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To the smell of pineapples: writing a Queensland auto-bio-graphie

Abstract

I grew up eating pineapples in everything; well, nearly everything (let's not exaggerate). They were a sweetener, made things juicy. Pineapple jam, pineapple breadcrumbs stuffed in the chicken roast for Sunday lunch after church, pineapple on the barbeque for the Christian folk my parents (MotherJoy and Onward) invited home, crushed pineapple in the punch, pineapple in the boiled fruitcake, pineapple in sandwiches as a treat through the summer holidays, pineapple in the curried rice salad for days my mother felt adventurous. We ate from pineapples too. Imagine then refined white sugar being spooned out of a fancy pineapple canister with its spiky pineapple top of a lid. Milk pouring out of a matching pineapple jug, part of a set. Salad out of large wooden bowls in the shape of half pineapples. And we ate off flat yellow pineapple dinner plates, helped ourselves to butter cake and sponge rolls on Sundays for tea off glass pineapple platters. People thought us quirky, we laughed them off. In the Solider family, this attachment to the fruit of the land was our way of stitching ourselves in place, saying we belonged. And in sub-tropical Queensland, the pointy state of Australia, what a surfeit.

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To the smell of pineapples; writing a Queensland auto-bio-graphie

Growing up with pineapples

I grew up eating pineapples in everything; well, nearly everything (let's not exaggerate). They were a sweetener, made things juicy. Pineapple jam, pineapple breadcrumbs stuffed in the chicken roast for Sunday lunch after church, pineapple on the barbeque for the Christian folk my parents (MotherJoy and Onward) invited home, crushed pineapple in the punch, pineapple in the boiled fruitcake, pineapple in sandwiches as a treat through the summer holidays, pineapple in the curried rice salad for days my mother felt adventurous. We ate from pineapples too. Imagine then refined white sugar being spooned out of a fancy pineapple canister with its spiky pineapple top of a lid. Milk pouring out of a matching pineapple jug, part of a set. Salad out of large wooden bowls in the shape of half pineapples. And we ate off flat yellow pineapple dinner plates, helped ourselves to butter cake and sponge rolls on Sundays for tea off glass pineapple platters. People thought us quirky, we laughed them off. In the Solider family, this attachment to the fruit of the land was our way of stitching ourselves in place, saying we belonged. And in sub-tropical Queensland, the pointy state of Australia, what a surfeit.

All this in the 1960s and 1970s before kitsch could possibly have been named as 'a thing' in Queensland; the Big Pineapple on the Bruce Highway north of Brisbane was only beginning its life as a tourist icon (it was officially 'opened' in 1971) (note 1). Not that MotherJoy would have been seen dead at the Big Pineapple; cheap thrills were spongy, without Godly merit (note 2).

Pineapples under the skin

There's a story one of my big sisters tells about pineapples, a story about her working at the Golden Circle Cannery in Northgate on the outskirts of Brisbane in 1969, the year a man landed on the moon. It was Ruth's first job - 'doing pineapples' as she likes to put it now - before she disappeared south across the border, to escape. She had to slice pineapples by hand, sort

pineapples as they piled up around her on the conveyor belts. *Pick up your pineapple*, she said the supervisor shouted. She came home sticky and stinky with excoriated arms, with stories about how you never knew from one day to the next whether there was a place for you on the production line, of how for some migrant workers this was their only job, about canners with fingers missing.

Pineapple juice got everywhere. I could smell it on her, even though like all the pineapple girls in the cannery Ruth wore a plastic apron, plastic gloves, cover-all plastic shoes, a plastic shower-cap. Peak season was the worst time when the suburb of Northgate rotted in the sun with the trainloads of pineapples waiting to be processed, and on the way home across town she said she stank out the train. Someone from the other end of the carriage would call out: *There's a smell of pineapple here today*. She tried to disappear. The sickliness got stuck in her hair and deep into the pores of her skin. After that, she swore she couldn't eat pineapple, definitely not pineapple out of a tin, nor the pineapple juice our mother favoured as a base for the iced punch that Ruth said was scraped off the floor after every shift.

That's when things changed, she says, beginning with pineapples. They lost their innocence. It was Ruth who gave me the word 'excoriate' (she dropped it into my lap and it leapt about like a roasted bird) (note 3); *excoriate* meaning to remove part of the skin by abrasion, to strip or peel, to censure severely. It comes from the Latin *corium* 'to hide' (note 4).

The smell of Queensland

When I think of pineapples - see them, *smell* them - I think of Queensland, remember my sister's poor hands and arms, her excoriated skin. The way being a child of Queensland has scraped back my skin, peeled my tongue. I feel the abrasion still. Now just thinking about it catches my breath. Makes me want to hide (*corium*), not come out (*ex* meaning 'out of'). Makes me feel *ashamed* (the root word 'shame' from the modern German word '*Scham*', which refers to the covering of the face) (note 5).

But I hear other voices too, voices that have grown up surrounded by pineapples (do their tongues tingle like tinsel after eating them for breakfast?), such as the voice of Liz Willis, an ex-Queenslander, in an opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last year after Johannes Bjelke-Petersen's death (note 6). Here she writes:

Joh Bjelke-Petersen united people in Brisbane in ways he could never have imagined - in fact in ways he may have deemed immoral and illegal. ... he made those of us who were on the other side of his political fence work even harder unwittingly steeling and skilling up his political opponents. ... Goodbye, Joh. You ruthlessly moulded Queensland in your image and marked all of our lives forever. (Willis 2005)

Once, when he first came to power as Premier of Queensland in 1968,

nobody knew how to pronounce Joh's name, a name that has, since then, come to define the Sunshine State. You were either for him or against him; my mother was for him.

Pick up your pineapple

The novel I am writing - about my mother, MotherJoy (spelt all one word, spelt with a capital-J), and about me, her daughter, Glory Solider - is set in Queensland (note 7) in the 1970s, when Joh was at the height of his powers, when defending civil liberties meant protesting on the streets *for the right to protest*, getting into half-nelson headlocks with police, being thrown into jail.

Writing this story is a way of thinking: thinking about growing up, about speaking up; thinking through writing about a story to make your heart contract (in the Solider family it was better to disappear than to stand out - 'while the big-fry chat, the small-fry scat'). Trying to make sense of a passage of Queensland's history - my history, as it happens - a history that has disappeared down cracks. Writing this novel is about writing shame (all the while thinking I'm *this close* to being a sham - all pretence without substance), about daring to uncover my face, in public, whatever the cost (or at least the question of cost didn't figure when I first started out) (note 8).

In writing the 'novel' (and see, I've put inverted commas around the word suddenly, to suggest perhaps, my hesitation, or slippage to being a fraud), I am experimenting with form and narration in dialogue with imagined interlocutors, to fashion and re-fashion the self (note 9). Writing this story - and daring to make it public, to be read by people I know and by strangers alike - is a way of peeling my tongue a second time, coming out of hiding. Not be censored. (Boy, it's really hard to breathe now.) And the word excoriate leaps and dances off the page exfoliating my vision, like the set of English books my mother wanted to ban all those years ago once did. Wings ablaze like a roasted bird.

Reading as transgression

When she was young, so the story goes, the English novelist Jeanette Winterson not only went to bed with books, to read in bed, she *slept on books*. She told this story on her first visit to Australia at the 2004 Adelaide Writers Festival (the story goes she is afraid of flying). She was giving a talk in one of the tents and told the story of how she hid books under her bed between the mattress and bedsprings. She calculated you could hide 70 Penguin paperbacks end-to-end in a grid like that for safekeeping (so my story of her story goes, 'trust me') (note 10).

I wish a similar story could fall from my mouth. I can't even trap such a thing.

No, in the Solider family, we didn't hide books to read them, we didn't read books to hide. We cut up books into little pieces. We pulled books apart along their spines, what books we had. Books weren't for reading; books were a disgrace. To be feared. In my family the only books we had

anything to do with, apart from Godly ones, were the ones my mother picked out of the school booklists to make an example of in raves to headmasters, in newspapers, on talkback radio live-to-air, and in public meetings: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. She made a list of them to ban, called it her death-list. 'Burn a book a day,' MotherJoy admonished of some 100 titles, the best in the English Literature canon, including Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (note 11). She hid these books underneath the house with the salacious passages marked up in red Biro, with dog-eared corners, testament to her cause. If MotherJoy was living her 'anti-smut campaign' life today, as she liked to call it, Jeanette Winterson's books, *Sexing the Cherry*, *The Passion* and *Written on the Body*, would be underneath our house for sure (the titles a clue, for starters). No question.

When her first book, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, came out in Australia in 1985 (I think this was the year), I was too afraid to open its cover. A copy of the paperback sat on my windowsill for another 15 years or so before I dared to read it (well, almost that long), and then, with half an eye closed. It was about the same time I opened a blank notebook and began to fill the pages with my kind of lettering (lots of letters 'e'). This was love at first sight really, as it was for Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with his own beautiful book filled with smooth creamy paper. But there was an itch of shame too - 'even with nothing written in it, it was a compromising possession' (Orwell 1949: 8-9) (note 12). It wasn't *illegal*, nor punishable by death, as it might have been for poor Winston in his Big Brother world, but whenever I went home to Queensland I kept whatever notebook I was writing in at the time firmly tucked under my arm during the day, slept on it under my pillow at night.

One thing always leads to another. I couldn't stop once I started. Words poured out of me darkening the page. I began to be bold with it, with what I was writing that is (not that I stopped sleeping on the book at night), daring myself to eschew fear and vomit my way out of trouble (for that's the taste of after-burn), dance and leap across the page with penny-bungers on my feet to see what it felt like, find out what happens next (note 13). I could always bang the book shut and lock it up in a cupboard. Never read it.

A disobedient subject

Let me introduce myself properly (about time, you're probably saying). My name is Glory Solider and the first part of my name, my Christian name, begins in a story where I sit amongst words in the dictionary, between gloomy/gloop/glop for a mangle of inedible food on the top side, and gloss/glossal/glossary for a collection of glosses inserted into the margin of texts, on the bottom. In other words, this name Glory - 'glory' for the bliss and splendour of heaven; 'glory' for resplendent - lies in the middle somewhere between a sticky mess and a messy text. Glory too is the name of the place where MotherJoy believes she is going when she dies, when 'death is swallowed up in victory' as she says it states plainly, literally, in the bible. My name is a reminder, a metonym, a *memento mori*, all very serious, but I can't help but muse on the origins of the name too in the family, being named after an ordinary duck, one of a pair with my little

sister Gracie. MotherJoy loved her animals.

And Solider as the other name? That's simple. We are all more solid than the rest, having three dimensions (the corporeal, the spirit and soon-to-be celestial); a geometrical body with the interior completely filled up, free from cavities, not hollow; without openings, breaks. All stitched up, separate and better than the world, saved from sin, superior. So this Glory-story goes.

I grew up in Queensland, eating pineapples every which way. I was seven years old when one of my big sisters marched illegally on the streets of Brisbane to protest the right to protest, only to land on the front page of the *Courier Mail*, in her favourite lemon moo-moo. I was eleven when Joh Bjelke-Petersen declared Brisbane a State of Emergency because of the so-called unrest with the Springbok Rugby Tour riots and I thought I'd like to be a policewoman when I grew up. And, in the war MotherJoy waged against pornography - her 'anti-smut campaign' - I helped my mother pack up and distribute pamphlets and newsletters for STOP and CARE (the Society to Outlaw Pornography and Committee Against Regressive Education), did letterbox-drops with her in those far-flung, out-of-the-way suburbs of Brisbane (note 14).

Growing up, I wanted to sin. I tried to sin. I even stole five cents from my mother's dressing table once and spent it on false teeth, the soft pink and white variety. To see what it felt like against my teeth - a sweet and sick mush in the mouth. You could buy a cent's worth of lollies at the corner shop down the bottom of the road. The shopkeeper dropped them into a small white-paper bag with a wink and made dog-ears out of the top corners as she rattled it for safekeeping. I bought five lots of lollies with that stolen coin; false teeth were my favourites, and then yellow bananas.

This is me then, the other half of my split self (note 15). This, my hero - a 'disobedient subject' (note 16). Glory Solider: disobedient subject, transgressor, *and sinner*. SIN - ooh, what a word! - but I want to say it like that. I remember a fellow schoolgirl turning up at an interschool sports carnival once in a black t-shirt with the word 'sin' emblazoned across her chest, and her being expelled, on the spot. You could hear a collective gasp go up in the stands, a big spluttery choke of Fanta; the stickiness of orange spatter everywhere. In the after-whispers nobody could decide what was more startling - the brazenness of the act itself, wearing such a word and across her breasts to boot, or the public and humiliating hand of authority. This girl's family went to church too and if she'd done it there, she might have been excommunicated, on the spot (note 17).

These are some of my fictions for a disobedient subject, my arrangement of 'lies', a ravel of record and fabrication. It's a dare to undo repression and censorship through writing (come out of hiding), to bring this story of the past - a story about repression and censorship, as it happens - into the land of the present, the living (note 18).

Writing a linguistic body

That then is the *bio* bit in 'autobiography' (*bio* from Greek, meaning 'life', a living thing). My hero, Glory Solider, the narrator and protagonist of this autobiography (as a novel), is a linguistic body. She lives on the page as the writing unfolds - this, the *graphie* bit, the unfolding writing bit (from the Greek *graphie* meaning writing) - and as such is measured, ordered, patterned (or at least she will be when the text is finished, the last full stop in place, contrary to the meaning of her name). She tells her story in third-person; finds out it is possible to say all kinds of things if one's words are not really one's own (Gibbs 1998: 48). Discovers she can displace the most shaming of things (the most shameful) if it's not your tongue exactly that is disclosing the meaning; if given a little distance, a gap in which to breathe - a gap of light and air, personhood and aspiration. The shape of another person's mouth.

All in proportion (note 19).

Writing makes things happen. Writing transforms and mutates. Writing changes things, changes everything. Writing is a means of coming into being (fashioning and re-fashioning the self); it makes skin and bones and blood - a body to breathe. So alive are the words, the paper, the ink, it is very nearly possible to imagine *real flesh* and blood (note 20). Where you really can taste the saliva of her new mouth.

There sounds a warning too, don't you think? Write only if you dare (note 21).

Still: on paper, speaking words that are not really my own, I dive in, become unafraid to speak up, never mind what happens next. Glory Solider is making herself up as she goes (note 22). She lives as music out of this glorious mouth as she's spoken in words; she lodges herself in the imagination - colonises your imagination - as her story gathers weight, holds water. She likes to think she performs open-heart surgery.

Intervention through invention

So here I am, writing/coughing/vomiting myself into existence to live on the page (my lips to your ear) about a time in the past. Finding a story trapped in my mouth, on my tongue, to tell, which now falls out my body, a song, a promise (note 23). (This the *auto* bit in autobiography; from *auto* meaning 'self' or 'same'.) (note 24) By writing it out I am unfolding it into the present; bringing it forward in time, if you like. Writing against the grain, Drusilla Modjeska might say, a swishing wave-like motion (note 25).

Inventing story to uncover a story.

Perhaps, I'm thinking (dare admit this), it was meant to be trapped in order to tell this story. In other words, you can't have the telling *without the trapping* (another kind of doubling). In order to be free enough now to tell this strange Queensland story, I had to live through the pages of the 'first' story *in the first place*, live in a curtailed and frightening world of law and enforcement, its commitment to shame. Or to put it another way still: I am intervening in history - with my story - to not disappear. It makes any shape of freedom on the page and in the imagination that much more piquant

(note 26).

Disowning self

Writing this novel is not for love; at least not yet (note 27). It's not even 'a wished-for story of the self' (note 28). (If I wished for anything it would be for that which is ineffable.) This writing is more about what the writer Brian Castro calls 'disinheritance' or dispossession, and not just the risk of putting oneself outside the family door by daring to speak up, uncover family secrets, voice matters of belief and shame - but a disinheritance or a '*disowning of yourself*' (Castro 1998).

Betrayal is the word (from the Latin *tradere* 'hand over').

It is about a time in history we'd all rather not know about, a history that is laughable, a joke. By *writing* about it I am ascribing a seriousness to it, writing it *into* history; but it won't make it less funny for that. What's more, in the doing, the fear is I am making myself (not only my family, my mother) a laughing stock too. Listen to this, for instance, from a Letter to the Editor, *Courier Mail*, January 1972, under the heading 'Books and the "moral landslide"':

A friend sent me some excerpts from the books in question, I almost wish she hadn't. They inspired me with an urgent desire for a bath. (CM 26.1.72) (footnote: This letter was written by Ken Hood.)

A bath? Surely not. But then, Queensland is different, people say. Everyone agrees. Under Joh's reign Queensland was a breeding ground for radical thinking (and I'm not talking here about the usual kind of radical). STOP and CARE, the protest group my mother belonged to, were dismissed 'with a sneer', called 'highly irrational', stupid (Gowers & Scott 1979: iii-v). Few educationalists or academics of the day wanted to be associated. You wouldn't be seen dead with them. And yet, STOP and CARE was successful in having two major and well-supported social education courses, MACOS and SEMP (note 29), banned from Queensland schools in 1978. 'It could only happen in Queensland,' people say. It's well documented (Charlton 1987: ch 8; Wells 1979: ch 7). In another Letter to the Editor under the heading 'Literature and morals', we read:

One can only feel concern for the children of such imperceptive parents [moral campaigners], who it seems will 'never never' have much opportunity to develop their own set of values. (CM 29.1.72) (footnote: This letter was written by Mrs Beverley Greig, 'Mother, Ex-teacher, and Student.)

That's me, a *never never* Glory Girl.

Crossing borders

Glory Solider - this never-never-Glory-Girl, my disobedient subject - is made up, an invention, a necessary fiction. She lives for a purpose: a voice that can utter inaudible things when real bodies, pockmarked with shame,

find it impossible to do so. With the slip of a pen, a swap of words, from first-person 'I' to third-person 'she' and back to first-person with small adjustments on the way, she crosses borders, slips under the skin, gets into the pores, becomes something else. What an impersonation (note 30). A seduction.

Perhaps this is what Alison Bartlett is talking about when she speaks about 'reading bodies' - *reading* your way in under the skin and into the pores of another (note 31). To feel touched by another's fingers. Heartbeat, a caress, laugh, sigh. All body. Blood too. Hot. And tongues. And isn't autobiography a cultural act of a self reading, as Janet Varner Gunn points out (a long-time scholar in the field), the self reading her life, reading how she appears on the page in a display, in the shape of what we call a book made up of black shapes on white paper arranged in letters and words and paragraphs? (note 32)

Bodies and books *and reading* turn up everywhere in this Glory-story. Intertwined and tangled. Now, I can read a book comfortably, in bed too. Now I love to curl up to this private intimacy with all kinds of new and favourite books. But it hasn't always been so. I have been afraid of reading, of what I might find between the covers; afraid of the shame I feel when reading, and now the shame about talking (and writing) about the shame in reading. I almost can't believe it myself: I want to forget. But as I write these words, I blush - all red - and know I care. Remember, the Solider family cut up books the way you cut up pineapples, or at least I did, and not to eat, not for pleasure.

Imagine though, for a moment (and perhaps I am talking here mostly to myself: persuading, cajoling, encouraging), imagine real bodies resting among imaginary bodies resting on real bodies. A doubling of a doubling. Imagine allowing yourself to be seduced by writing. To transgress through reading. Alison Bartlett writes about the power of the imagination to transgress, especially when reading in bed, when imaginary bodies are resting on real bodies. And she's talking here about the materiality of books - best between sheets. She asks us to imagine a real book of paper and cardboard covers *actually touching* a body of flesh and blood, the scrape and rustle of paper against bare skin, a whispering pair; how, when they touch, 'the constructed borders between text and body coalesce' (Bartlett 1998: 95).

I begin to imagine all sorts of things. No wonder MotherJoy thought literature was dangerous! No wonder she was afraid. 'Whatever you do,' she said, as I boarded the Greyhound bus to go to university when I was 18 years old, leaving Queensland for good and disappearing south across the border, 'whatever you do, don't do English literature, do something else, anything else.' (note 33) *Whatever you do*. The puzzle, in writing this story (these two books), becomes how to fabricate a fabrication in writing, *and* get away with it as read. Especially given it's a story of 'self'. Others are involved. Disinheritance - the familiar silent treatment - is palpable.

Dancing pineapples

So why this? Why am I 'going public' in the middle of what I am doing, *as the writing is unfolding*? You'll think it either very brave or very stupid. And I might change my mind. So I could say I am giving you a preview of what is approaching, setting the stage, giving you a nibble of a pineapple as an *hors d'oeuvre*. Or I am marking a spot, getting a view for myself both backwards *and forwards*, as the work is in progress: writing about process as the thing itself is being processed. Which brings me and you back to pineapples. Imagine now it's midsummer and the terrible stench of overripe pineapples rotting in the sun outside, waiting to be processed, excoriates the lining of our nasal passages. We're skinning pineapples together and nearly getting our fingers chopped off as we stand at the conveyor belt in Northgate Brisbane covered from head to toe in plastic.

A friend once gave me a t-shirt as a joke (it took me back too). She said, it's from your era Glory, the one you're writing about, the 1970s; and yes, it turned out this friend was from Queensland too. Her first job was at the Golden Circle cannery in Northgate, but she only lasted there an hour. The t-shirt was red, a Bond's raglan sleeve. It read, 'Fuck Art Let's Dance', as bald as that in white felt lettering. Bawdy kitsch.

She dropped it into my lap literally, a bit like the word *excoriate* dropped there earlier (dancing like a roasted bird), with a splash of feathers. She dared me to wear it, not that your mother would approve, she said. In fact, the only place I feel comfortable wearing it is to bed, in private. It slips over my chest, cotton soft, snug tight. This is true. Which all seems strangely apt given this friend's penchant for theory. She calls herself a theory tart, and was the one who introduced me to Hélène Cixous. She says she only reads her in bed (and I wonder what Hélène might say if she heard).

Not that I'm *not* self-conscious about wearing this t-shirt, even to bed, in private, careful who sees me in it, who reads it on me. Especially reading it out loud. Just as I'm careful about who sees this writing (not that a writer has any control once their work is *out there*). Who, for example, for a start, is going to look at these few thousand words? What sort of betrayal is up for grabs right now as you read? Would we prefer that wild pineapples grew over the interstices to cover up history, especially a story we're ashamed of?

Still, wearing this retro 'Fuck Art' t-shirt - and ending this necessary fiction here with this story - is the kind of defiance that seems appropriate under the circumstances. It's a good story too. And to hell with it, I can imagine dancing freely now, the dance I'll simply call The Pineapple. An innocent pleasure. Won't you join me?

Notes

1. There's a photograph on *PictureMaroochy*, part of the Maroochy Heritage Library in Queensland, of the spiky fibreglass top being hoisted onto the fifty-foot-high Big Pineapple at the official opening of the Sunshine Plantation in August 1971. See

<http://www.maroochylibraries.qld.gov.au/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/PGM/OPAC/PICAUS?54370>

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2. How was I to know as I began writing my novel, began writing about pineapples, what I know *now* (still writing the novel), that I would help bury MotherJoy next door to the Big Pineapple, just a little further up the Bruce Highway, outside Nambour. Surprising things *do* happen. But I'm jumping way ahead of myself. [Return to text](#)

3. Like the books burning away in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*: 'The books leapt and danced like roasted birds, their wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers' (124). [Return to text](#)

4. All dictionary definitions come from *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* unless indicated otherwise. [Return to text](#)

5. Etymologically the words *shame* and *sham* are related. Sydney academic Elspeth Probyn puts them together in her book *Blush: faces of shame*. She says the crucial element turning 'sham' into 'shame' - not only the mere curl of a letter 'e' - is the level of interest and/or desire: 'There is no shame in being a sham if you don't care what others think or if you don't care what you think. ... To care intensely about what you are writing places the body within the ambit of the shameful' (Probyn 2005: 131). In this case, places *my body* back squarely in Queensland covering my face. I care - intensely. (I confess I *ate* this book when I found it, read it. Have you had that experience? Where you read a new book so fast, so furiously, all in one go, it's as though you've swallowed the book whole? You can't believe that this book exists - all for you!) [Return to text](#)

6. And boy, have the likes of Liz Willis got some pineapple stories. Perhaps this is the thing with Queenslanders, the thing that makes us part of the same family: we *all* know pineapples aren't as innocent as we once thought they were. [Return to text](#)

7. Imagine, the novel you might pick up soon from a trainload of hot-off-the-press books all smelly in the sun, to suck on its warm juice. I wonder then, as you read, if you'll fall in love with Queensland the way I am finding myself doing. [Return to text](#)

8. Isn't it the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood who warns the casual visitor: 'Touch the page at your peril, it is you who are blank and innocent, not the page' (Atwood 1994: 79)? Ouch! A spike of one of those pineapple tops pricks my skin. [Return to text](#)

9. Lorna Sage drops the word 'interlocutor' into my lap, links it to the imagination (Sage 2001: xvi). Or rather, it is Marina Warner in her introduction to Lorna Sage's final book published posthumously, *Moments of Truth*, a book about the relationship between memoir and invention, record and fabrication (xiii). The title first caught my attention. These two words - 'imagined interlocutors' - phrased in that order, help me grow wings to fly, voyage out; help me put aside my shame, regardless. There's something else too. To mark the well-thumbed place in Lorna's book I have a faded Polaroid snap of my sister on the back steps of our old house in St Lucia, taken with the lace of her cream petticoat made from a delicate embroidered mosquito net falling nicely down the brown stairs. The funny thing is, her head is cut off. I was hopeless at taking photographs; still am. And I used to be ashamed of this too but now it makes me laugh. [Return to text](#)

10. In *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson teases us mercilessly with this line, over and over - 'I'm telling you stories. Trust me' (Winterson 1996: 262). And you don't know whether you should, or can. These two sentences are also the epigraph of Australian writer Robert Dessaix's autobiographical work, *A Mother's Disgrace* (he names its genre as such in *Scarp* 31, 1997). Here, the idea of trust becomes heightened even more, where any exchange of the idea of 'story' between 'you' and 'I' takes on far greater proportions, becomes juicy with the weight of suggested 'truth'. You want to know what it tastes like - what the truth is, what trust tastes like - the whole lot. I want to be able to trust him with what I read. [Return to text](#)

11. Queensland morals campaigner Rona Joyner *did* circulate a 'death-list' of books she

wanted to ban, a compilation of over 130 book titles she asserted likely to corrupt readers (Gowers & Scott 1979: 30, 31). This list was originally compiled as supporting documentation for a delegation to government, under the title 'Concerning the moral pollution of children through literature', and presented to the Queensland Education Department by a deputation of six concerned Christian parents in 1972 (24 January). It complained that these 'offending books were still being set or recommended, and available in school libraries' (Wood 2003). The 'death-list' was subsequently published in the University of Queensland's independent student newspaper, *Semper Floreat*, under the title 'Rona's Death List: Burn a book a day' (15.3.78). [Return to text](#)

12. Have a guess: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was on MotherJoy's death-list too. [Return to text](#)

13. And isn't it true, that writing is about waiting for something to happen? Robert Dessaix names writing as 'a waiting experience' (Dessaix 1997: 23). [Return to text](#)

14. STOP began in 1971, the same year as the Springbok unrest in Brisbane, CARE a year later (STOP PRESS, 15.3.85). One of the mottos of the 'ministry' was: 'The role of the Christian is to rule' (STOP PRESS, November 1986, vol 15.7). [Return to text](#)

15. Doubling is everywhere in this story. Margaret Atwood puts it this way: 'The mere act of writing splits the self into two' (Atwood 2002: 32). I wonder what I would have done had I known this at the beginning? [Return to text](#)

16. A term the Brisbane academic Gillian Whitlock floats my way (Whitlock 1996: ix), and what a word for everything I am doing here, for isn't disobedience necessary to any betrayal of the order of things? Where disobedience is a desire to transgress, to not be contained by the circle of convention, to cross boundaries, not comply to the 'autobiographical pact' (Philippe Lejeunes coined the term 'auto+biographic pact' in 1973, where the point of reference in 'autobiographies' is that the 'author' of the text speaks the truth not a lie, indeed that the author is in fact *who they say they are*. That 'the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* ... be identical' (Lejeunes 1989: 5)). Where disobedience permeates membranes, excoriates skins, *exclaims* into the void (the way French writer Hélène Cixous encourages me to write: 'as one throws a voice - forward' (Cixous 1986: 94)). And to think when I first came across Gillian Whitlock's book it was her name I was more entranced by, more than what she was writing about. Did the Whitlocks live next door to us in St Lucia? Might we have shared pineapple sandwiches? [Return to text](#)

17. I remember this same girl saying how she really wanted to become a woman, to bleed, and then to grow large with child. It was all a bit shocking, put like that. I wonder if she did. It makes me think of something else Hélène Cixous said in an interview not long ago, in Paris: 'And after you have sinned once, as you know, you never stop [*laughs*]. So that's what happened' (Blyth 2004: 109). Not that I could ever think of sin and transgression in this way - with laughter. MotherJoy made things very clear: the wages of sin is death. And I didn't want to die, not then. So I chose carefully. [Return to text](#)

18. And bless me if it's not then, in thinking this, that I trip over someone who faces the idea of repression and censorship head on, challenges 'codes and social orders' with the power of the imaginary. This is our weapon of choice. What I really like about what Verena Andermatt Conley has to say (writing in response to Hélène Cixous' work) is that she gives agency to the 'new' subject (with 'multiple signature'), to 'unbite' her tongue (the unbiting tongue bit is mine) (Conley 1991: 26). Once I dare let go, speak up, I tell myself, all sort of possibilities might open up. The thrill of the imaginary - freefalling into space. [Return to text](#)

19. It is Virginia Woolf who gives me this word (tucked away in Leonard Woolf's compilation of her 'writing' notes in *A writer's diary* (Woolf 1978: 205).) 'It is this writing that gives me my proportions,' she suggests when tackling 'the last lap' of *The Waves*. What this word embodies is permission to actually *do it*, to write, and a licence to sculpt. Virginia's newly created world falls into shape, 'done without spilling a drop'. While all I can think of, in the hot Queensland sun, is pineapple juice in a swill over the cannery floor. [Return to text](#)

20. In 'Memoir Australia' Drusilla Modjeska writes: 'The question of *what really happened* lies somewhere in every piece of writing that calls itself memoir' (Modjeska 2002: 191). In the companion volume I am writing alongside the novel, a memoir about writing this novel, you'll find everything else about the story you want to find out; well, nearly everything.

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21. This might be the kind of thing H  l  ne Cixous means when she speaks of writing 'at my throat' (Sellers 1994: xv). Return to text

22. Just the way Lorna Sage and Marina Warner tell the story of modern literature, where writers make themselves up as they go along: 'becoming new beings made of words...creating their own "profane interiorities"' (Sage 2001: xviii). Boy, the idea of sin is everywhere. Return to text

23. In *Written on the Body* Jeanette Winterson translates a body into a book (Winterson 1992: 117). Return to text

24. I wonder what the poet and playwright Dorothy Hewett would think of this Glory-story. She calls the genre of autobiography fluid, calls it 'flux'. She writes: 'It seems to me that in order to write autobiography, the writer invents a pseudonym, a character, and follows that character through a series of events that appear to make up a life' (Hewett 1987: 18). Autobiography as invention, yes, and what if the writer disappears altogether? Return to text

25. Or rather, as Drusilla Modjeska writes in *Poppy*: 'to trace the twine back, thread by thread, and unplat it into a perfect record...back to the first knot', as a way to remember, as a form of discovery (Modjeska 1990: 16). She writes about the writing of *Poppy* in her collection *Timepieces*, a work she wishes she was brave enough to call fiction when she was writing it (a work that got us all going in a new direction in the 1990s, Gillian Whitlock says): 'Discovery and invention can lie very close to each other' (Modjeska 2002: 67, 94). Return to text

26. Does this mean - *could* this mean - that we, the children of Queensland, have something to be grateful for? That we could, for example, farewell Joh Bjelke-Petersen by *thanking him* for uniting us? Return to text

27. Somewhere Michel Foucault writes, to tease, about how we write to be loved. And love turns up too in Margaret Atwood's list of reasons why writers write in *Negotiating with the dead* (2002: xx-xxii). Return to text

28. As Heather Wearne might suggest when writing about autobiography (Wearne 2002: 95), not to wish away your life. Return to text

29. MACOS = Man: A Course of Study and SEMP = Social Education Materials Project. Return to text

30. It's an elaborate ruse, an invention of gigantic proportions. Quite funny really, if it wasn't connected to flesh and blood. Return to text

31. Alison Bartlett is a one-time Queensland academic, now in Western Australia. In her astonishing - and sexy - 'Reading bodies', she writes: 'Your body and mine rest on each other's, making and filling curves, creating humps and gorges to sink into and nestle against' (Bartlett 1998: 90). Imagine having afternoon tea with her! Return to text

32. Janet Varner Gunn calls autobiography a 'displayed self' (Gunn 1982: 7, 8), which makes any recognition of self, like looking into a mirror, really confronting. Especially when reflected in public. Return to text

33. And I can tell you this, cross my heart, those were her exact words too. They stick out of the ordinary, arranged in that order, like beacons, like stars in the night sky to guide the way. She gave me a gift that day, little did she guess, little did I know, a way of arranging my first

thoughts, a revelatory moment, a shift of axes. The words settled under my skin as though written there in tattoo ink. Return to text

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