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MODERN GREEK STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND (MGSAANZ)

ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΑΥΣΤΡΑΛΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΝΕΑΣ ΖΗΛΑΝΔΙΑΣ

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MODERN GREEK STUDIES
(AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)

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The periodical welcomes papers in both English and Greek on all aspects of Modern Greek Studies (broadly defined). Prospective contributors should preferably submit their papers on disk and hard copy. All published contributions by academics are refereed (standard process of blind peer assessment). This is a DEST recognised publication.

Το περιοδικό φιλοξενεί άρθρα στα Αγγλικά και τα Ελληνικά αναφερόμενα σε όλες τις απόψεις των Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών (στη γενικότητά τους). Υποψήφιοι συνεργάτες θα πρέπει να υποβάλλουν κατά προτίμηση τις μελέτες των σε δισκέτα και σε έντυπη μορφή. Όλες οι συνεργασίες από πανεπιστημιακούς έχουν υποβληθεί στην κριτική των εκδοτών και επιλέκτων πανεπιστημιακών συναδέλφων.

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SECTION TWO

S. M. Hawke

The University of Sydney

DANCING WITH THE GHOST OF CHARMIAN CLIFT: A FICTO-CRITICAL REQUIEM

PRELUDE

Charmian Clift, Australian novelist and essayist, was born in the small coastal New South Wales town of Kiama in 1923, where her passion for the sea and quest for tenderness began. Genealogically she was Jewish on both sides, with Scottish and Irish working class inflections. After encountering the awkward tragedies of pre-and post WWII early adulthood, including relinquishment of her first-born 'Jennifer' (aka Suzanne Chick), she married Australian writer George Johnston. Clift and Johnston worked at the Melbourne *Argus*, then lived an expatriate writerly life with their three children on the islands of Kalymnos and Hydra in Greece from 1954–1964. Their collaborative and individual novels spoke to each other through the alter ego of characters Cressida Morley and David Meredith; Clift and Johnston were as difficultly entwined on the page as they were in life. On returning to Australia in 1964 Clift wrote for the Women's Pages of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from which she befriended readers, across class and gender from Wahroonga to Blacktown. Her column tackled such issues of the time as violence, outdoor drinking, poverty and to some degree politics written into the everyday. The column was extremely successful and brought her out of the Johnston shadow in which she had lived and written since they married. Through her erudite and precise yet personal tone Clift actively called her readers to consciousness, to participate in the debates of the everyday. That her life ended tragically, prematurely and I suggest unnecessarily, in their Mosman home, came as a great shock to Clift's readers, although she had spoken and written of death often. Her alter ego Cressida Morley suicided in Johnston's last novel *Clean Straw For Nothing*, which was to be launched later that year.

PROPHECY

Indeed, at times, I am so filled with vanity at my own interesting and dramatic situation that I indulge myself with secret scenes wherein I die in a terrible and bloody agony that still, however, leaves me capable of making a calm and compelling death-bed speech to George. He, of course is to marry again for the sake of the children, preferably a Greek girl with a satisfactory dowry... I derive a great deal of melancholy satisfaction from the chanting priests and the passing bell, and myself stretched out among the flowers as stiff and white as a freshly pulled garlic stalk (Clift 1959:252).

Make the speech she does (although it differs somewhat from the one quoted here). While the prophecy is well cast in much of her writing and her life, the question still remains, who killed Charmian Clift? Was it George Johnston in the Mosman study with a list of complaints, and his own absent virility, complete with directions from his latest novel; was it the self-confessed addiction to retsina in the tavernas of Kalymnos and Hydra; was it the unending quest for tenderness – a destination unmet; was it the forced relinquishment of the first child made silently sacrosanct through her absence; was it the family friend that broke her hymen at too tender an age, or was it that she wasn't particularly wanted at birth, overshadowed by ample and perfect older siblings? This list reads like something from a detective novel – attempting to solve the mystery of why someone isn't anymore. The finger could be pointed at all the suspects, all the locations, and all the weapons of inner and domestic war. Yet, Charmian Clift is as large in death as she was in life. Immortalised by the myth that remains, her life continues to dance through the Australian Literary Record. I am not the first and will not be the last to stage this inquiry.

WATER AND TENDERNESS

As a lover of Greek mythology, I don't believe in accidents. Instead, much to the amusement of academic friends, I put my belief (but emphatically not my faith), in The Fates. Who am I, to argue with them?

In the Easter holidays of 1969 my family holidayed at the seaside town of Kiama. My father took us on adventures through the delicate borderlands between terra firma and the Kiama patch of the Tasman Sea. He showed us the Kiama Blowhole, a spurting hole surrounded by rocks and leading to an underwater cavern. I remember his stern warning – as he looked at his third and most wayward child – not to fall in. He spoke with the

certain authority fathers had in those days, and assured his children that people didn't return from a mishap like that. Scylla was ever waiting to feed off the wanderer, irrespective of age and voyage. I fell into the ladies pool on the way home instead and experienced my first blue bottle sting. In those moments, I understood with eight-year-old insight, that the sea had desires, hungers, miracles and cruelties of its own. I longed to return in the summer and explore the blue and blowing forbidden. I was in love with the sea – the mystery and danger it promised.

In the intervening months, Kiama's most outrageous daughter had returned to a sea of her own kind. Throughout her writings there are both figurative and literal suggestions that Charmian Clift longed to be one with the sea. Much of her early and unpublished writing speaks of the love of Bombo Beach, Kiama where her childhood was safely enwombed and upon which shores she wandered and 'star-baked' at night. References to watery origins and sacred memories are dispersed through later fictional works involving her character and alter ego Cressida Morley. This paper maps albeit erratically, recorded incidents of trauma in the life of Charmian Clift as well as daring to read between the lines in an effort to explain or discover who or what killed her.

The watery longings experienced by Charmian Clift are not uncommon among the disturbed, traumatised and displaced, according to the recalcitrant, recently recovered disciple of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, who wrote his theory *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* in 1924. Ferenczi describes the watery longings of the traumatised through ontogenesis and phylogenesis: ontogenesis is the desire of the individual to return to the womb; in short to be one with water, pre trauma, and 'phylogenetic regression' or the 'thalassal trend' is a collective desire of species to return to the water/sea from which all life has its origins. I suggest Clift was pulled by an overwhelming desire for reunion with her ontogenetic uterine beginnings and broader phylogenetic, thalassal world, post trauma. Ferenczi posits that creatures/humans have the ability to return to primordial conditions after suffering from extreme or prolonged trauma/abuse, which may result in the human becoming dis-ordered or hysterical in some way. In such instances the human response is no longer nervous or psychic but organic (operating from the substratum) deferred to a second level of intelligence that Ferenczi suggests exists in a semi-fluid state. His thesis is supported by client disclosure in the clinic, from primarily hysterical patients.

Whatever her psychic conditions, informed by ideational and symbolic trauma in Freudian terms, and bioanalytic conditions in Ferenczi's terms, Clift's writing is steeped in deep watery longing and a certain grief in having lost the quest for tenderness early in life. Much of her trauma and subsequent sense of displacement was indeed physical and fatally wed to the rest of her aetiology. The site of Charmian Clift and her writings

provides an uncanny meeting place for exploration of Ferenczi's (1924) ideas about the 'Thalassal Trend' and bioanalysis,¹ that I suggest acts as a springboard for current embodiment theory as espoused by Elspeth Probyn and Elizabeth Wilson.

Like Charmian Clift I was desperate to swim in the deepest ocean, fly like Icarus, tempt the sun to melt my naïve bravado and dip my wings in the wet. My life, like Charmian's has been directed by a troubling imbalance between air and water, children, creativity and a quest for tenderness. Between that moment and this I have almost melted and almost drowned several times. I still like to dive headlong, but the mysteries I seek are less often on the rocky ledges of the geographical and spatial world, instead located in the uncertain territory of my inner wars and wanderings, lurking precariously in my aura and the flesh of memory. I too have always felt comfort in the sea, and wonder now how it is that I survived so long on the plains.

My Charmian quest began subtly in Autumn 1994. We were expecting our first and only child, living on the south coast of New South Wales, a little south of Kiama. The morning sickness I suffered lasted well into the night for five months. I was almost permanently camped beside the loo. Educated by stern nuns, even as an adult, I took this suffering as a punishment for perceived shortcomings in the fields of sexuality, and alcohol soaked adolescent misadventures that too often found me hugging odd things and relinquishing others.

We had no television and the radio was permanently on. One night, a woman called Suzanne Chick was being interviewed about her forthcoming autobiography *Searching For Charmian* (1994 Pan Macmillan). I was half listening, arms clutching the bowl in a manner only the drunk or pregnant could know, when in between pukes I suggested to my partner we call the baby Charmian, Charm for short. Charmian Clift, the interviewer reported, had been an innovative and courageous writer. I was very much a fledgling in the craft, in need of inspiration, and there was a resonance there for me, and the name carried with it grace and style. My partner read it differently.

'Yeah, nice name,' she said, 'but people will think it's Charmaine and I hate that name. Think of all the problems you have with your own name, Shé?'

She was right and the name was scratched before it was written down. The child was named after Dame Kiri Te Kanawa instead, my partner being operatically inclined. We thus entered into and became happily distracted by the no-rest-stops theatre of Motherhood.

I didn't give Charmian Clift and her four children Jennifer, Martin, Shane and Jason, another thought until recently. I was researching the lives of expatriate Australian women who had lived in Greece, to help flesh out details of the book I'm writing, and to give me a grasp of the fundamentals of Greek language. The Greek/Australian dictionary

just wasn't doing it for me. The theme of relinquishing mothers both cosmic and corporeal was also crucial to my research, which explores the comparative absence in the Greek mythological record, of Metis mother of Athena. I was directed to read Beverley Farmer, Sue Woolfe and Charmian Clift, to pick up the nuances of language and life from an expatriate perspective and add the cultural specificity my writing lacked. Farmer and Clift succeeded in lifting the language barrier by weaving Greek words and phraseology languidly through their work, both 'writing against the grain' and being way ahead of their time. Reading between the lines, I saw much tragedy in the lives of these two.

Later, Sue Woolfe, whose writing is as profound as it is delicately woven, would have me 'leaning unsteadily towards infinity', exciting my daughter and I with the magic of numbers, informing less tragic aspects of my work (but that is the work of another paper). Meanwhile, Charmian had hooked me in so deeply with *Mermaid Singing*, that I had to put Beverley Farmer's *Milk* aside. Words such as caique, sirocco, retsina and thalassa became more meaningful. I drifted happily through the current of Clift's prose like an unsuspecting fish about to be caught in an underworld drag-net, unaware that Hades Hall beckoned from the depths of the Aegean.

Clift, Farmer and Woolfe have interwoven Greek words, myths and characters through their writing. In the spirit of intertextuality and with specific diegetic intention, I weave here ficto-critically² some of their words and my own poetic offerings, in addition to the phrases of others who have paid particular homage to Charmian Clift.

I KIAMA

Born at the end
 not at the beginning
 of somewhere,
 a discordant third
 in a happy duet
 ...they nearly sang the song without her.

She lived one deep breath
 from the ocean,
 that swam through every cell of her body
 like living in a magic, tideless shell
 en-wombed by the thalassal wonderland.
 It was both her edge and centre
 the sea.

As the shell she was
she danced along its watermark
dived into its whirlpool
Charybdis, her first seductress.
But others would want to possess
and fill her
woo her from the shores of known things
into flight with fledgling wings,
shape her and shift her
to the unknown
yet hoped for
safe harbour,
already weary from her storm.

Desperate for tenderness
yet hungry for passionate things
she flew like Icarus
opened wide
left the shell on the beach
flexed the wings of her flesh
that would eventually melt in the sun
instead of arc across her sea...
buried treasure truth ever unfound,
yet fondled and fingered
by curious predators
wanting to pluck her charm
from un-swum depths.

In the quest for tenderness
she spoke in confusing tongues.
Aching with the empty arms of misadventure,
the corrosive presence of absence
left her burning beneath the skin,
her internal chorus singing
the love me love me plea.
She would lament the absence of stars
that baked her in teenage twilight.
She swallowed the wine instead of the water
lost her boat to icy flesh,
was wed to a chivalrous act,

that sent her wandering
 from familiar pacific harbour
 to the wild Aegean swell
 in search of an inner home
 a satellite eclipsed by her husbands sun.

LAPPING SHORES OF BELONGING

I have waited six weeks for my daughter to join me here in Fairlight, traditional land of the Kay-Ye-My tribe – a Pacific Ocean marine wonderland compared to where we have been. Tragic enough to have relinquished her four days a fortnight for the last four years, in the wake of separation – six weeks felt like a death sentence. (There is always a Paris lurking in the shadows, and my Helen was doing the stolen wife thing. Aphrodite's spell had just begun to break.) My sense of belonging in Sydney began here at the waterside rock pools, in the company of dog-friendly people with a ken for lapping shores.

The sea has not been so close since I was pregnant with my daughter. Now she is here, we frolic around the edges of the thalassal world, exploring nooks and caves that have welcomed the tide for aeons. We are waiting for the heat of summer before we dive headlong into underwater world. We have visions of surfing and sailing in our mythological fantasies, *The Odyssey* revisited with our own familial inflections. She is already well steeped in Greek Mythology, can't wait to grow up and play Cassandra in her uncle's rock opera *Paris*.

Our dog Jess is an engaging mascot. Dogs called Jess are as common in Fairlight as townsfolk in Greece called Dionysus and Socrates. We meet the same people each time we come, Barbara and Pam, Trish and Bryce. The latter ask Kiri how she is finding Sydney, knowing she has been uncertain about re-mapping the co-ordinates of her belonging in this inverted sea-change.

'It was fine enough until we got stuck in the Fisher library lift with the ghost of Charmian Clift!' She speaks with naive certainty. Bryce is visibly startled by her statement, which she quickly follows with a dramatic re-telling.

'We were on our way down from getting the Charmian books in the 800s, when suddenly "Bang! Bang!" ...then darkness all around. I leapt into mum's arms and the books scattered all over the floor. Mum said into the emergency telephone that she was stuck in the lift with a hysterical child and the ghost of Charmian Clift. The operator didn't catch the last bit.' She runs off with dog, leaving Bryce aghast:

'You wouldn't want to be stuck with the ghost of Charmian Clift. Tragic woman, tragic family, you know, they're all dead bar one.' He speaks as if he knows and I quiz him

further. Yes, he knows, he was a journo' in Johnston time and met him once in London when the two had an enjoyable, somewhat inebriated session in a pub off Fleet Street, but Bryce's friend Barry knew George well while working in the London bureau of Associated Newspapers. In fact he named his daughter after Charmian and was Max Brown's agent!³ They invite me around for tea.

While trapped in the lift my daughter suggested we pretend we'd been transported to another time, Charmian time. First the questions came to set the scene; she wanted the story from the beginning. How do you tell big real life tragedy, as opposed to mythological Greek tragedy, to a ten year old? Yet, in between panic and worry about how much oxygen there is in a closed lift, she persisted with questions.

'Why is Charmian so important to you mum? What did Vras mean by "the poor kids, such a tragedy, such a Greek tragedy"? How did she die? Did someone kill her? Is it like in The Trojan Wars? We're not gonna die are we... mum?' I feigned calmness as fear replaced curiosity and carved its mark upon her face. The emergency lights came on with a dull hiccup and she picked up a book with one hand, clinging to me with the other. Examining the cover photo in the half-light, she mused further before I could answer her questions, 'She looks like Grandma. Good thing we're not stuck in here with grandma!' Grandma is extremely claustrophobic. Grandma and Charmian are from the same time, are versed in some of the same tragedies.

We agree Charmian is elegant and beautiful, but I have already flipped beyond the dust covers and lines of other texts, and read an aching sadness there. I hold my daughter close; grateful we are together in this life. As I begin the telling of the life and myth of Charmian Clift, the doors break open. Instinctively she jumps out then squawks – 'Don't leave Charmian behind.' I fling the books into the foyer in the scramble, knowing very well that the ghost of Charmian Clift has made her presence felt today.

II KALYMNOS AND HYDRA

On a warm blooded island
 with a cold blooded sea
 lived the golden boy and his mob,
 seen by the knowing eyes
 of black-shawled women...
 time was yet to tell.
 Before they drank from the sweet water well
 she dived into the depths of her becoming
 ... and undoing

revelled in the taverna
 eyes retsina soaked
 plucking sponges from seaweed
 instead of pearls
 sprayed by the poison spit
 of Hydra,
 the romance of Kalymnos
 too long ago
 if it were yesterday.
 The children,
 who were not the one
 who wasn't anymore,
 watched her
 lose her foothold on the shore
 fall like a jewel
 to the welcome hands of thieves
 and tentacles of the deep
 preying on her sole refrain
 the love me love me plea
 while he stood idly by.

TEA

I have tea with Trish and Bryce Fraser and Barry Quigley⁴. They enchant me with recollections of a woman they had great respect for. Barry agreed Charmian was a tragic soul but an enigmatic woman, who could walk into a room and command a collective sigh and render the most composed person breathless. She had a startling presence George didn't have but that he envied. Barry Quigley worked for George in the London office and described him as a depressive addict, a manipulator and user but a great journalist. That the Clift/Johnston family and its incumbent tragedies read like a Greek tragedy made manifest, is a commonly held thought. Charmian's posthumous wisdom and insights into humanity, teach the keen and willing student, from the dust and the covers and recollections of friends and colleagues, such as these. I am not alone in my haunting.

I speak to Barry and Bryce about Charmian's apparent but fruitless quest for tenderness, that always seemed to meet with the lusty desires of men who would pluck her prematurely from her tree and clip her wings – from Golden Boy to Nature Boy. They concur that she never did seem to acquire the gentleness in life she so clearly desired. Always she retreated to the sea for comfort and restoration in the wake of heartache,

disillusion and brute insensitivity. My thoughts drift back to Ferenczi and his later work, *The Confusion of Tongues: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion* (1933). In this work, Ferenczi puts out a strong call to consciousness for tenderness in human kind, as opposed to lust, displaced passion and abuse that is often responsible for wounding the vulnerable, who present clinically with hysterical symptoms and in turn express a phylogenetic desire.^v In this context, Charmian's experience of and quest for tenderness was repeatedly thwarted affecting deep and irreparable injury to her humanity. The absence or dis-order of tenderness clearly began at birth, when she was delivered from a mother indifferent to her becoming, beset by pre-existent wounds of motherhood passed down the maternal line. Further, in her book *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift* (Wheatley 2001), there is reference to the rape Charmian experienced as a teenager at the hands of a family friend, scoring her flesh with the probable premature ejaculation, that Ferenczi associates with clinical hysteria and fragmenting internalised shame. The later birth and relinquishment of Charmian's first child, Jennifer further compounds the guilt and shame of a once reasonably intact child, who had unwittingly progressed in Ferenczi's terms to a 'precocious maturity' (1933:165).

Quigley and Fraser both imply that while Charmian and George initially fell passionately in love, George wouldn't have been the most attentive of lovers, which in itself was a tragedy, since Charmian was adored by most who knew her, yet apparently unfulfilled by the man she had wed. Their honest summation of events leaves me with the question: was Charmian Clift suffering from anxiety hysteria? I go to the Macquarie Dictionary (1998) to check the meaning of hysteria in the everyday, frustrated by the dense speak of psychoanalysis that seeks to convert the ordinary into something fantastic: 'morbid or senseless emotionalism; emotional frenzy ... a psychoneurotic disorder characterised by violent emotional outbreaks...' (p. 1057). I know the word originates from the Greek word for uterus – *hyster/hysterikos* – the Macquarie tells me the latter literally means 'suffering in the uterus' (p. 1057). Charmian Clift certainly had a suffering uterus, in the sense that her virginity was stolen from her, and her first born was delivered from the womb never to be seen again. I suggest such suffering can only be fully understood by others who have suffered similar fate. Did she cleverly avert compounding hysteria, by producing three more children and by turning from her apparently impotent and jealous once-a-year-man, finding fulfilment elsewhere. I can't know, but from speaking with these friends and trawling through her texts and those of people who knew her, I know her spark and perhaps her grief eventually drowned in the drink, while George lost his breath to fear and jealousy of his enigmatic wife. Despite Charmian's many admirers and alleged lovers she never speaks of having found the tenderness she so craved. One wonders if her only experience of tenderness was in those brief moments during which she

held Jennifer, or while holding court with the sea as a young child on Bombo Beach. It also seems her desire to truly 'be alone with oneself' was never realised until the moment of her death, and that anxiety hysteria, alcoholism and depression were evident by then.

This story becomes more tragic when one learns that Gae (George's daughter by his first wife), Martin and Shane Johnston, barefoot Australian children of Hydra, are all dead, like their parents from alcohol and drug related misadventures or suicide. What then is the legacy for the remainder of this and the next generation of survivors of this couples various progeny? Relinquished child Jennifer, or Suzanne Chick pertinently says in her book *Searching for Charmian* (1994) 'I sensed myself tapping into some universal mother-to-daughter continuum ... womb to womb to womb' (18). How many more generations of Clift women, beginning with Charmian's grandmother, will be affected by the multi-generational mother/daughter mishap, womb to womb? The genealogical bewilderment of Suzanne Chick may have been maternally resolved, but what intervention does the well documented tragedy of the life and death of Charmian Clift offer to the lives of Chick and her daughters, Gina, Danielle and Kristin and to the life of Shane's daughter Rebecca O'Connor, and to some extent Martins Johnston's step children to Roseanne Bonney? I wonder too of the youngest Clift/Johnston child, the Greek born Jason, orphaned at thirteen by warring parents who had long been on the road to a suicide of sorts. Did he find a Medea and live happily-ever-after, cloaked in a Golden Fleece?

As the stories draw to a close, Barry recalls the contents of Charmian's suicide note: 'Darling, sorry about this ... but you hated me so much today... I can't stand being hated... I shall cease upon the midnight with no pain.' His sea-blue eyes fill with tears and soon after he is gone.

I thank Bryce and Trish Fraser for an illuminating, generous yet emotional morning tea, jump in the car and race off to write up my notes before I collect my daughter from school. We are going to the south-facing Little Manly Beach this afternoon because the nor-easter is blowing the blue bottles in at north steyne. When I greet her she is in a flood of tears, almost hysterical with grief and rage. This is her second week at the new school, in the new world. She feels like an alien, exiled against her will for something not of her doing. Fairlight will never be home, she reckons. She'd rather live in Greece, than here! I can't know what The Fates have in store for us.

I think about how it might have been for Jason Johnston to come to Australia, at about the same age as my daughter is now, having only known the Greek world save for a brief moment in the Cotswolds. Who was there with the tender ear to hear his confusions and displacement, which must have been bone-deep. The mother in me wants to wrap him up in tenderness (as I now wrap my daughter) and urge him to look at the whole thing as an adventure, but it's not my place and the time has long passed, indeed he is

older than me and only known to me through the textual ambiguity of the page. I am reading his life from the outside. My daughter still has both parents; un-drunk but separated, keen students of the Clift Gospel. Could this be our saving grace? The grief that envelopes her today is of a 'not-belonging' in the new world, that Elspeth Probyn describes as '...the often fearsome interstices of being and going, of longing, not arriving...' (1996:40); much of what is sacrosanct to her, is no longer in the right place. She has been here before, both temporally and spatially.

III HYDRA TO MOSMAN

Called by ancient Thalassal memory
sand still between her toes,
to the depths of the Aegean
her very own Poseidon adventure
after Charybidis lured her down
she resurfaced with the bends
and the telling in her eyes.

The bend was in your heart dear Charmian
your eyes veiled in sadness
the quest for tenderness lost
or never found
with your impotent once-a-year-man
bonded by habit and duty
long lost to love.
He might have heard your Siren's song
thought himself an Odysseus of sorts
but it was you who went a wandering
to return a stranger in the homeland.
Did anyone he meet your longing
...ever?
Did every Christmas haunt you
with those briefs moments of memory
still burning in your womb
and feeding from your breast
the milk long since curdled by your grief.
Is it how you imagined
...the boat ride through The Styx?

 FRIENDS AND RELATIONS

I worry about the prospect of taking my daughter to Greece next year to do research, haunted by the tragedy of the Charmian dynasty. Why do The Fates call me there? Do all expatriate writers who live in Greece meet with tragedy? I need a happy-ending-Greece-story and seek out Sue Woolfe for the telling. In the ensuing conversation and email dialogue with Woolfe,^{vi} I asked what led her to Greece, how long did she stay and did the journey bring tragedy to her life. There is an urgency in my asking. She shocked me by saying,

'I was led there by Martin Johnston ... I'd heard stories about the Johnston's, and found them thrilling, I'd loved Robert Graves' re-telling of the ancient myths, and then suddenly a few things came together ... I'd had a few shy chats with Martin Johnston, then a colleague ... at SBS. Greece seemed necessary ... Martin and his wife met us in Crete' (email correspondence 20/10/04).

The adventure unfolded from there and Sue and her writer husband Gordon Graham both wrote novels in the isolation of a small village called Karitanna, after whom they named their daughter, conceived while living there. The tragic aspect of their adventure lies in the reason for their premature return. In 1986, the Chernobyl disaster spread a radioactive cloud over Greece. The pregnant Sue Woolfe and husband Gordon made a hasty retreat. Their daughter was born safely in Australia some months later. The Woolfe/Grahams are testimony that creative writers can co-habit without destroying each other.

As The Fates would have it, I have tripped over Clift/Johnston friends and acquaintances while writing this paper. I have swum eagerly along in the flow of telling. I would love to know more. Yet a sense of sensitivity for and understanding of a need for privacy in troubled lives stops me short of intruding further into their stories or mine, so I shall close with damp-eyed wonder, and this ficto-critical addition to the archive.

Dancing with the ghost of Charmian Clift makes for an uncertain and awkward step, something between a waltz and a tango. I, like so many people want her to be here still, in a very embodied sense, and the children too. I want her to find Jennifer, and for Shane to be alive and accepted for who she was instead of being unconsciously compared to the one that wasn't anymore (Jennifer). As it is, not even Charmian's ashes remain, lost in the aftermath of mourning.

I have read things out of order in the life and myth of Charmian Clift. I have whimpered and raged at her tormentors, the accused. I have wished she'd find some happy escape from a duty-bound shadowy marriage steeped in a deadly mixture of Scotch, love and loathing. Yet maybe I understand why she stayed.

Charmian Clift got under my gills, scaled me from the inside.

I have to accept that at the end of her life, the dreamboat had sprung a leak and she was well drowned in the drink, a tragic way to become one with water too far removed from her beloved Greece or the security of Bombo Beach. One of her final masterpieces of writing, aside from the suicide note left for George, was an essay entitled *Clean Straw for Nothing* (June 1969), which was her response to George's book of the same name, due to be launched that month. In poetic tragic style, she suicided before the one-sided confession was made public through the characters of Cressida Morley and David Meredith. I thought her *Clean Straw* read like a rather apologetic, but very real farewell to someone who would never love her or represent her for who she felt she essentially was, someone who would only ever see her as the 'preying mantis' of his dying world. Clift wrote thus:

I have shared a great deal of his experience, and I know too that we both remember the experience quite differently. It affected us quite differently. We write about it quite differently. I suspect is the difference between optimism and pessimism... But with *Clean Straw* I've had a complete emotional block, and not all my deep and genuine sympathy at the sight of him struggling and fighting with what was obviously proving to be recalcitrant ... could force me into the old familiar step-sitting role. Nor all my professionalism could lure me into listening dispassionately (Clift in Wheatley 2001:389-394).

IV LITTLE SIRIUS COVE

The tick and the tock
of the confessional clock
hold the shame more acute
than the sorrows.^{vii}
We are ever haunted
by your midnight ghost
scorched by too much seeing
as it is with all soothsayers
no more wind beneath your wings
dipped too deep now.

The hoops of middle age
have stopped spinning
yet they still imprint the page

are frozen in time
 like your quest for tenderness
 too many breaths from the sea
 for skin to be made tender
 from the soak.

CLOSURE

Psychoanalysis works ultimately through the deepening and enlargement of knowledge – ... knowledge can be enlarged and deepened only by love (Ferenczi Letter to Freud in *Final Contributions* 1926:17)

I take myself to Raglan Street, the last home of the Clift/Johnstons, in search of some closure and yell outside the house in the car with the windows up, 'What the bloody hell were you doing way up here at 112. You should have been one calm breath from the sea.' Moving to a house of 'looking in' instead of 'looking out' adds another suspect to the list of the accused in the Charmian Clift trial, to whom equal portions of guilt must be assigned. As a juror in this case I conclude that Charmian Clift needed more help than she got in her vain attempts to 'be alone with oneself'. Psychoanalytic intervention based on Ferenczi's work on *The Thalassal Trend*, may have at least offered comfort in the knowledge and love of water, and validated her need for tenderness, but he dwelt in the shadow of Sigmund Freud much as Charmian dwelt in the shadow, albeit fading, of George Johnston. Sándor Ferenczi's findings were little known at that time in any case. At the end of the day, the walk from 112 Raglan Street was simply seven minutes too far from Little Sirius Cove for Charmian to go star baking on, and be at one with water. The journey home was no longer an embodied one, but a trek of the soul.

I pack my daughter and dog into the car and head for Kiama. I want to show her the Blowhole, and the place I first got stung by the blue bottle, the Bombo Beach of the early summer of 1969. I want to tell her about star baking and Icarus and every little bit of Greek myth I can uncover, and of course more about Charmian and Metis and what work these figures do. I do tell her about the need for tenderness in life and love, and that all knowledge is meaningless unless accompanied by love. Sándor Ferenczi says so and I believe him. My daughter looks at me curiously, yet compassionately, with the naïve wisdom that the young possess, and says,

'Oh mum, you are such a case. I know that love is all there is. I knew that before I was born!'

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NOTES

- 1 Ferenczi's ideas about hysteria are also well documented in Chapter XIII: 'Confusion of Tongues between Adult and Child' (1933) – Chapter XXIII: 'The Effect on Women of Premature Ejaculation in Men' (1908) in *Final Contributions to the Problems & Methods of Psycho-Analysis* 1955 Hogarth London, which counters Freud's hypothesis that hysteria is purely ideational. Hysteria in women (male trauma survivors tend to present with obsession) according to Ferenczi is born from unfulfilled sexual engagement, the motif for which has often been laid down too early in life through sexual abuse or trauma. In addition to the primary sources noted here, the reader may also be drawn to the following articles: Elizabeth A. Wilson (2004), 'Gut Feminism', in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 15: 3 pp 66-94, 2004; Elspeth Probyn (2004), 'Thinking with Gut Feeling', in *Eating Things*, Public Access: 30.
- 2 Ficto-criticism is a blending of fictional and theoretical work. It 'allows different kinds of writing and different points of view to comment on each other' (Tilson and Gibbs 1982:3). As a writing practice it emerged in Australia from radical literary explorers such as Anna Gibbs then from Murdoch University. Stephen Muecke is also attributed as one of the founders of ficto-criticism.
- 3 Max Brown was a contemporary of George Johnston, as were Bryce Fraser and Barry Quigley. Many people could claim to have known the Clift/Johnstons and those cited here were more professionally acquainted, as contemporaries of George Johnston than socially close to the couple. Barry acted as Max's agent regarding the publication of *Charmian and George: The Marriage of George Johnston and Charmian Clift*, Rosenberg, 2004, the proof copy of which, referred to in this article was called *A Walk With You: The Story of George Johnston and Charmian Clift*, 2001. The book was twenty years in the making and Max Brown died four months before it was released. Many thanks to Barry for lending me the proof copy.
- 4 I am indebted to Trish and Bryce Fraser and Barry Quigley who kindly answered questions that covered delicate but historically significant and psychoanalytically relevant turf, over a very warm cup of tea; Barbara Albertini for introducing me to all.
- 5 That Charmian Clift who was herself traumatised and so attached to the sea, lends itself quite well to what Ferenczi is saying.
- 6 Warm thanks to Sue Woolfe for the generosity of her time and the sharing of her happy Greek anecdotes, and enlightening me to the magic of number nine so that I could share this wonder with my daughter. Her books *Leaning Towards Infinity* and *Painted Woman* were both written while living in Greece. Also to Adrienne Sallay for introducing me to Sue Woolfe and the writings of Clift and Farmer.
- 7 These two lines are from CP Snow. Clift borrowed them to describe her own sense of circumstance.