mutation for The Blue Feather’s Simon serves (more convincingly than for Helume’s Simon) as a means to psychological and spiritual — but not physical — healing for himself and the adults who care for him. In Crew’s earlier novels, long-withheld truths like the secret of Simon’s missing eye are told by mothers when their sons have disappeared or died, too late to make a difference to their lives. In this book, Simon himself manages to voice his own truth, to live through his initiation ordeal, to return after disappearing from camp and to find his own means of integration into everyday life.

Simon slowly learnt to trust, to admit his needs, to ask for help, to acknowledge and use the gifts he is given — a backpack, compass, water-bottle, tarp, knife and feather. His ordinariness closely parallels to the hero-quest stages in Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces (as cited in the epigraph). Like a thousand other heroes, he reluctantly accepts the call to adventure, then finds help along the way. He crosses a threshold from the normal everyday world into a symbolic landscape where his honesty and strength of character are tested, where he must suffer psychological death, passing through a labyrinth and entering an underworld. A flurry of allusions to resurrection, both biblical and classical, surrounds the final revelation about the birds, indicating that they bring spiritual rebirth as well as psychological healing and initiation. How the characters see, and how they interpret what has been seen, marks their development in healing and grace. The scientifically-minded Mala, like Douding Thomas, needs to see with her physical faculties in order to be sure; Greg (echoing the New Testament) can believe without seeing, and it is one-eyed Simon, in the tradition of blind seers like Telemachus, who has the fullest vision of the birds.

The Blue Feather’s use of symbolism runs the risk of becoming sentimental. The quest is quickly accomplished, the helpers very helpful, the symbolism spelled out, the happy ending predictable. There is, however, enough toughness in the text to keep it from sentimental excess. For all their symbolic weight as eagle, albatorn, phoenix, constellation of stars and Holy Spirit, the giant birds have attacked and killed men. The quest follows a path from one death to another. At the happy ending, Simon still has a glass eye and his history of problems with welfare agencies is unresolved. The giant birds — if they exist in the everyday world — are in danger of being shot, or poisoned with radiation sickness, or caged and put in zoo. The book’s ending isn’t altogether consoling, nor does it offer complete narrative closure.

There is a curious mixture of freedom and spiritual determinism in The Blue Feather. Greg is scrupulous in allowing Simon freedom to choose, but Simon cannot understand his own willingness to stay at the sanctuary, to keep Greg and Mala company on their trek, to pursue his quest for the giant bird, to accept guidance. Towards the end of the book, spiritual guidance bleeds into spiritual compulsion, potentially as lethal for Simon as the forces that (probably) possess Steven Messenger, whisper to Daniel Coley, trap in No Such Country and animate the cut-out doll in Inventing Anthony West. Whatever directs his quest — and the epigraph from Campbell invites an archetypal reading — proves benevolent, but is far from safe.

Simon’s quest has mythic resonances. In Crew’s next book, Moses’s Brother, the heroine Sarah is more of a fairy tale character, a Cinderella whose substitute mother forces her into household slavery. The book’s first page reveals its straightforward plot, the murderous career of an 1850s baby farmer, sentenced to death as the result of a girl’s testimony. Sarah’s story is told almost entirely in resistant terms, until in the midst of her ordeal she is visited briefly by a phantom in the form of her mother by birth. In so far as Sarah is a Cinderella figure it might be expected that her mother’s spirit would aid her in sentimental Victorian style, but the phantom neither aids nor threatens her. The episode seems an odd venture into the supernatural when every other aspect of the story is explicable within the boundaries of ordinary common sense reality. This loving mother reappears as flesh and blood at the baby farmer’s trial, and then claims Sarah for a
happy-ever-after life of aristocratic pleasure, with no discussion of her ghostly manifestation. In this book, then, Crew does not so much cast doubt on the boundaries of consensus reality as momentarily defy them, with little effect on the plot or characters.

Most of Crew’s short stories and novellas deal with the darker possibilities of spiritual and paranormal visitations. Their plots mainly concern mysterious crimes and strange deaths. As in *Angel’s Gate* a novice policeman is often the chief suspect, but only in three stories, ‘The Last Cabinet’, ‘Self Portrait’ and ‘A Step Behind’, is the solution within the boundaries of ordinary consensus reality. ‘The Last Cabinet’ may also be read as an unpleasant reworking of *Snow White*. See Mills in *Branding*, 1996) In most of the other stories, supernatural forces pull characters towards their death: by way of their fascinating oddity in the relatively cheerful ‘Face to Stony Face’; through an almost Dickensian, sentimental promise of union with a loving heavenly family in ‘Madonna of the Streets’; by way of hocus telephone calls in ‘The Fourth Call from Hombres’; by ghostly co-option of an old crime in ‘The Staircase’; by ghostly invitation in *The Well*; by an invitation to stay overnight in *The Bent-Back Bridge*; by *The Barn’s* lure of the prehistoric. These stories are well-crafted variations on Gothic horror and the macabre, each avoiding formula with its clever final twist.

The Well, *The Bent-Back Bridge* and *The Barn* are the first three books in the *After Dark* series of stories to make your hair curl. *Edited* by Crew, *After Dark* is marketed as a competitor to the American Goosebumps series, for children who have gained some independent reading skills but need the encouragement of short books with short chapters. Each book includes full-page black and white illustrations. While for many of the later *After Dark* volumes the illustrations are integral to the work, modifying the verbal text, providing crucial clues, for Crew’s three novellas they are an enjoyable extra. *The Bent-Back Bridge* was first published as an illustrated short story and here, in particular, the words stand well alone.

*The Bent-Back Bridge* reworks Norse legends about trolls under bridges, and specifically ‘The Three Billy Goats Guff’. *Janet*, the plump schoolgirl from whose point of view the story is told, is a solitary victim, lured to the bridge at night by the promise of friendship. No other human being, no guile on Janet’s part, will protect her from the shape shifter who has taken the form of *Lola, a new girl at school, to offer friendship and an invitation to stay overnight.* Janet’s wretched school life is sketched out, her size, unattractiveness, habit of cheating, neediness, her complete vulnerability to any offer of friendship. The shape-shifting monster, under the bridge mimics her victim physically, as another schoolgirl, and morally, as a thief. ‘Friend,’ Janet cries out as the monster tears at her life (p.45) — or is this word spoken by the monster in final mimick of Janet’s hunger for love?

Hunger for love, hunger for the kill, are the motivating forces of *The Well* also. As in several of Crew’s novels, an unpleasant family truth is finally revealed by a mother. *Adam and Seth’s* grandmother is forced to admit that her son, their father, had a twin brother who died at the age *Adam and Seth* are now. Tom committed suicide when his father died, believing the other twin to be their mother’s favourite. *Seth, Adam’s* twin, is drawn to the well in which Tom died, in which his vivid ghost manifests to lure the boy to his death. It seems as though the grandmother’s love breaks the malign pattern, saving *Seth,* until the story’s final description of the boy’s ‘cold, wet lips’ and ‘stony tongue’ (p.48). Seth may be alive, but only as the living dead.

* Carter, in *The Barn*, rejoices in the prehistoric life he discovers in the swamp. This eleven year old city-sophisticated furiously resents his parents’ move to the country until he comes to identify with two predatory dinosaurs in the barn, a pair as much out of place in the twentieth century as he is at the local school. To Carter, the prehistoric creatures mean a secret power that can sustain him through all the embarrassments and humiliations of his new life: the same promise, in fact, as *Lola* seemed to offer. *The Barn* ends with Carter’s jubilation, leaving to the reader’s imagination any horrors to come.

* Carter experiences the safe thrills of disobeying his parents and viewing prehistoric creatures. Crew’s fiction is rarely so safe, or so reassuring. The power of his work is not usually emotional, as in *The Bent-Back Bridge,* for...
although his characters often suffer, attention is drawn to the puzzles and ambiguities of their lives rather than their emotional crises. Conventional horror fiction sets up puzzles and ambiguities, withholding the revelation of the murderer’s identity, of the monster’s physical form, to intensify suspense, but always with the guarantee of a revelation to come. The distinctive post-modern quality of Crew’s writing at its best is its excess of answers that amounts to no answer at all, its refusal of the grand revelation, its celebration of doubt.

Crew’s fascination with inadequate fathers takes the forms of rivalry among his father figures, uncertain parentage, attacks on patriarchs and the death of their many-fathered sons. In a fictional universe where there are too many fathers, mothers are generally passive, inadequate, silent guardians of the family secret. Mama’s Babies explores a fairytalesque fictional universe where there are too many mothers, the missing good mother and the sinister substitute mother who withholds the secret of the daughter’s true parentage. In such worlds as these, with too many parents, the adolescent’s rite of passage to womanhood or manhood is in danger of collapsing, through rape or murder, and ordinary consciousness reality is in danger of collapsing into psychotic or supernatural nightmare. To move from this confused and doubtful arena into the world of fantasy quest, as in The Blue Feather, is a relief that Crew rarely affords his readers. Instead, he insists upon the exasperating, exhilarating uncertainties of writing on the edge.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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The Ambiguity of Hesitation in Gary Crew’s Strange Objects

by Michael Stone

Abstract

Gary Crew’s novel Strange Objects won the Australian Children’s Book of the Year Award in 1991. It is an intriguing novel composed of many genres, all of which contribute to another—the fantastic—which centres upon the state of mind of Steven Messenger, the main character.

Some of the problems which arise from his behaviour can be satisfactorily answered to give a single logical explanation of what this book is about, so if Todorov’s theory, in which he is concerned to define the nature of the fantastic, is applied to this novel then Strange Objects must be placed in Todorov’s category of the “pure fantastic," which includes such works as Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw, Pushkin’s The Queen of Spades and Edgar Allan Poe’s The Black Cat.

Two critics who basically accept Todorov’s theory but with some elaboration and qualification are Christine Brooke-Rose and Rosemary Jackson. Brooke-Rose emphasizes the concept of ambiguity; the complexity and subtlety of the pure fantastic lies in its absolute ambiguity, while Jackson suggests that as well as looking at the poetics of form, the politics should be considered as well. Jackson also wishes to lay more emphasis on psychanalysis in constructing a theory of the fantastic than Todorov does, and she believes the fantastic subverts the text and in doing so becomes an influential instrument for social change.

These concepts are appropriate in discussing Crew’s novel and placing it in Todorov’s category of the “Pure Fantastic.”

In the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, the genre of the Fantastic is described as “a mode of fiction in which the possible and the impossible are conflated, so as to leave the reader (and often the narrator and/or central characters) with no consistent explanation for the story’s strange events.”

Tavston Todorov in his book The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (first published in French, 1970 and translated, 1973), argues that fantastic narratives involve an unresolved hesitation between the supernatural explanation available in marvellous tales and the natural or psychological explanation offered by tales of the uncanny—"if that hesitation is unresolved and Todorov’s example of this is Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw, then the novel in question must be placed into his category of the "Pure Fantastic.”

Before proceeding further, it may be helpful here to consider Todorov’s theory in the diagrammatic form that he devised.

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Christine Brooke-Rose in her book, A Rhetoric of the Unreal, sets out this diagram and explains it clearly.

The pure fantastic is represented by the central line—a frontier between two adjacent realms. If the supernatural eventually receives a natural explanation, we are in the fantastic-uncanny: if the events are not supernatural but strange, horrific, incredible, we are in the uncanny (with the accent on the reader’s fear, not on his hesitation). On the other side of the line, if the supernatural has to be eventually accepted as supernatural, we are in the fantastic-marvellous (with accent on wonder). Presumably, then, on the left of the line, in the fantastic-uncanny, not only is the reader’s hesitation resolved but his fear is purged; whereas on the right of the line, in fantastic-marvellous, this fear is turned to wonder.

Critics have suggested other books which might be placed in the Pure Fantastic category in addition to The Turn of the Screw. Brooke-Rose suggests Edgar Allan Poe’s The Black Cat, Rosemary Jackson’s Hogg’s Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, Stanislaw Lem’s The Monkey’s Paw, Pushkin’s The Queen of Spades in many theories’ estimations is also viewed as belonging to this category.

Dostoyevsky had commented on this novel once describing it as the epitome of the art of the fantastic.
He stated that “when you have read it through you cannot make up your mind whether Herman had a vision or not. Did this vision come out of Herman’s nature or was he really one of those who are in contact with another world. That’s art for you”.³

Todorov’s book when first published aroused immediate interest. While his theory was rejected by some, it was greeted with enthusiasm by others who wished to develop, refine or moderate his ideas.

Neil Cornwell in his book The Literary Fantastic³ draws attention to two critics, Christine Brooke-Rose and Rosemary Jackson, who basically accept Todorov’s ideas and he explains how they elaborate and qualify his work.

In A Rhetoric of the Unreal (1983), Brooke-Rose seizes upon the notion of hesitation and points out the ambiguity that is involved in that moment when the reader has the choice of different explanations of an action or event. Brooke-Rose states that “the complexity and subtlety of the pure fantastic lies in its absolute ambiguity”.⁵

Commenting on Todorov’s distinction of “pure fantastic” from “uncanny” or “marvellous” she writes:

If the only feature that distinguishes the pure fantastic from the uncanny and the marvellous is ambiguity, which in turn is shared with some non-fantastic fiction, we must either emphasise (as Todorov does) that this ambiguity concerns only the supernatural (that is, in effect falling back on the supernatural as basic element), or treat such other non-

“fantastic” texts as a displaced form of the fantastic;¹¹

The key elements for the fantastic texts are hesitation, ambiguity and the supernatural.

In Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (1981)¹², Rosemary Jackson, while basically accepting Todorov’s formula wants to extend it beyond the poetics of the form to create an awareness of the politics of the genre.¹³ She also wishes to place more emphasis on psychoanalysis than Todorov does so as to “stretch Todorov’s ideas into a more widely based cultural study of the fantastic”.¹⁴

Jackson also sees the fantastic as the outlet for the exclusions, and the taboos, the estrangements and the alienation of bourgeois society. She believes that

fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which is outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems.¹⁵

Jackson’s argument then is one that views the fantastic as a subversive influence for social change.

Gary Crew’s novel bears out Todorov’s theory with Brooke-Rose’s and Jackson’s modifications. There are frequent moments of hesitation where absolute ambiguity prevails. There is a mixture of genres contributing to the fantastic giving credence to Dostoyevsky’s remark that “the fantastic must be so close to the real that you almost have to believe in it”¹⁶

As well as exploring the forms of the fantastic the novel gives meaning to Jackson’s ideas on politics, psychoanalysis and subversion as part of a theory of the fantastic. The Aboriginal way of life is valued and beliefs and customs are given meaning in scenes that demonstrate rather than explain. Female characters are shown positively in the same manner. Psychoanalysis comes into play in an attempt to understand the minds of the characters especially that of the leading one. The text itself may be viewed as explaining a society as well as an individual, for events and detail reveal flaws in both. While the text upholds what is good it is subversive in the sense that it tells the reader know that individuals and the society they belong to are far from perfect.

What kind of a novel is Strange Objects? It is composed of numerous genres culminating in that of the fantastic. It is an adventure novel where action comes thick and fast. It is a quest novel with two searches, past and present, symbolised by the idea of
the Shining Hills. There are no chapters; just items made up of letters and documents, so its form is epistolary. It is also an historical novel based on careful research and the facts uncovered from the past give the book a mixture of fiction and facton.

The reader is also presented with a thesis about how the first Europeans brought with them a cultural baggage that influenced their way of seeing the new land. These people were influenced by tales of explorers to the Americas, the conquistadors and the hearth of buccaneers. Early Dutch explorers we are told, referred to the natives as Indians as the myth of El Dorado were transported to Australia. Crew debunks a few myths for us including the cannibal one by recording there is no evidence that the Australian Aborigine ate human flesh; yet we know this happened amongst white men from stories told by escaped convicts, trying to survive in the bush.

The book, too, has a dark side with its aspects of the horror novel. The leading character's surname is Messenger but for whom is he a messenger? The town is isolated, desolate and nondescript. Its name is Midway, but midway to where? The school the boys attend is Hamelin High but who is the piper calling the tune? The novel deals with the dark forces of human nature with all the trappings of the Gothic.

Loos and Pelgrim bring civilisation to the natives in the form of toy soldiers, with movable arms and legs, whose movements the natives copy, incorporating these into their dances, thus unwittingly preparing themselves for future confrontation with the Europeans.

The image of civilisation in the form of an article of clothing — the white stockings fluttering like hundreds of white spirits — brings terror to the natives whose ultimate future is to accept the wearing of clothes. When the wind catches a stocking Pelgrim describes it as a flag to march under. These stockings though never given away are not found in the pot when it is discovered by Steven. They should be, but their disappearance gives credence to the comment by Dr Michael's about Pandora's box. The stockings might be seen to symbolise the ills of white civilisation being let loose upon the natives.

The pot's other contents represent the dubious benefits of civilisation to natives: the gold ring, the written book which strongly opposes the long tradition of the Aborigines' oral culture and a dead white girl's hand.

Crew, himself, sees his book as a
novel of colonial discourse intended to challenge the reader to examine what happened in Australia's past and re-assert the forces that shaped this nation and the effect the white invasion has had on the original inhabitants of this country. At the conclusion of the novel, the Murchison Aboriginal Council is re-empowered to deny, or approve, white access to what little remains of their land — even although the request is to view the bootes of a white man.17

These different genres provide enough material for a single discussion of each one in its own right, but they all make a significant contribution to that of another — the fantastic — which centres upon Steven Messenger, the main character of the novel. Is the novel concerned with the disintegration of his personality or is he just plain evil, a person controlled by forces outside himself? Is he a disturbed character unbalanced by the death of his father which he refuses to face, or is he just a person seeking identity, a former growing up in a small desert outback town which he sees as stifling? At the end of the novel does he really disappear as a result of malignant forces or does he stage manage this himself? None of these questions are satisfactorily resolved, there is always doubt or some fact which cannot be accounted for, so Strange Objects becomes a candidate for Todorov's category of the Pur Fantastic where there is no consistent explanation for a story's strange events.

The ring may be seen as symbolising the greed of white civilisation for when it is in Aboriginal possession and covered with wax, it seems to have no power. The gold and ruby of its make-up have no value for the Aboriginal, Charlie, the Aboriginal, is adamant his people do not want the ring. It seems to be capable of evil only when its wearers are greedy or selfish but the ring seems to manœuvre itself towards characters like these. We are not sure if Steven Messenger stole the ring from the mummified hand; he tells us it must have fallen off when Kranzmann waved the hand about and it rolled into his sleeping bag. Because Steven tends to “life” things we cannot be certain which is the true explanation. We are also uncertain as to whether the ring itself created Steven's double or whether he did this through his own mind, believing in some power of the ring. He is “a dreamer of dreams”, a phrase from the epigraph, who is warned that he "must take care not to stir up (strange objects) or meet, the wrong ones" in the great abyss. With the ring he becomes self-assured and this could be explained by a supernatural power on the part of the ring or as he himself says, the ring gives him something "fixed and concrete to hold onto for the first time in his life. If the ring has come innocently into his possession..."
sion, he, as finder, still can't bear to return it even though he knows it to be a valuable historical treasure; a dilemma of ethics many others would find difficult to handle.

How the ring came into Jan Pelgrom's possession in the 17th century is explained vaguely. Pelgrom says he had it from a Spaniard. Later Loos finds he can't remember the full explanation Pelgrom gave of how he came by the ring. While these remarks can be interpreted in a sinister way and are reinforced by Pelgrom's jealous guardianship of the ring, again he is like Steven Messenger in suddenly owning a valuable possession that gives him self-esteem. But he does give it away freely to Ela and when he does seems just as dangerous, as he stalks the camp at night, feared by all until his death from fever.

Certainly there is something frightful about Pelgrom who has taken part in murder and rape and who threatens Loos with an axe on two occasions, although Loos lets him go because he always has the upper hand because of his muscle and physique. If Loos is to be believed Pelgrom's fears, complaints and whines are not admirable. If Pelgrom was so frightful why did Pelsaert set him free when he showed no mercy to the other mutineers and murderers? Explanations about his youth, or that Pelsaert wanted to furnish a companion for Loos might be suggested but none can be given with any certainty.

We are not sure how psychopathic Pelgrom is or whether it might be explained as “folie à deux”, “madness together”. Gary Crew uses one of the documents in the book to point out that the Banjul madness was similar to that of Jonestown: 1977, when 900 men, women and children, followers of Rev. James Warren Jones, echoed their leader and committed mass suicide.

The definition of a psychopath as inadequate, introverted, trying to form one or two possessive relationships is strained to fit Messenger and Pelgrom, especially the latter. Both characters may be inadequate; Steven is introverted and appears to be trying to form an intense relationship with Kratzman, but this is not so in Pelgrom's case.

When Loos realises the mountains nearby are similar to some in the Americas he believes he will find wealth beyond compare. The idea he says, “bears constantly in his brain” and the boy's unwillingness to help him in the search causes frustration, leading him to accentuate the boy's shortcomings, thus revealing himself as not the long suffering keeper he sets himself up as.

It is difficult to see what each pair of characters in this part of the novel thinks of each other as real feelings are hard to discover.

Steven scorns Kratzman for reading Playboy magazines left behind at the hotel but as he supplies these it is difficult to believe he doesn't look at them himself.

Loos' and Pelgrom's story can't be completed. What happened after Pelgrom tried to retrieve the ring and failed? We presume Loos was last to die and it was he who placed Ela's hand in the pot. We can only surmise what took place between her death and the hand becoming mummified and later removed.

The partnership of Steven Messenger and his friend Nigel Kratzman parallels the earlier one of Wooster Loos and Jan Pelgrom. Each pair, Messenger and Pelgrom, Loos and Kratzman are similar in appearance, age, height and colouring. Loos and Kratzman are the good guys saddled with unwilling, unhelpful and unco-operative partners. We see a great deal of Steven through his own eyes with very little comment on Steven from Kratzman.

The relationship between Loos and Pelgrom is discovered through Loos' eyes only. The two professors who edit the diary describe Loos as a person of "great humanity". Against this view is that of a sceptic who writes to a newspaper where this journal is being serialised, pointing out that the academics are accepting the word of a condemned murderer, who in the diary states he is building up his self-esteem so that he may be well thought of for posterity. Is Loos genuinely rehabilitating himself or is he creating an idealised image of himself? That is a question which can't be answered for certain.
In time Loos and Pelgrino disappear into the vastness of the Australian continent. The same might be said of Steven and Nigel who vaguely head off in opposite directions, north and south respectively. Steven's view of the landscape suggests that further sightings of either of them will be difficult. Midway is no place to build a monument to human existence. The hotel sign continually flashes “Vacancy”. The grey sea blazed by the wind washes the cliff so hard that one night he expects the units will lift and sink slowly into the sand. The roadhouse and even Highway One he believes will vanish forever, undermined or swallowed by the sea beneath. The landscape here is harsh and is at odds with human endeavour, especially white endeavour as the difficulties of the struggles of Loos and Pelgrino of the past, and Steven, his mother and others around them in the present show.

Minor characters in the novel are ambiguous. The scientist Dr Hope Michaels whose name suggests she is on the side of the angels could be on the side of the keepers or owners of the ring if the ring is seen as an instrument of evil.

Her name may be a red herring, a game the author is playing. She appears to know the ring is missing before all the others but the reader hesitates as this could be deduced through her scientific training. She flatters Steven by telling him he gave the two murderers “their lives again, you gave them to us”, (p.54) She is talking about the service he is doing history, but the remark is ambiguous. She tries very hard to get the ring back from Steven but are her motives pure? Is she doing this in the interests of science or for another power? She also flatters him in likening him to James Dean, a figure he begins to model himself on. Dr Michaels classifies Steven as schizophrenic, something she has very little evidence for, and it is a judgement she is not trained to make. If the Messenger documents are authentic then we can believe in Dr Michaels as a reputable archaeologist but if not, well, the link to antiquity can suggest another possibility. When she hears of the discovery of the pot, she comments ambiguously that this may be another Pandora’s box. (p. 24)

Steven’s friend Nigel Kratzman is ambiguous too. We see him through Steven’s eyes and Dr Michael’s. Steven sees him as weird and untrustworthy, a boss boy who is always making rules. Kratzman is associated by Steven with the principal of the school when he assumes the place in the Staff room vacated by that man. Dr Michaels describes him as a fine-looking, mature young man, happy in his present trade. His energies and dreams go into restoring a car wreck and ultimately he goes south to do a mechanics course which Dr Michaels tells us has been very successful.

While he has many positive aspects of character there are others that suggest a sinister side; Steven seems him as preoccupied with spying on people; we are told he terrorised a school group with the unremarked hand, his method description of the dead body and the suicide could account for Steven’s dreams of blood; he stops Steven killing a bird but he has supplied the material for building the sling shot.

Kratzman looks after himself. He distances himself from his friend at a time his friend needs support and he shows little sympathy towards Steven who has recently lost his father. Kratzman has never had a father we are told so his behaviour here could be sympathetic or unsympathetic. He leans towards the latter.

Nigel Kratzman never offers help willingly and expects to be paid for what he does, even if the payment consists of old Playboy magazines.

His taking of Steven and the Aboriginal, Charlie Sunrise to the sacred place is made through a desire to see what is in it for himself. Like Steven he seems to have no friends but he is a manipulator of people and his coming across as a mature pleasant young man could be seen as part of his manipulative skills. At the end of the novel we learn his name is only a pseudonym because he does not want to appear under his own name in the published papers. This lack of real identity adds to his shadowiness as an “ordinary” character.
It is hinted at in the book that other things as well as the ring went missing when the pot was opened in the cave. If this was so, Nigel Kratzman would just as likely be a suspect as Steven Messenger. The ambiguity of this relationship draws the reader's attention back to the protagonists of the early period. Is Pelgrim as bad as Loos makes out?

The hesitations which made this novel Pure Fantasy in Todorov's terms centre upon the character of Steven Messenger. Are the documents true in revealing an unbalanced personality or are they created carefully and constructed by him to leave a situation and a town he finds unbearable in order to discover his own identity? Like Kratzman who has to go south to find himself, Steven must go north. He is like his father who was always travelling north, not staying in one place long, always looking for something better. The south in Australia is more secure, the north still unknown and adventurous.

The character of each boy teaches him to seek fulfillment by travelling in opposite directions that are symbolic for each, though Steven is cynical about that quest. "I wonder what will be there when we reach the top? Disneyland?" (p. 26)

There are cases of people wishing to escape a difficult situation, simply disappearing. Steven's background is not all that stable in the ambiguous treatment of his mother as a character shows. Does he want to get away from her? She is friendly with the truck drivers who pass through the town but we don't know how friendly. She doesn't get on with the only other woman at the motel. We don't know why and this complicates the relationship between the two boys. We suspect the relationship with her husband was not strong but we later learn that Steven's father has been dead for six months at the time these events are happening. Against this Steven tells us she only remains in the town to get him some high school education.

Because Steven never admits to the death of his father in a novel accident we could explain some of the events as a result of a shock or the product of an unbalanced mind — his dreams of standing in blood for example — but they can also be described as a fictional account of a planned disappearance. When he finds the ring he has the wherewithal to leave. One of his first questions to the police sergeant looking for it is, "Is it gold?" and his second, "Is it worth money?" (p. 23)

The Messenger documents have been constructed by their owner and who is to believe Steven's statements about knowing names and events before they were told him. All the events could have been learned from newspapers and placed in a different order in the scrapbook after the events.

Everything that Steven tells us exists in fiction — and we know he is a reader — dreams, spaceships, rings which glow in the dark and people being lifted into shafts of light. There is a strong flavour of alien culture in his writings. The landscape bims of aliens — and people have even reported sightings. The area is isolated, backpackers and campers are at risk. There is a history of unexplained disappearances in the region. Stories of the hitchhiker and the homicidal maniac are told by the school groups. If you meet this person on the highway — don't stop. Go to touch hands with must ants eating a body, bones and all, that had been left on their nest.

These ideas become part of the Messenger documents — they are even presented in a Star-Wars Project book with the caption "A Lepidoptera lands on the barren surface of Tatooine". Messenger reads a great deal of material left behind by truck drivers who pass through Midway. Some of this is at the newspaper, comic and magazine level but not all, the range is large and possibly there are Stephen King novels. He has an interest in science and tends to find out about things which interest him, such as the meaning of the fabled El Dorado. He comments on the inadequacies of the school and local library. Amongst his documents are photocopies from learned books that he has looked up (Items 9, 10, 22).

Steven can be seen as disadvantaged in an area where mediocrity and settlement for a peaceful if not dreary existence hold sway. When it is suggested that he looks like
James Dean he seized upon this cult figure to build his own image either in dream or reality. First he notices this figure in the daylight in school uniform, then gradually he appears in jeans and then more definitely in a red top and white jeans. This figure he says he sees, may exist only in his own mind.

His experiments with the Life Form (a lizard in a wire cage left on an ants' nest) can be seen as a way of planning his departure from Midway. He originally calls this a LIFE FORCE but decides that name is too bookish but this again can be interpreted as a Freudian slip as Steven searches for a more meaningful and perhaps forceful life. His careful research and labelling the parts of the lizard reveal either a cold-blooded approach or one that is rational and scientific. The lack of fingerprints found on the bolt hulk retrieved from the ant's nest makes his disappearance more ambiguous.

Steven's character has so many ambiguities that are open to varying interpretations that it is difficult to label him sinister. We know he is a loner who is orderly and perhaps over tidy. He takes pride in his hands and is a little obsessive about them but at the same time he is capable of delicate work with them; he has constructed a wire model of the Eiffel Tower.

Steven values his privacy and doesn't like his belongings touched. He sleeps away from others on a school excursion but only moves away after Kratzman talks unceasingly about cars. He is capable of racist remarks but so are many others and when some of his actions are analysed, such as moving away from Charlie Sunrise's dirty trousers as they sit together in the truck and being repulsed by his twisted hand, these could be actions that arouse feelings of dislike in people whether they be black or white.

Steven also says he hates other kids, but how true in this and how deep is the remark? He is sentimental of his classmates who took days off to strip an engine as Kratzman did, or pretended to be sick using the trauma of the mumified hand as an excuse. Because of his weak chest and asthma, he seems to have difficulty in being part of a group and asserting himself. His attempt to fire shots at a goal is a temptation easily yielded to by many others and even his systematic killing of the lizard for the perfect skeleton can be seen as the need to gain scientific knowledge and not killing for its own sake. If he plans his own disappearance this way, it would be an essential part of his preparations.

Whatever happens in this novel, no clear answer can be given for other possibilities are also evoked.

The ring to Steven is not necessarily a force for evil although the reader is guided to this interpretation by linking him with its previous owner. 17th century Jan Pelcgm. These two have age in common and in moments of anger and intensity, a halo effect is created around their heads. But in the novel the author suggests this may be explained scientifically so that it is not necessarily a supernatural phenomenon. They are characters who are seen as complaining and cowardly but this is only told us by characters who are building their self-esteem at the expense of others. Both Steven and Jan are responsible for the death of others. Jan Pelcgm, whatever his part in the Rassavis killing, brings destruction to the Aborigines through his influence. Steven pushes Charlie Sunrise against a rock and he breaks his skull. Steven says this was self defence as Sunrise had tried to take the ring from him. This may be hard to believe but it is possible. Throughout the story both Steven and Kratzman have been circumspect of the Blacks and in terror of their camp. Black deaths in the novel can be seen as an ongoing effect of black and white civilisation attempting to come to terms.

Steven finds the ring early in the story at a time when he is anxious about his father taking "contracts that are further and further away" and "staying away longer too" (p.27). His father has been gone for weeks, much longer than usual and has possibly been killed in a truck accident, an event the reader learns later that Steven is unwilling to face. He also feels that pressure will be on him to pack up and leave when (if?) his father returns. The ring to the boy is a kind of security.
something to hold on to. “No matter what happens, I’m going to have this. I’m going to keep it until I’m ready to give it up” he says (p.27).

As the restoration of the car was to Kranzman, so was the ring to Steven something secure. His comments about wanting “to be out of the blood, safe inside the white light of the ring” (p.52) do not have to be taken literally but are happenings in his dreams and the blood reference to his father’s death as could be the red light of the ring as he looks at the flashing red motel sign reading vacancy (p.56). The many references to blood throughout the novel suggest the awfulness of the father’s death that Steven is unable to come to terms with.

Steven also realises that he cannot give up the ring because it makes “dead people come alive” (p.56). Hope Michael’s puts this thought into his mind when she suggests to him that he “with Wouter Loos and Jan Pégroux from a long sleep. You gave them their lives again” (p.54). The ring has given Steven Messenger a legendary identity, the image of James Dean, and the name of a mysterious girl, E.L.A., two icons readily sought by teenage boys. Perhaps he believes the ring might bring back his father too. In view of the strength he gains from the ring, he says, “there was no way I was giving that ring back. If I gave that ring back everything would stop” (p.56).

When he describes the ring as a circle of pure gold, something that is perfect, this may be a condition he wishes for himself. As the inquest we learn from his mother that the ring was not responsible for his dreams and screams in the night which she says began six months before finding the mummified hand, at the time of his father’s death in the ring accident. As Steven has not faced up to his father’s death the ring becomes a more positive force in the story even perhaps helping him come to terms with this and develop a more grown up identity.

Even so his final remark when he says, “Up north I could wear the ring every day, on my hand, right out in the open, then I would find out what we can really do”, is one that remains ambiguous. (p.177)

Messenger’s final disappearance establishes the novel in the Pure Fantasy area. Nothing has been seen of him for three years, just unconfirmed sightings. But are those sightings Steven, his clone or just someone who looks like him. Somewhere remain unanswered: How was Steven able to describe the sink hole if he wasn’t there? and how did he get home from the Aboriginal site in an impossible time? and was it him on the highway outside his home three days after his mother said he had left?

By this time Steven Messenger has passed into the myths of the area along with the vanishing bichbaker and the other legends of the Murchison area.

Did he plan his disappearance himself or was he a victim of some evil force, his messenger abroad in the vast spaces of Western Australia? Or was he disturbed, on the way to being a psychopath as his counterpart in the 17th century was believed to be? Another unresolved question in the novel is the linking of Steven and Nigel to Water Loos and Jan Pégroux by Charlie Sunshine when he believes the cave drawings of the past represent Steven and Nigel. Is this merely superstition or has he secret knowledge that links to the past?

Because of the ambiguity of its hesitation there is no place for Gary Crew’s novel within Todorov’s definitions of the marvellous or the uncanny, so it must be placed in the category of the Pure Fantastic with other significant novels Todorov’s term applies to.
Footnotes
3 Chris Baldick in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 129 describes the marvelous as follows: A category of fiction in which supernatural, magical or other wondrous impossibilities are accepted as normal within an imagined world clearly separated from our own reality. The category includes fairy tales, many romances, and more science fiction among both other kinds of fantasy with “other worldly” settings, like J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Modern theorists have distinguished marvelous tales from those of the uncanny in terms of the explanations offered for strange events: in the marvelous, these are explained by magic, while in the uncanny, they are given psychological causes.
4 Chris Baldick (above) defines the uncanny as follows: The uncanny is a kind of disturbing strangeness evoked in some kinds of horror story and related fiction. In Todorov’s theory of the fantastic, the uncanny is an effect produced by stories in which incredible events can be explained as the products of “the narrators” or the protagonist’s dream, hallucination or delusion. An example of this is Poe’s *The Tell Tale Heart* (1843), in which the narrator is clearly suffering from paranoid delusions. In tales of the marvelous . . . no such psychological explanation is offered and strange events are taken to be truly supernatural.
7 Cornell, p.23.
8 Cornell, p.23. Also quoted Jackson, p.27.
13 Jackson, p.6. Quoted in Cornell, p.15.
14 Jackson, p.7. Quoted in Cornell, p.15.
15 Jackson, pp.3-4.
16 Cornell, pp.23, p.223. Also quoted Jackson, p.27.
18 Gary Crew, *Strange Objects*, Melbourne, Octopus, 1991, pp.62-3. Group hysteria: A condition where the insanity of one person seems to affect the mind of another or several members of a group. If the person who first caused the problem is removed, those who have been affected usually revert to normal behaviour patterns.

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Gary Crew is as complex as the fiction he writes for young readers. His work is shaped by his fascination for post-colonial literature, history, and his own past. He wrote in Magpies, I know I cannot entirely abandon my own past. Once I would have longed to, I would have given anything to at least redress, at best forget, the forces that shaped me — but, as I grow older, and more confident in my art, I am not so certain... A writer who cannot remember must produce lean fare. And surely a children’s writer who cannot remember is no writer at all. He has the ability to take snippets of our history and transmute them back into beautiful and confronting fiction.

Gary’s contribution to Australian children’s literature is in threefold. He changed the nature of young adult literature by taking it to darker and more intricate places than ever before. His journey into picture books saw the development of books specifically aimed at older readers, once the sole preserve of the very young. And finally, he has mentioned some of this country’s finest writers and illustrators who acknowledge their debt to him and his encouragement and at times his harsh criticism.

Gary’s particularity in the field of picture books is his ability to make room for him, to some extent. I read between the lines of his fiction. I read between the lines of his fiction. Gary’s picture books have been the greatest friends ever since, with each growing taller to greater heights. I have to say that I find them hard to read. A perfect threshold (her motto: “Less is best”) and a perfect aesthetic eye (plus an awesome visual memory). What a combination! Gary’s books have been a great and rewarding friendship. A wonderful adventure in writing.

An observation I’d make is that the IBBY had to make room for him, to some extent. I read between the lines of his fiction. I read between the lines of his fiction. Gary’s picture books have been the greatest friends ever since, with each growing taller to greater heights. I have to say that I find them hard to read. A perfect threshold (her motto: “Less is best”) and a perfect aesthetic eye (plus an awesome visual memory). What a combination! Gary’s books have been a great and rewarding friendship. A wonderful adventure in writing.

Gary Crew has the ability to visually conceive and construct alternative ways of looking at the world and guiding andimmersing illustrators is one of his skills. He claims that.
the role of the illustrator is not to verify or confirm the print text, rather it is to complement it and extend the text, giving the narrative a greater resonance, while respecting the integrity of the book as a work of art.

I was privileged to publish his first YA picture book about death, Lucy’s Bay, in 1992. Gary’s love of drawing and certain encouraged him to extend the text by developing a visual narrative beyond Gary’s original conception. Lucy’s Bay again demonstrates Gary’s love of language, pure white and neat down to the sea, broken stones of tiny fish along the edge and the rise.

We discovered Shuan Tan and wanted to work with Steven Woolman that the deeply psychic The Watertower is one of Australia’s most loved and pondered picture books for older readers.

The other most significant contribution to literature Gary has achieved in his ability to mentor new writers and illustrators. Some of these have included Anthony Eaton, James Roy and X Burga. He has done this in numerous ways, through master classes and mentorships held at Writers Centre, as series editor with Lethbridge and at the request of publishers as in the case of James Roy at UQP.

Anthony claims,

Gary was, without a doubt, one of the most important factors in the foundation of my writing career. When he agreed to mentor my first novel, The Darkness with me, little did I know what an intense, incredible experience I had let myself in for.

"Don’t be precious!" has been Gary’s catchcry since the day I met him. Don’t think of your writing as art, think of it as words on a page, words that you, as a writer, need to polish, to craft, and to view through an unemotional lens, in order that you might be able to bring out their full potential. It’s a confronting experience, being told this. For some, no doubt, it’s the first and possibly hardest test of their mental atti-

tude to writing and the writing industry. I can see that there are many people out there who might not appreciate the frank and direct approach of their writing that Gary offers, but to this day, it’s a philosophy I continue to apply to everything I write.

When I think of Gary, I tend to think of him as a craftsman — an artisan in the old sense of the word, an uncompromising master of his trade, and of his tools. In this case the trade is stories and the tools are words, and I consider myself extraordinarily lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from such a master. He has had an extraordinary impact upon the field of children’s and young adult writing in this country. Books like Strange Objects and No Such Country are masterpieces of post-modern narrative and craft, and were exactly the first to demonstrate to me that writing for young people didn’t just mean writing kids’ stories. These books showed me that the application of sophisticated writing techniques and narrative approaches isn’t just something that can be done in children’s and young adult fiction, but something that should be done.

Even though I like to think that in the decade since I first met Gary, I’ve developed my own style, voice and philosophy of writing, it’s fair to say that, in many respects, I still sense the impact of Gary Crew in many aspects of my approach to my chosen career.

James Roy continues,

All I’d say is that when he edited my first book, Gary almost stopped me writing and then and there. What he had to say fell so squarely, so pointedly, and so persuasively, that I shall never forget what he said. He was a master, and his skill — and his skill — to see if I could cop it. To see if I was tough enough, Fortunately I was, and the changes he suggested — some of them enormous — not only improved that first book out of sight, but taught me skills and principles that I still recall when I write, thirteen years later.

Jane Burke also commented on her experience of being mentored by Gary.

Gary’s words of encouragement really made the difference to me. I suppose it gave me the confidence to keep writing the manuscript and believe that it was actually okay.

In the end the biggest thing Gary did was to take the manuscript to Helen Chamberlain. It was published, White Lies’ (BWA notable 2003) and all worked out okay, but I suppose it was a bit of a gamble for Gary, as he was my mentor and my default associated with it.

Gary Crew’s contribution to Australian children’s literature is huge. As a writer of confronting accessible transgressive fiction, his brilliant transformation of picture books for older readers and his influence on a whole generation of writers who acknowledge him as their mentor, muse and all times haras-

sor has been remarkable and under acknowledged. He will never give up on his crusade of writing innovative picture books for older readers and continuing his collaboration with new and creative illustrator. He will always challenge himself and delight and confound his readers. He continues to evolve publishing his first adult novel The Children’s Writer last year. Gary Crew is an icon of Australian children’s literature. His work will be measured and loved by many generations of young readers to come.

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Appendix B. Reviews


THE WRECK OF THE BATAVIA
A TWO NOVEL COMPARISON STUDY

In 1629 the Dutch vessel Batavia was shipwrecked on the Houtman Abrolhos off the coast of Western Australia. Some 250 people found themselves fighting for their lives in more ways than one on these barren islands.

The account of the wreck and its survivors has been well documented and the events are of the nature of highly exciting, very brutal fiction. The captain, Francisco Pelsaert, with several men, set off for Indonesia in an open boat to gain assistance. Meanwhile, Jeronimus Cornelius, who had already gathered a group of men together before the shipwreck to mutiny and seize the treasure on board, now began with this group systematically to murder the remaining passengers and crew.

When Pelsaert returned with a rescue ship the tables were turned by the few remaining survivors and Cornelius and his band were tried and executed on the spot.

These events have now become the source of two novels which interestingly have come off the press a few weeks of one another: Strange Objects, by Gary Crew is published by Heinemann Educational Australia, and The Devil’s Own, a first novel by Western Australian Deborah Lisson is published by Walter McVitty Books. The two would make a valuable resource for comparative studies in literature.

Historical fiction is not a popular genre, but both of these novels, by the use of modern day protagonists, begin firmly set in the present. Readers are thus led gently from present time into the past. The Devil’s Own is a time slip novel, while Strange Objects is a much more intricately structured piece of work which defies categorisation.

The Devil’s Own follows a reasonably straightforward and well-known path in the time slip field. It is prefaced with a quotation which is actually the oath of the mutineers from the Batavia and is the source of the book’s title. The first two chapters are then composed of alternating passages, one of events at the time of the Batavia wreck (these passages in italics to differentiate them) and the other of Julie Dykstra, a Dutch Australian, and her family on holidays in the Houtman Abrolhos. There is no link between the two concurrent passages, however, Julie, not getting on well with her family, does catch glimpses of a face on one of the islands. This is to prove to be of a character from the past. Julie then slips into the past to become part of the events in the final days of the Batavia slaughters and eventual rescue before she makes the necessary slip back to her own time.

Strange Objects, Gary Crew’s third novel, has a much more involved structure. It is an ambitious and impressive work. It also begins with a quotation. This is from one of Lovecraft’s stories and is also the source of the title, but leads us into the knowledge that this is not a story of normal, everyday events. We then are given an introduction by Dr Hope Michaels, Director of the Western Australian Institute of Maritime Archaeology,
explaining that she was left a project book by 16 year old Steven Messenger who has disappeared. This project book is filled with diary entries and cuttings from various sources. Most of the remainder of the book is composed of these pieces. So the structure is that of a collage of newspaper articles, diary entries, transcripts of radio interviews, academic statements, extracts photocopied from books, and so on. Readers must construct the narrative for themselves from all of these pieces.

The narrative concerns Steven Messenger who discovers a “cannibal” pot, containing a mummified hand and a diary, in a cave. Scientific investigation prove the diary to be that of one Wouter Loos who was one of the Batavia mutineers, but for some reason was set adrift rather than hanged, together with a teenage member of the murderers, Jan Pelgron. Loos had kept the diary for his remaining days while trying to survive with Pelgron on the inhospitable coast. Much of the time they spent with Aboriginal tribes.

The two narrative lines of Messenger, affected strangely by his theft of a ring from the mummified hand, and of Pelgron, the teenage murderer, run concurrently through the novel.

Parts of the papers presented to the reader are of real events, and it is indeed difficult to distinguish the factual from the fictional. Footnotes and quoted books add to the blurring of the lines between real and imagined, and while there are events in the novel of the fantastic, the reader is drawn into the conviction that this has all really taken place.

The complexity of the structure is carefully managed by Crew so that the events are clear and for the reader it is all a fascinating and engaging read.

Because the two novels are so different in structure and style yet based upon the same events, it can be of value to take them with students to see how two authors have treated the same inspiration. Lisson remains with the events on the islands; Crew virtually ignores them and uses the two castaways, who are not mentioned by Lisson at all. The result is that, oddly, in Lisson’s novel the factual basis seems unreal, whereas in the Crew novel it is difficult at times not to consider the fictional element as being factual.

The two novels, while both fiction, would appear to have been written with different purposes in mind. Lisson’s is predominantly written as an entertainment, whereas Crew’s is making comment.

The Lisson novel gives the chance for discussion on the contrast between present day and past, and a character who must survive in both milieux.

The Crew novel lends itself admirably for detailed discussion, for there are carefully placed commonalities between the two “stories” which make nice contrasts: Aborigines feature in both threads and we see them before whites and after; the two teenage boys, Pelgron and Messenger, have much in common (in fact, it is disturbing to come to grips with the slowly dawning realisation that Messenger, the protagonist, whom we expect to be the “good guy”, is, in fact evil, and we keep rejecting the notion waiting for some confirmation that we are mistaken). The novel is also one which by its structure, its storylines, and its mysteries makes the reader want to talk it over.

Objects that bear a power feature in both novels: a rosary in The Devil’s Own and a ring in Strange Objects. The ring plays a major part in the Crew novel and bears with it the power, like that of the ring in Wagner’s ring cycle or of the ring Bilbo Baggins stole from Gollum in the Tolkien series, of gradually destroying its bearer.

Suggested Activities

- Research the historical facts of the wreck of the Batavia and the geographical area in which the novels are both set.
- Chart comparisons and contrasts between the two novels. Both novels have teenage protagonists. One is male, one is female. Both have objects of power. One is positive, one is negative. And so on.
- Discuss the common elements between the two threads of Strange Objects. What points is the author making by linking the two stories in this way?
• Crew and Lisson both have had to consider language style. Crew has to write in various styles to suit a variety of documents and narrative forms. How has he achieved them? Lisson has to overcome the difficulty of presenting speech in both modern and past times. How does she do this? Compare the spellings of historical characters' names in the two novels.

• How are time links and leaps achieved by Crew? While it is not a time slip novel, there are occasions where “contact” of a sort is made. Has the author chosen an appropriate method to do this, why has he done it, and is it successful? How are the time slips achieved by Lisson? Are they successful? How are time slips made in other novels, e.g. Playing Beatie Bow? How do authors overcome the problems of speech, clothing and knowledge when characters find themselves in other times?

• Compare the family life of both protagonists with their reactions towards it. Julie's family is caring and involved with one another while Julie seems to be at odds with them; Steven's mother appears to be unconcerned about her son.

• Crew makes interesting observations about the way people “see” or interpret their surroundings according to the ways in which they have been brought up. Loos, for example, can only see Australia and its inhabitants according to his European background, e.g. he is always frightened of being eaten by the Aborigines whom he sees as cannibals purely because of his background. Messenger also has preformed ways of seeing and interpreting. Examine the ways in which the two characters interpret their surroundings according to these sets, and discuss them in relation to the ways in which people react according to set predilections.

An article by Sharyn Pearce on Gary Crew and his novels, which may be found in Papers, Vol. 1, No. 2, discusses Strange Objects in connection with Crew's other two novels.
The wreck of the Dutch ship *Batavia* on the coast of Western Australia in 1629 has been a source of inspiration for many Australian writers. Its story of mutiny, wreck, murder, rape, barbarism, and subsequent rescue and justice is both horrible and fascinating, combining as it does the worst of human nature with a challenge to the 'received' history of European exploration of Australia.

After the wreck, the commander, Francisco Pelsaert, took the long boat and sailed for help, leaving a junior officer, Jeronimus Cornelisz, in command. Most fictional accounts of the wreck concentrate on the violence and cruelty of the crew, under Cornelisz, towards the marooned passengers. Over 100 men, women and children were killed before Pelsaert returned to rescue them. Most of the murderers were executed, but Pelsaert allowed two, a young boy, Jan Pelgrom, and another man, Wouter Loos, to be marooned on mainland Australia. Loos’s fictional journal forms a thread in *Strange Objects*.

In the year that *Strange Objects* won the CBCA Book of the Year Award, another book about the Batavia wreck was shortlisted for the same award – Deborah Lisson’s *The Devil’s Own*. Whereas Lisson’s book is a straightforwardly told time slip story about a young girl finding herself caught up in the *Batavia* horrors, Crew has chosen to give us multiple accounts, intersecting possibilities, and unresolved questions. *Strange Objects* circles around the story of Stephen Messenger, the 16-year-old who finds Loos’s journal in a small ‘cannibal pot’, along with the long-mummified hand of a white girl and a golden ring. One of the conceits of the story is that Messenger has constructed a scrapbook which contains, not only his own account of the consequences of his find, but also newspaper clippings, radio interviews, letters from a prominent archaeologist and from a schoolmate/neighbour of Messenger’s, as well as Loos’ translated journal as it appeared in an Australian newspaper.

The result of these multiple storytelling modes is that there is no one ‘truth’ represented. The lack of a single authorial voice allows doubt, and the details of both timelines are described, contradicted, reaffirmed and questioned again, leaving many possibilities for the reader to choose among.

One of these possibilities is related to the ‘magic’ effect of the ring on both Pelgrom and Messenger, the two young and probably mentally ill boys of the two timelines. In my personal correspondence with Gary Crew this year, he said, ‘… as an historian, I am not impressed by the fantastic (that’s just a red herring…), because I simply believe that all possibilities are on
the table and one day we may know more’ but to my mind this balance of possibilities puts the book firmly in the tradition of the literature of the fantastic. Tzvetan Todorov, in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), has defined the fantastic as:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know….there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (p. 25)

Todorov suggests that if the author chooses the first solution, the novel belongs in the category of the uncanny; if the second, then it belongs in the category of the marvellous. But if an author maintains the uncertainty; if readers are left to decide for themselves the truth of the situation, the novel belongs in the category of the fantastic. (Perhaps the best known example of this in English is Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, which would be an excellent companion text for *Strange Objects*, as would Lisson’s *The Devil’s Own*.) *Strange Objects* neatly fits Todorov’s criteria. (In quantum physics’ terms, the novel remains in a superposition of states.)

The uncertainty is magnified by the fact that Messenger is an unreliable narrator. What is unclear is how unreliable. While his understanding of other people is obviously flawed, and his interpretation of other people’s actions towards him breathtakingly self-centred, it’s not clear whether everything he describes actually happens, or whether his problems with people are symptoms of an underlying mental illness, exacerbated by grief at the death of his father – which is only revealed at the very end of the book.

Loos, the other main narrator (through his journal) may also be unreliable – not through any mental incapacity, but through hunger, exhaustion and a profound cultural dislocation as he interacts with a group of local Aboriginal people.

Both of these narrators recount seemingly magical experiences associated with the ring, which belongs to Pelgrom in 1629 and which Messenger finds and claims for his own in 1990. But are these experiences real, imagined, or part of an untold history for which we have no current evidence?

According to Crew (again, this comes from our correspondence this year), ‘The gold ring was meant as a motif/trope to suggest the alien’s (Europeans’) lust for gold. This is echoed in Pelgrom’s mistaken belief that the quartz crystal he finds is a diamond. The same idea was suggested in
Favenc’s earlier *Marooned on Australia* (1867) – which I read after I wrote *Objects* (had no idea it existed!) – yet also based on the Batavia wreck – which has strong links to Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and their attendant (colonial) wealth.’

Fantastic literature resists the temptation to declare either/or. There are three ways to approach it: decide on a ‘reality’ (eg Messenger is mad/Messenger is sane and therefore the magic is real); disbelieve all realities (eg everyone is mad, everyone is lying); or combine realities (eg Messenger is mad but reports truthfully on what he sees and experiences. His mental illness may be a combination of pre-existing condition (Asperger’s/psychopathy?) plus denial of grief. Perhaps this mental state, so close to Pelgrom’s, may explain why the ring ‘chose’ him. So it is possible to accept all the readings, and this is what makes *Strange Objects* a challenging and engrossing book; each reader will come to their own conclusions about what has actually happened, and some rare readers will be prepared to enjoy the novel without coming to a conclusion. *Strange Objects* is constructed through parallels, with identical themes being explored in both time frames via matched characters. Messenger and Pelgrom are the most obvious pair: both young, both troubled, both profoundly self-centred, both obsessed with the ring, both inclined to violence and, ultimately, both killers. We do not discover what happened to either of them after their disappearances; after they commit murder, they disappear from their respective narratives, Pelgrom immediately, Messenger within days.

Crew uses Messenger to give us insights into Pelgrom – the parallels between them are close enough that we may assume that what is true of one is true of the other. Paranoia, unfeeling cruelty, unthinking violence, are coupled in both cases with a sense of being outcast; in Pelgrom’s case, literally, both from his ship and, later, from the tribe, and in Messenger’s case physically and socially, in his isolated home and his lack of friends.

We are given hints early about Messenger’s obsessive and anti-social traits. In his first journal entry, where he describes the school camp on which he found the cannibal pot, he slips away to the cave where he finds the pot. ‘None of the others saw me move; I was in the dark, well outside the bright ring of firelight.’ Later, this is echoed in Pelgrom’s haunting of the indigenous tribe: ‘Each night he comes, calling softly, about the camp, outside the firelight’. In the end, both achieve a kind of metamorphosis, described by others as having in some ways escaped mortal bonds without dying (of course, the ‘truth’ of this is contradicted and left unexplained, inviting the reader to decide for themselves).

The parallels continue. Messenger and Pelgrom both have foils; a good, solid, strong male with a conscience and compassion for others. In
Messenger’s case, it is his schoolmate and neighbour Nigel Kratzen (a pseudonym he chose for himself, we discover, as a joke. Kratz means ‘scratch’ in German.) For Pelgrom, it is Loos, the writer of the 17th century journal who is marooned with him.

There are other parallels: Loos’ sled and Kratzen’s ute, for example. Ela, the European girl who has been marooned from an earlier wreck, and Charlie, the contemporary indigenous elder, are less obvious parallels until they are both murder victims – then we can see that they both acted as the guide to indigenous life to their respective ‘boys’.

Although Ela’s relationship with Pelgrom is far more intimate and intense than Messenger’s with Charlie, they serve the same narrative function. It is notable that both have trouble with English; their communication with Messenger and Pelgrom/Loos is partial and prone to misinterpretation.

Ela is the only active female presence in the book and has no female parallel. There are two others: Messenger’s seldom-seen mother, and Dr Hope Michaels, ‘Director of the Western Australian Institute of Maritime Archaeology.’ Dr Michaels is the most sympathetic of the experts whose assessments are sprinkled through the text, but she does not appear ‘on stage’. Messenger’s mother appears rarely and briefly; she is mostly at work or speaking from another room. The book, in relationship terms, is about boys and men; this is emphasised when the truth about Messenger’s father’s death is revealed towards the end of the book. It’s important to note that, despite the lack of female characters, the book is not sexist. Rather, it reflects a truth: that women are often peripheral to the lives of young men, especially when they are placed in physical isolation from girls.

Along with isolation, racism is a constant presence in the story. Messenger is casually, thoughtlessly racist, less from personal conviction, one gathers, than from an unexamined acceptance of the local culture. Pelgrom is terrified of the local tribe, believing them to be cannibals (a belief, the notes from various historians remind us, which was widespread at the time and may yet linger). Loos, while more thoughtful and open-minded than Pelgrom, is still a man of his time and is completely unequipped to deal with the radically different social structure of an indigenous tribe. He just doesn’t understand what is happening around him – and yet, he does not try to learn the language in order to understand better. Even positive characters like Nigel Kratzen are afraid of the ‘mission’ as a place of violence and intimidation.

As one of the contesting ‘experts’ notes about Loos’ journal: ‘they [Pelgrom and Loos] brought with them a way of seeing the landscape and its inhabitants which had been heavily influenced by tales of explorers or
conquistadors and the hearsay of buccaneers and fellow sailors’. As readers, we are constantly reminded of our own preconceptions, about racism, scholarship, European exploration and, over and over again, the construction of history and the nature of ‘truth’.

‘Truth’ is complicated in *Strange Objects* because Crew presents the world through the eyes of people who either have a specific agenda (the police, the historians) or whose perception may be compromised by illness, both mental and physical. Messenger is the perfect unreliable narrator – in denial about his own circumstances, with some kind of mental impairment (Asperger’s syndrome? Sociopathy? Paranoid schizophrenia?) which prevents him from accurately assessing others, and perhaps influenced beyond all this by the effects of the golden ring. We distrust him; but we are given no way to decide how much of what he says is false.

Loos, on the other hand, is a narrator we instinctively trust. But his circumstances make him unreliable. He does not understand local culture. By the end of the story he is hungry, dehydrated, frightened, probably dying and possibly delusional. Between the two of them, and in spite of the ‘expert’ assessments of their journals (which Crew makes mischievously contradictory), readers are left to make their own truths, their own personal history of the cannibal pot and its contents.

In the end, Crew seems to say, this is what history is: a patched together account of failed perceptions, misunderstandings and impossibilities, made anew by each person who considers it from their own, particular viewpoint.

**References**


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Crew, Gary and Peter Gouldthorpe

FIRST LIGHT

Lothian, 1993
ISBN 0 850 915 67 8 $19.95

In the tension between the weight of the deep, dark, dragging sea full of unknown lurking horrors and the soaring flight of a bird in the clear light of the sky at dawn, Crew and Gouldthorpe have found the metaphors to carry the story of a father and son’s differences, and grant that old tale a new breadth and depth.

The bare bones of the story is a simple fishing trip. The father demands that his reluctant son leave the construction of his beloved biplane and accompany him on the more ‘natural’ outdoor pursuit of fishing. Through the stunning artwork we are carried immediately into the world and character of the boy; we see by his expression and posture his resentment and distaste for the expedition, we share his view of his father as a shadow between himself and his own way of being. The father’s face is not shown; each illustration is composed so that we view his back, his bulging shoulders, hear his ordering voice, see his hands casting a squid for bait by the blood red marker buoy light. The final revelation of the father as a fairly normal, kindly looking man comes both as a relief and a shock, and occurs at the climax of the story when the pair experience a reminder of what can lurk beneath the surface.

The reader has been made aware of this throughout the book by Gouldthorpe’s inspired use of cutaway cross-sections to expose the hidden things: the wiring within the wall, crabs and mangrove roots in the shallow waters, squid and rays in the deeper ones. The images are dramatic and resonant with old fears. As in Lucy’s Bay the facing of these fears leads to a dissolution of tension upwards into the lightness of the sky, symbolised here by a swooping seabird, the span of its pale grey wing echoing the description of the biplane of the first page.

This illustrator’s gift for portraying the intensities of all emotional levels of the story, filling the gaps which Crew is clever enough to leave in his writing (since this is a picture book). The result is a work which gives the reader a sense of empowerment, of change, of possibility. Together the creators have realised in word and image the first light of a new beginning, the surface of the water made palpable in the rays of the rising sun, the start of a new way of seeing for both men.

**Extending Readers**

Once children’s reading skills are established and have become so natural that they are unaware of the actual reading process they will tackle anything, so long as it interests them. Difficulty now becomes that of content and concepts rather than reading. This is a crucial stage, for now that children can read they need books that will keep them interested so they are readers by choice. It is vital that they are kept interested if they are to become lifetime readers.

Many will still read realistic material and this should not be discouraged for it is a means of relating in a pleasant manner with reading.

Books reviewed in this section are arranged from easiest content and concepts and young characters to the more difficult books with older characters.

The Second-Hand Tongue and Other Hilarious Stories, Garry Hulse, Ill, Steven Axelson, Margaret Hamilton books, D 047341 38 8, $9.95.

This collection has its roots in the idea that the storyteller is telling a story from a device or object. These are tall tales of the classic Australian variety. Yet they are also very contemporary, with a lot of tales working for others.

There is a moral tone to most of the stories; each has a strong message, most predominantly that we should all "go back to basics."

The latter is nowhere better expressed than in The Press Minister’s Tree where the conversation asserts that two old teachers should climb trees occasionally as an upshot of recommending that we all should let our collective hair down whenever we can.

The stories are characterised by nice little twists of fate, too, in such stories as A Tale of Two Trees where a mouse challenges the top sheepers in the country to a sheep competition, forgetting that his size might make him a vulnerable even if he wins the contest. Hulce’s style as a well-published author for this age group is demonstrated in this tight structure, and concise text which is ideal for his readability and contains evidence of an author who values drafting and editing his work.

The volume is a good supplementary reader for the upper primary level and for anyone who likes a good yarn.

**Timesmatch**, Robert Swardens, Doubleday, 0 386 401467 7, $19.95.

After years of research and experimentation, Harper Aya has invented an apparatus that can return life and bring back into the present the species of tree that have died out in the world of 2039 AD. Her children, Frazier and Kay, share in the excitement of bringing back small creatures such as butterflies and beetles, but inevitably, Harper’s discovery leads her and her children into difficulties with the military forces that would like to make use of the apparatus for their purposes, with people who would like to bring much-loved relatives and objects back to life, and finally with people who would like to see the return of Addit Hilt. When Hilt is rescued, Harper begins to question the world by releasing a extinct species becomes a struggle for life and death on the competition of the state, animal organisations and individuals, and to retain some control over lives under unwelcome surveillance of the media or the state.

The fast-moving plot is believable and extends over 49 short chapters so that readers can take the tale in amounts as large or as small as they can comfortably manage.

Swindle’s story never becomes oppressive, but it raises sharply the moral and practical problems of scientific development that the world is facing today. The novel depicts, in the lives of ordinary people, some of the choices faced by scientists forced to make public a discovery that can be put to bad use. Though the setting is 65 years hence, it is little different — perhaps too little different — from the England of today and the language of the young protagonists is that of contemporary English school pupils of 10 and 13. Characters divide readily into good and bad, with the good scientist and her children struggling against the bureaucratic authority of the Ministry of Defence and the destructive selfishness of neo-Nazis. Not a novel, this, for those who like their physics in careful detail, but an enjoyable read for upper primary and lower secondary pupils who enjoy suspense without terror.

**Black Bell**, Nicole Pites, Angus & Robertson, 0 207 16308 0, $6.95.

Fabio Nardo’s whiskers, eighteen-centimetre cartoon figure on the cover gives no hint of the sensitive, moving story contained in Nicole Pite’s novel. The story is written in the first person, in a journal format, as the hero James sits towards his brown bell in karate. We share James’ interaction with Alfie, as well as the helpless futility he endures as he is forbidden to retaliate against two boys who attack his handicapped sister.

As this review suggests, attempting to lead in a form of understanding and acceptance of his circumstances, James slowly develops the wisdom to cope and grow in his own right. The range of themes dealt with here include family relationships, growing and life changes, dealing with handicaps and bullying. The author describes James’ sufferings and his observations of his weekly training sessions and fighting encounters in particular, reveal highly compelling reading.

I wish this warm, touching, and positive book a long and healthy shelf life.

**The White Guinea Pig**. Unillustrated. Dubnoscoby, Vivinger, 0 870 65522 0, $14.95.

In her previous novel for young readers, The Last Week in December, Dubnoscoby uses a young girl’s guilt and inner conflict over a theft to present a powerful inner voice and a quietly appeasing of real characters. In The White Guinea-Pig Dubnoscoby presents an array of ordinary characters struggling through life, doing the best they can with what comes their way. Geraldine is 12 and desperately wants an animal to love. Paul, the bright blue boy, the fish and Mandy and Danni the guinea pigs are not great successes because they are unable or unwilling to return Geraldine’s increasingly frustrative devotion. Life is further complicated by a large white guinea pig fostered upon Geraldine by another child at school and which disappears from the backyard cage and thereafter makes occasional appearances in the garden and haunts Geraldine’s dreams.

**Paperies and Trash Cans**

I love paper. It doesn’t matter where it comes from as long as I can touch it. This causes my boyfriend no end of consternation. “Don’t touch that” he’ll screech as I spot something sticking out of somebody’s trash container. “You don’t know where it’s been!” For me, it doesn’t matter where it’s been, as long as it inspires me.

My love for paper started when my mother, who was a secretary at Ford Motor Company, “borrowed” some letterhead paper for me to draw on, since sketchpads were beyond her financial means. I was thrilled, and the paper seemed even special since it was stolen. I pictured the Big Ford Bosses somewhere, happily assured their employees were using the paper for official use. Meanwhile, I sketched, cut, and folded my way into other worlds with it.

Now I make most of my own paper. But I still need inspiration. So I go to places like Kate’s Paperie in New York City, where I find Kate’s is one of those way-fancy sandwich-board-downtown-stores that changes you twice as much as you can tell people you shopped at a “paperie.” All the paper samples are large sheets draped over wooden dowels, lining the walls like huge sheets of toilet paper for dignitaries. Once I made the mistake of walking up to one of these samples to feel the paper’s texture. A chorus of howls was raised at me from my fellow shoppers. Apparently, I was supposed to merely contemplate the paper from a distance, like Martha Stewart contemplating a new color of paint meant to enrich the lives of Smart shoppers.

When I feel like being totally bohemian, I go to Pearl Paint in Chinatown. Pearl Paint is the largest discount art-supply store in the country. It’s like a crazy-cats’ nest painted like a ballet-hubspot pole. The paper floor is covered and claustrophobic. The help behind the counter seems to love every area of soft tissue on their heads pierced and adorned with rings. But Pearl Paint is like Kate’s Paperie in one very special way: everybody really wants to help you at either place (at Kate’s I’m not rich enough; at Pearl I’m not young enough).

But it doesn’t matter where I am at or what I’m doing or who I’m doing it with, interesting paper (even from a trash can) makes me want to sing (“Although you don’t want to hear my singing, trust me.” —Robert Fulghum)

**News from Down Under Turning Heads**

BY KAREN JAMEYSON

Picture books for older readers. The topic is about one in Australia, particularly in regard to the Book of the Year Awards. Should this art form be judged shoulder to shoulder with the more traditional picture book for a very young child? Who reads these books anyway? As the controversy swirls on, however, the books in question continue to be published in greater numbers, with a range of results.

Mixed public reactions frequently accompany award decisions. But when a picture book for older readers was named the 1995 Picture Book of the Year by the Australian Children’s Book Council, there was, according to one critic, downright “hostility.” That book, however, The Watertower, written by Gary Crew and illustrated by Steven Woolman, continues to attract interest—and readers. Crew, a prodigiously gifted wordsmith, has managed to work his magic successfully on a variety of reading levels, with a number of his books receiving widespread critical acclaim (his novel Strange Objects, for instance, was the Australian Children’s Book of the Year in 1991 as well as an Edgar Allan Poe Award for Mystery Fiction nominee in the U.S.). The Watertower turns heads from the moment it was published—literally as well as figuratively. That’s because, to begin with, the reader must actually turn the book on its side to read it and then continue to turn it as the story progresses (or doesn’t, depending on your interpretation). According to one advocate, a high school English teacher, this actual turning/handling—along with the tantalizing clues to the story—is what keeps her student readers, particularly the less enthusiastic ones.

Both Crew and Woolman like to make their readers work. They understand precisely how much explanation their audience needs, and the Watertower strains readers’ abilities nearly to the breaking point. So this story of the boys Spike and Dubba going for a
secret swim in the rusty old water tower in their outback town has another strand of plot looped around it; one that is similar somehow to the water tower, what goes on there, and the fascination it holds for the townspeople. But author and artist pass no definitive information—only imaginative visual and textual clues.

Although the illustrations do depict the startling blue of the outback sky and the characteristic dusty red of the soil, the general darkness of the page is black and the predominant color—underlines a malevolence seemingly at work, somewhere, somehow. And an incomplete circle placed at the top of the water tower appears repeatedly in the illustrations: in eyes, in bolts, on glasses, in windows. In the shape of the paintings, in the design of the book overall, just one piece missing, the creators seem to be haunting over and over. Just one more bit of information you’d understand. But, as it is, unanswered questions hover in the air, leaving readers to argue, debate, muse, and ultimately reach their own verdicts about what happens. And now that Crocodile Press is publishing on edition in the northern hemisphere, American readers can make up their own minds. (Although the cover—which portrays the water tower at the center of painting waves, lift up with an eerie green light that highlights its floating saucer-like shape—gives readers a pretty good hint. Think Tripods.)

Among other recent picture books no more appropriate but if not as specifically for older readers than the traditional audience is Toby’s Big Picture Story from City Zoo. The back notepad

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
picturesque components, Riddle has tucked in many other sights as well, including King Kong, the Loch Ness monster, and Salvador Dali’s Night Stalker, along with what are perhaps less familiar references, such as Bugsy Siegel’s Pink Flamingo Casino and paintings by Magritte, Mondrian, and de Chirico.

"It is not intended," comments Riddle, "that the story rely upon people being able to spot the references." But he hopes that the allusions imbue the work with a "latter-than-life quality," shaping it into a "twentieth-century legend." And, obviously, the more recognition, the more surprised moments of enjoyment. Riddle—a successful cartoonist as well as an author-artist—has stated emphatically that he writes for "the fun of it" rather than for a specific audience. If that narrows his readership, so be it.

But it doesn’t.

When the reader’s subtle visual panorama of popular culture references onto the wings of a disarmingly simple text and plot, the result seems so right and true right across age barriers. So while the book is not intended for fledgling readers, they’re bound to appreciate its story on the simplest level. It’s not a book strictly for older readers the way The Waterhouse seems to be. The Great Escape from City Zoo is a book that just in—gently, devilishly designed, rich with allusion. It also seems likely to find itself a devoted audience. And among the lucky ones are bound to be a dedicated cadre of older readers.

Critic and reviewer Karen Leongpat is currently on the editorial staff of the New South Wales School Magazine.

IBBY Australia Nomination for Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing 2024: Gary Crew
THE WATERTOWER

BY GARY CREW & ILLUSTRATED BY STEVEN WOOLMAN • RELEASE DATE: FEB. 20, 1998

For older readers, a genuinely eerie picture book, which Crew (Bright Star, 1997, etc.) and Woolman have constructed as a kind of puzzle. The haunting watertower sits outside of town like an egg on legs, or like a lurid green broken spaceship. One blisteringly hot summer day, Spike and Bubba decide to go for a swim inside the watertower, where the cool water beckons. Bubba is uneasy; when they emerge, he discovers his pants are gone, and sends Spike home to fetch another pair. What happens then, as the hyperreal illustrations focus on the tower and the town, is unclear, but one of the pair of boys is transformed, and he is not alone in that transformation. The broken circle logo on the watertower appears on many pages, a clue to an alien presence or some more earthly invasion of the quiet little town. It may be hard to coax middle graders back into a picture book, but they will certainly give themselves a shiver or two in these pages. (Picture book. 9-11)

**CREW, Gary (text) Mark Wilson (illus.)
I Said Nothing – The Extinction of the Paradise Parrot Lothian, 2003 unpaged
$26.95 ISBN 0734405596 SCIS 1144049

What does it take to realise that the extinction of any living species is a tragedy? Do we need to be utterly convinced that the end is just around the corner before we act? What we need is Gary Crew’s compelling Extinct series alerting us all to the dangers of being unobservant and inactive.

This is the second title in the series and tells the story of the Paradise Parrot through the eyes of young Harry. We are shown what lead to the extinction of the birds and how young Harry reacts at each step of the food-for-thought story-message. The book is beautifully designed, and the illustrations add much to the meaning of the text and interpretation of the story.

The first book, I Saw Nothing: The Extinction of the Thylacine introduced a wonderful sense of intrigue and dilemma that this book has further upcoming titles will match the excellent style and authenticity of the first two in the series. GD
The Viewer.
Subject Headings: Regression (Civilization)-Juvenile fiction. End of the world-Juvenile fiction. Grades 4 and up / Ages 9 and up. Review by Sylvia Pantaleo. ****/4

Excerpt:
Tristan was curious from birth. This is not to say that he was different from other babies. In fact he was rather ordinary. But from the moment he opened his eyes, he seemed to be looking. Taking the world in, as it were. Nor did this remarkable curiosity - this constant need to search, to look out - lessen as he grew older.

As a teenager, one of Tristan's favourite attractions is the city dump. "The place was littered with the off-scourings of a careless people." Tristan marvels at the treasures he finds in the dump. He takes home broken objects, dismantles them to discover how they function and then restores them. He wonders at the inner world of the objects - a world that he cannot see. One day, Tristan discovers a curious locked box constructed from dark wood and metal. He takes the box home and, once he triggers the lock, Tristan discovers many treasures, all "aids to sight, aids to seeing further. Or more closely. Or more clearly." The most intriguing object to Tristan is a Viewmaster-type device. On each of the three accompanying discs, Tristan views the ages of humankind depicted as cyclical structures of growth and destruction, conveying the evils of war, religious persecution and slavery. Each disc has its own particular sounds; the first orb depicts creation and evolution, the second ancient civilization and the third, the Middle Ages. Tristan, frightened by the sights and sounds of the discs, has a restless sleep. The next day at school, Tristan is unfocused as he is eager to return home and peer again into the haunting world of the Viewmaster.

Once Tristan arrives home, he picks up the Viewmaster and inserts the first disc again. However, the orb has changed, and Tristan views the age of conquest and colonization. The second and third discs have also changed - they portray disturbing images of the machine age and a modern ecological crisis. As Tristan tries to pull the Viewmaster from his eyes, he is compelled to continue looking, to actually attempt to enter the machine. When Tristan's mother enters his bedroom the next morning because he has not answered her calls, she discovers an empty bed and a strange box, firmly locked on his desk.
This sophisticated picture book tells a mysterious, eerie and disturbing story. Although an apocalyptic worldview is conveyed, the discs also illustrate the circularity of regeneration and decay. The orbs demonstrate how, over the ages, humans have tried to order their worlds via science, religion, and technology. Circularity is symbolized in numerous images including the design of the text that describes Tristan’s absorption into the Viewmaster. Note Tristan's name on the outside of the Viewmaster on the double page spread where he is drawn into the machine - into the inner world that he will now be able to see!

Tan includes multiple symbolic representations in his artwork. The recurring image of the comet in every disc (and on the cover) is only one of the many motifs for readers to consider. The orbs created are amazing in their realism. Each disc has nine images, and a human figure from each particular era (e.g., hunter gather, Egyptian, religious figure, Native Chieftain, scientific figure, toxic waste worker) is depicted to the left of the centre image. A version of the human figure is then repeated under the other eight images on each disc. The attention to detail is remarkable, and the synergy between the words and pictures demands, and deserves, close reading. The Viewer encourages and rewards careful observation - on every page readers can point and click on varying images or texts with their eyes. Finally, the unique design of the cover reflects the central themes of the book. Die cut letters on the cover are designed to appear as a viewer, but they are also symbolic of the inner world(s) within the pages of the book.

The Viewer is an outstanding picture book in that it invites discussion and lends itself to multiple interpretations. Gary Crew has written several novels for young adults, as well as numerous picture books. He won CBC Picture Book of the Year for The Watertower (1995). Shaun Tan has an outstanding reputation for his illustrative work, and The Viewer won the Crichton Award for Book Illustration in 1998.

Highly Recommended.

Sylvia Pantaleo is an Associate Professor of Language Arts in the Faculty of Education at BC’s University of Victoria.

To comment on this title or this review, send mail to cm@umanitoba.ca.

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Hosted by the University of Manitoba.
‘[Review: *The Viewer*]’ *Publishers Weekly*  
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781894965026>

**THE VIEWER**  
Ominous words and violent imagery fuel this dystopia, which is equal parts science fiction and life-as-we-know-it. Crew and Tan (previously teamed for *The Memorial*) introduce Tristan, a curious boy who tinkers with discarded objects. In the junkyard one day, Tristan discovers a box covered in obscure hieroglyphs. Inside are various lenses and scopes and an unusual bronze mask with glaring eyes. Three metallic discs, each with nine images around its perimeter, fit this apparatus, and Tristan cannot resist looking into it. The artist likens these concentric circles, which appear on the right side of each spread, to mandalas, compasses and cyclical calendars, and he matches the iris of Tristan's astonished eye—peering through the viewer (on the left page)—to a mechanical camera shutter. As the boy scans the first disc's snapshots of fighting dinosaurs, a roaring sabre-tooth tiger and a caveman, he hears "raucous cries of human beings." With the next disc, alongside the sound of "the grinding of stone against stone," the artist pictures ancient wonders (e.g., Stonehenge, Easter Island); the third shows bloody scenes from the Bayeux Tapestry and Bruegel ("He heard the clash of steel upon steel"). When he goes to sleep that night, Tristan feels that he is "no longer alone." The next day, Tan presents an Escher-inspired scene of the boy's room, as if viewed by the mask itself. When Tristan looks at the discs, their content has changed to haunting images of the colonial era, world war and present-day pollution. Crew's language is foreboding, while Tan loads his marvelous, shadowy images with post-apocalyptic clutter. The audience can almost feel the power that the mask exudes in this unsettling walk through history and its cautionary perspective. Ages 6-11. (Apr.)
Appendix C. USB
[Contains photo of author, electronic copies of books, and an electronic copy of the dossier.]