

‘The Writers’ Picnic’: Genealogy and Homographesis in the Fiction of Sumner Locke Elliott

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I wanted to begin this essay with a well-known anecdote recounting the dinner party Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris held in their Martin Road home for Sumner Locke Elliott. Elliott’s biographer Sharon Clarke suggests that this anecdote is ‘told so often . . . some have declared it fiction’ (*Writing Life*’ 239).¹ As with a fictional event, there are conflicting interpretations of the evening—Clarke called it ‘a great success,’ yet David Marr’s biography of White doesn’t mention the evening at all. White had greatly admired Elliott’s third novel, *Edens Lost*, calling it ‘marvellous,’ noting the ‘atmosphere and place, tone of voice, and the characters—above all the characters’ (Altman, ‘Crushed’). White had said as much to Elliott’s friend and fellow New Yorker Shirley Hazzard but despite this, the admiration and affection Elliott expected were absent; second hand accounts suggest that it was a ‘quiet’ and ‘awkward’ evening, and Elliott felt ignored. The punchline (as it were) of the anecdote sees Elliott leaving the party dejected. He recounts:

After saying our goodbyes, with Patrick standing at the top of the stair, I began walking back down and I heard him cry behind me: ‘Come back! Come back!’ As I was returning to New York within the following days, I thought he meant to Australia and perhaps even to visit with him and Manoly again. So, with my back still to him, and wanting to immediately reassure him, I also called out my reply. ‘I will! I will!’ I exclaimed most delightedly, glad I’d made a good impression. ‘Not *you*,’ I heard Patrick say, caustically, behind me. ‘I was talking to the dogs.’ Apparently his schnauzer dogs had begun to follow me down the stairs. (cited in Clarke, *Writing Life* 239–40)²

I thought this brief moment epitomised the complex and at times unexpected dynamics of expatriation, literary celebrity, artistic coterie, and gossip that have contributed to Elliott’s fame and also the occlusion of significant parts of his life within Australian literary criticism.³ Here, Elliott’s anxieties around his status and readership in Australia were embodied by the Nobel laureate and national representative, who recognises but looks past Elliott—just as he felt Australian readers had done with his writing. As in other such moments of entanglement and connection, this anecdote figured Elliott as a person who intentionally veiled himself through sensationalised accounts of these celebrity relations, only to be revealed in minor footnotes in the biographies of other authors, such in David Marr’s life of Patrick White, or Dennis Altman’s life of Gore Vidal; and so on in the lives of Shirley Hazzard and Francis Steegmuller, Whitfield Cook, John and Elaine Steinbeck, Paddy Chayefsky, Fred Coe, Tad Mosel and others.⁴ Yet, in depicting Elliott’s life and career through these networks and connections, I realised that I was glossing over his novels, and reinscribing predominant accounts of him as a minor, middlebrow, and rarely read expatriate author, studied now mainly for his theatre writing and cited as a curiosity of Australian-American expatriation in accounts of Anglo-Australian cultural flows.⁵

Accordingly, this essay takes a different point of departure which reconfigures understanding of the intertwined nature of Elliott’s life and work, offering instead a view of Sumner Locke Elliott as an author uniquely positioned within Australian, American, transnational, and queer

literary networks of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Long recognised as cannibalising life for fiction, Elliott's oeuvre is populated with semi-familiar characters, and structured by the recurring depiction of biographically defining moments, which have been viewed as imbuing his novels with a unifying narrative perspective of nostalgia for Sydney of the 1920s and 30s. Questioning this narrativisation of conjoined life and work, this essay identifies Elliott's recurrent rewriting of childhood as a strategy of self-construction, positing 'The Writers' Picnic' found in *Careful, He Might Hear You*, *Edens Lost* and *Fairyland* as Elliott's primal scene of literary origination in which he returns to the details of his childhood as a negotiation of biography and creativity.⁶ I will argue that this ur-scene sees Elliott draw on the tragedy of his own orphaning to announce an alternative birth into literary life and artistic genealogy that is proleptic of his coming out in *Fairyland*. This analysis focuses on Elliott's recurrent fictionalised depiction of this, and other, biographically significant scenes associated with his orphaning and early life, as a negotiation of the delimiting spectre of his author mother, as well as with homosexuality and the closet. This consideration traces the presence of these *topoi*, arguing that Elliott's rewriting of self and origin also sees a dispersal of biographic detail in the fragmentation of literary selves, and a literal and figurative movement away from nostalgia, childhood, and Australia. Part of this discussion addresses the symbolic nature of this recurrence across a range of texts, precisely because of the way in which Elliott is seen to return, time and again, to these same formative scenes throughout his writing, in a manner that charts his changing relationship with the figure of his author mother, related to dynamics of nostalgia associated with the Australia of his youth, and bound up with his negotiation of homosexuality. Indeed, aspects of 'The Writers' Picnic' are significant to the explicit homographesis performed in Elliott's final novel *Fairyland*. The newly revealed generative potential in my identification of the queer interaction between life and fiction in this moment questions the full extent of Elliott's self-writing across the entirety of his oeuvre.⁷ I will argue that through 'The Writers' Picnic,' Elliott is seen to rewrite aspects of his earlier fiction and biography, performing a 'backwards coming out' that figures self through childhood as always already queer and other (Stockton 50). Announcing himself as born into art at the very moment of his mother's death, 'The Writers' Picnic' sees Elliott claim and reshape his mother's legacy: her absent figure, together with Katharine Susannah Prichard and Stella Miles Franklin, is drawn into a perverse trinity of literary forebears evocative of Shakespeare's *Weird Sisters*. This implicit return to the space and place of bygone Sydney and biographic childhood—in what Elspeth Probyn has termed a 'suspended beginning'—sees a renegotiation with nostalgia and the primal scene of birth. Finally locating himself in *Fairyland* in a perverse and queer genealogy of literature, 'The Writers' Picnic' is also a point where Elliott accesses childhood to 'laugh at the solemnities of origin' and manifest another more fully realised self (Probyn, *Outside* 96).

In the first iteration of the 'The Writers' Picnic,' PS, the young protagonist of *Careful, He Might Hear You*, attends an event held in honour of his deceased mother Sinden Scott. Like Elliott, PS is orphaned and his home life continues to be riven by the familial and class antagonisms of his mother's two warring sisters, his guardians: Lila the wife of a Labor politician and 'working-class darling,' and Vanessa, the remote and Edwardian companion to a wealthy and aged English relative. These figures directly correspond to Elliott's maternal aunts Jessie and Lilian, and much of the tone of the novel is set by Elliott's dramatic fictionalisation of their contrasting presences. In the award-winning 1983 film adaptation, Jessie/Vanessa is played by Wendy Hughes who portrays the character as a remote woman of sophistication and austere beauty, manifesting her neurosis as a displaced desire for PS's father, transferred onto the child in a moment of thunderstorm, hallucination, and Gothic excess (Carmody 1). A roman-à-clef focused on the opposing class aspirations embodied by Elliott's two aunts, *Careful, He Might Hear You* saw Elliott draw on his own life for the narrative, depicting these familial and class

dynamics spatially by recalling suburban Sydney and the formative elite educational institutions he attended with keen acuity. Here, Arncliffe, Banksia and Bexley are recalled and aligned with the working classes, while the eastern suburbs are depicted as an Edwardian England in miniature. Such is the fidelity of this representation that Walter Mason comments that Elliott ‘carried in his head a precise map of a disappeared Sydney of the 1930s and ‘40s which he constantly resurrected in his writing’ (‘Vanessa Berry’). For many, it is this ability to recall the space and place of Sydney of the 1930s and ‘40s that is the most remarkable feature of Elliott’s writing. Patrick White in letters to Shirley Hazzard wondered how Elliott managed this ability of recall, while noting with some derision that his writing has ‘some rather glossy stretches which let it down.’⁸ Indeed, it’s possible to tie both Elliott’s early success and his enduring status in the popular imaginary with the sense that his works nostalgically recall Sydney in this particular period.⁹ Romantically tied to a bygone era of Anglo-Australian cultural flows, this scene is also characterised by parochialism and evocative of Elliott’s rigidly conservative social and moral milieu. In ‘The Writers’ Picnic,’ Elliott is seen to consciously approach this terrain through the memory of his deceased mother, and his fictional surrogate PS—and, as I will argue, Elliott recalls that it was precisely this facet of Australian life that impelled his expatriation.

Anticipating the title of Elliott’s final novel, the scene begins: ‘Tin letters slipping sideways over the jetty said: FAIRYLAND’ (*Careful* 113). Though the young PS is dazzled by the picnic—as these people are so unlike the sturdy working class family that have thus far constituted his world—Elliott gives expression to the naivety of his fictive child-self’s view: ‘[I]t was a playground of dead picnics’ governed by a ‘woman wearing a bright dirndl handing out tickets behind a table from which hung a banner declaring: WELCOME SCRIBES AND DAUBERS’ (114). Elliott archly describes this picnic as attended by a motley assortment of writers, bohemians, socialites and enthusiasts that recall various figures from his early life in a manner that is reminiscent of the recurring tea party in Lewis Carroll’s fictional world. In the fiction, neither of PS’s aunts wanted to escort him to this event; Lila is concerned that she lacks the requisite sophistication, while Vanessa feels such an event is beneath her. In life, Elliott’s aunts Jessie and Lily were in accord about keeping ‘their sister’s memory alive in the child’s life,’ yet Jessie (recalled in the character of Vanessa in the novel) ‘disapproved of the less celebrated literary colleagues of Sumner Locke . . . many of these would be writers were bohemian . . . most lacked . . . refinement and success and were redolent of failure’ (Clarke, ‘Radio Days’ vii–xv and ‘*Writing Life*’ 57). In this frame, ‘The Writers’ Picnic’ also represents Elliott’s negotiation of Helena Sumner’s enduring presence as a literary figure, while also suggesting something of his opinion about her chosen subject matter, and status as a writer. As in the ficto-critical para-texts surrounding his publications and other ficto-biographic events throughout the oeuvre, Elliott draws on the figure and memory of ‘celebrity’ figures to both reveal and obscure matters more deeply personal. Just like the anecdote where Elliott tacitly speaks of literary hierarchy in his depiction of White’s interpellation of him as of a kind with the wayward schnauzers, this story suggests something of Elliott’s disregard for Helena Sumner’s cultural-nationalist and pro-war literary leanings—and, like later anecdotes involving figures such as John Steinbeck and Greta Garbo, this strategy of ‘celebrity’ citation works in relation to his literary self-construction, as it is also troubled and rendered dubious by associations with theatricality, and literary dynamics of the closet. In this frame, Elliott’s depiction of ‘The Writers’ Picnic’ as a scene of literary dabblers and dilettantes is both a gesture of recognition and affiliation, and of denigration and rejection—and as I will argue later, in its later incarnation in *Fairyland* this scene becomes aligned with queer associations of bohemianism and the literary arts.

Archival evidence suggests that this story is a recollection of a real event Elliott attended as a boy, escorted by organisers Katharine Susannah Prichard and Stella Miles Franklin within an explicit—and occasionally fraught—context of feminist, cultural-nationalist and political writing.¹⁰ Elliott recalls: ‘with the exception of Katharine Susannah Prichard and, of course, Miles Franklin, they were mostly hacks, flops, who were hardly ever published, living on what my aunt Blanche used to call ‘the smell of an oily rag’ (Clarke, *SLE* 56). Held to mark the posthumous publication of Helena Sumner Locke’s collected poetry, within the fiction this picnic is a key point of complication and serves as impetus for narrative conflict. Aligned with tropes of the writerly and literary sphere as radical, bohemian, egalitarian, and conversely elitist, the picnic is also a moment where Elliott draws on his theatric sensibility to make light of the predominant narrativisation of his artistic development as a continuation of his deceased mother’s legacy. The dirndl-wearing organiser Conchita states:

there *is* no P.S. . . . I know that’s what she called him . . . But there is *no* postscript to her. When she went, everything died with her . . . there can be no appendix to a work of art such as she . . . I shall call you ‘Boy.’ . . . Boy’s mother had more spunk and talent than all of us put together. She lived among us, drank us all up and then hammered us into characters on her little anvil, sending sparks up into the night. (*Careful* 126)

The depiction of this writers’ picnic as a point of origin for a literary life works to rewrite Elliott’s authorial self and reposition him as an ‘Australian author,’ and more importantly a ‘serious novelist’ trying to distance himself from his populist radio writing, and failed theatre career.¹¹ In this moment, deceased mother and orphaned child are linked through writing by the metonym of author/mother work/child in a manner reminiscent of Helena Sumner’s obituary notice:

[Helena] Sumner Locke, the well-known Australian novelist, passed away yesterday morning in a private hospital at Kogarah after giving birth to a son, and the event will be learned with widespread regret. Early this year . . . she laughingly remarked that she had but two ambitions in life—to produce a play and to produce a son. Her heart’s desire was realised with her last breath. (Andrews)

At the writers’ picnic, one attendee asks “‘Wasn’t there another book?’” “Unfinished” said Conchita, “Boy . . . someday you will finish your mother’s book for her. Will you do that?” (132). Though Elliott reportedly vacillated between ambivalence and begrudging acknowledgment of the legacy narrativisation of his artistic development, his ‘birthright’ as child of Helena Sumner afforded him friendships, literary connections and national and transnational cultural links.¹² ‘Birthing’ himself into literary life across his various ‘writers’ picnics,’ he is similarly authoring his affiliation to Katharine Susannah Prichard, Stella Miles Franklin and his connection to the social realist tradition of Australian working class, feminist, and queer writing.¹³

Today, this legacy endures in the sense that Elliott is still largely selectively read for the limited evocation of Anglo-Australian dynamics depicted in *Careful*, *He Might Hear You*, or as a very brief example of Australian-American literary production in works largely focused on Australian/English expatriation.¹⁴ Even once expatriated with a successful American life and career, the very act of Elliott’s journey to America amplified this mother/child trope in Australian accounts, reported as Elliott re-treading his mother’s journey some 40 years prior (Andrews). Many years later, the publication of *Careful*, *He Might Hear You* saw Australian

commenters and critics recall Helena Sumner and narratives of legacy despite her being virtually unheard of by this time. And yet, although it is a fictionalisation of his own much-reported orphaning and early life, *Careful, He Might Hear You* failed to capitalise on this fame, (in)famously selling only a measly seven copies domestically in its first print run compared to several thousand in Germany and the United Kingdom, and several hundred thousand in the United States as part of American Reader's Digest 'Book of the Month' (Clarke, 'Writing Life' 231–35). It was not until the 1983 release of the cinematic adaptation of *Careful, He Might Hear You* that Elliott became something of a household name in Australia. However, correspondence from this period between Elliott and Shirley Hazzard suggests ambivalence: Elliott was both proud of his success, yet also self-mocking, he writes:

Dearest Cob, I cannot wait till November to learn more about so many things, about how deep is the Patrick bile resenting me. . . The film [*Careful, He Might Hear You*] continues in eight cities and in seventeen situations around New York, opening Texas today and I believe Provincetown Mass. I have to tell you it is a hit whereas 'Phar Lap' has come and gone noiselessly, not a legend in this country and astonishing to the Aussies in both cases where I have been compared patronisingly to the horse. (Letter SLE to Shirley Hazzard 1984)

Here Elliott plays out a familiar configuration through the figure of Patrick White working as a cypher for his feelings around the reception of his work in the country of his birth that is also suggestive of Elliott's own mixed feelings about his position—or genealogy—as a writer. Indeed, correspondence between Elliott and Hazzard from the late 1970s through to White's death contains evidence of Elliott's continuing preoccupation with White's opinion.

In another sense, the mixed legacy of Elliott's intermedial prolificacy has seen his work viewed in some quarters as middlebrow fodder, while his social-realist depiction of themes of domestic drama have also seen him aligned in the popular press with 'middlebrow' authors whom he himself derided—Clarke reports that on being asked to adapt Colleen McCullough's novel *The Thorn Birds*, Elliott spoke dejectedly of the offer to a friend: 'It's absolute shit, John, and I turned them down' (Clarke, 'Writing Life' 237). Elliott recounts much the same tale in a 1977 letter to Hazzard, though goes on to claim that this rejection left him with a feeling of 'a sort of purity' (SLE to Hazzard, 6 Oct 1977). Nevertheless, there is a quality to Elliott's writing that evokes associations with the middlebrow. In a telling comparison, Walter Mason comments that Elliott's novels fit somewhere between the 'pot boiling pleasures of Colleen McCullough' and 'the high-literary explorations of Patrick White' as an example of 'middlebrow beauty' (Mason, 'Featherstone'). Amidst all this, we see another facet of the literary self-construction performed by 'The Writers' Picnic,' in the scene's negotiation of ideas and modalities of the middlebrow. In reaching back into his childhood, Elliott is seen to attempt to rewrite the narrative of his own artistic heritage and development: aligning his fictional childhood surrogate with such celebrated figures as Katherine Susannah Prichard and Stella Miles Franklin, Elliott rewrites his development as an author in a way that glosses his experience as a popular writer for radio and theatre and his mentoring by Dorris Fitton and George Edwards. In a way, Elliott was successful in this recreation and it is arguable that he is most often associated with those novels that most closely draw on details of his early life—*Careful*, *Edens Lost*, and *Water Under the Bridge*. However, these novels also contain evidence of the many years Elliott spent honing his craft as a writer and adapter in radio, and later in the then booming American live television industry. Between 1949 and 1962 Elliott was involved in the writing and adaption of over fifty plays for American television with Fred Coe's *The Goodyear Television Playhouse/The Philco Television Playhouse*, during a period coinciding with the

burgeoning of an intermedial audio-visual culture significant to our understanding of Elliott's work, and central in the formulation of many aspects of popular culture that are aligned with conceptions of camp and male homosexual identity. All of this appears to be absent in *Careful, He Might Hear You* but is in fact central to the fabric of Elliott's real and imagined narrative of artistic development in a way that we see unfurl throughout his writing life. In another sense then, the space of popular culture and the figure of the working artist in Elliott's fiction—while also being aligned with the figure of his absent author-mother—comes to provide the clearest sense of how he conceived of himself as a social and romantic being.

In returning to these moments of early life in his first novel, Elliott is not only articulating his position within a literary genealogy but recalling key conversations around his earliest writing. Like his character PS, Elliott was viewed as a postscript and his earliest successes were seen as a completion of Helena Sumner's unfinished work, with Elliott negotiating the dilemma of this inheritance: 'Stories of his mother resounded through his life as they do through his books. His own name was a constant reminder of her. . . . Clearly it was no easy matter for the boy to establish his own identity' (Clarke, 'Writing Life' 5–6). These dynamics are dramatised in *Careful, He Might Hear You* in the figure of deceased war-poet, Sinden Scott or 'Dear One,' in PS's mother, and again in the deceased author-mother figure, Victoria, in *Edens Lost*. Corresponding to Elliott's mother, Sinden, of all Elliott's fictional mothers, bears closest resemblance to Helena Sumner: 'Sinden Scott, a brave little soul cut off in her prime just when she was about to reap the harvest, enjoy the fruits, find the pot of gold' (146). Sharon Clarke describes these 'melodramatic words' as 'lifted verbatim from a memorial poem written by Randolph Bedford,' pointing out that the effect is 'one of bathos, it undercuts the sentiment, mocks the event, and ridicules the prolonged period of her mourning,' suggesting to Clarke that Elliott needed to escape links to his mother.¹⁵ Like Helena Sumner's writing, Sinden's poetry is markedly pro-nationalist, and pro-war, expressing a rigid view of hegemonic masculinity and military service. Aligned in many senses with a pro-nationalist, imperialist, and pro-war cultural terrain, Helena Sumner's works were engaged in an explicit memorialisation and celebration of warfare, mobilising tropes of Christian sacrifice which draw notions of femininity and motherhood into a symbolic schema aligned with Marian devotional imagery such as the Pietà and the Mater Dolorosa.¹⁶ In Elliott's novels, this elevated imagery is absent and he associates this modality of commemorative and nationalist writing with neurosis and abandonment, describing the writerly praxis of his various fictional author-mother composites as frenzied, crazed, and a point of unhealthy obsession. Despite this, critics and commentators often took up Sumner's and Helena Sumner's shared focus on war narratives, and many of these early accounts ignore Helena Sumner and Sumner Locke Elliott's radically opposed views of war and its thematisation in the civic religiosity of Australian nationalism.

Elliott's fiction refigures Helena Sumner's achievement as a kind of abject and neglectful fanaticism, inferring a psychopathology inextricably linked to her husband (Sumner Locke Elliott's father) Logan Elliott's military service and absence. Taking a highly critical view of the senselessness of war, Elliott's *Rusty Bugles* epitomised the boredom, restlessness and wasted potential that characterised the military experience of many servicemen who did not see combat action. As Peter Stanley writes:

Once the bombs stopped falling, Darwin became a tropical backwater, evoked by Sumner Locke Elliott's powerful play *Rusty Bugles*. It was a place of tinea where men went troppo: where the root of the troops' frustration was that Darwin was where the war wasn't. Certainly north and north-western Australia became the base for air operations over the Timor Sea, but it remained a sideshow to the main

advance made by MacArthur's drive along the north coast of New Guinea.
(Stanley 5)

The vision of war presented in *Rusty Bugles* runs counter to glorification narratives, and positions Elliott in opposition to the legacy of his mother, within a genealogy of literary military representation attuned to the unique sociality of military life, and the mental and physical trauma queer servicemen faced at the hands of their comrades and commanders.¹⁷ Arguably, then, Helena Sumner's presence and figure as an author is bound up in a retrograde cultural temporality inherently focused on death, remembrance, and the Colonial and Imperial cultural dynamics of the past. In Elliott's mind, the discomfort the orphaned child of *Careful, He Might Hear You* expressed toward the culture of military memorialisation recalled his own feelings of shame and ambivalence around his parents' absence, and the constant reminders of his mother's legacy. In another sense, the premature death of Helena Sumner during Sumner Locke Elliott's birth cannot be overlooked as it comes to dominate Elliott's depiction of the heteronormative and maternal, where family homes are uncanny and mothers (particularly in *Edens Lost, Waiting for Childhood, Going and Fairyland*) depicted as absent or abandoning their children. And yet Elliott clearly draws on the figure of his deceased mother and her friendships and connections in ambivalent and ambiguous ways. In Elliott's later works, figures evocative of these women come to signify an affiliation, if not a self-writing of kinship, with this genealogy of writing—a kinship which has been occluded by identifications of belatedness and nostalgia, and the nature of the commemorative legacy narrative that dominates accounts of his works.¹⁸

Elliott's literary fixation on the moment of death as the beginning of artistic life has directed critical focus to the operations of nostalgia in his work. His works are best known today for their evocation of a now lost Sydney and a record of prior dynamics of Anglo-Australian cultural exchange. However, the manner in which Elliott negotiates the past has not been addressed, as a result of the prior critical focus on the fictionalised depiction of the death of Elliott's mother and the negotiation of her artistic legacy of commemorative nationalism. Elliott remarks: 'People do tend to take my Australianness for granted because of books like *Careful, He might Hear You*. But I am rather an expatriate in that I write better about the place away from it' ('Pleasing Yourself' 104). In a 1988 article, Elliott 'objects strenuously' to identifications of his work as nostalgic, turning to nostalgia as meaning 'homesickness, a sentimental or morbid yearning for the past' he states:

I have never had a twinge of homesickness . . . the past being generally the reason that I fled Australia. . . . [I]t is the combination of memory and fiction that makes a story more readable than the account of even some sensational event told with every facet of truth . . . there must be a trace of nostalgia in all memory, but even memory is fiction. ('Against Nostalgia' 9–12)

In his Introduction to the republished *Fairyland*, Dennis Altman argues that Elliott's works were, in many ways, too late and too early. Belated and no longer shocking or radical in his late-career evocation of queer life in *Fairyland*, Elliott's earlier fiction (especially *Careful*) were, conversely, always-already nostalgic by the very nature of their focus on Elliott's early life, depicting a 'backwater' period of Sydney existing some 30 years' distance from their publication (*Fairyland* xii).

Edens Lost is arguably best known today for its depiction of the place and space of bygone Sydney, however, the novel's negotiation of the subjects of childhood, the family and the development of the psyche reveal an unrecognised modernity in Elliott's writing. Belied by

humour reminiscent of Elliott's radio and television writing and its 'middlebrow themes,' this novel also bears evidence of the significance of Elliott's homosexuality to his expatriation, American life, networks, and literary connections, and illustrates the development of his treatment of this subject in his narratives of origin and interiority. Recalling *Careful, He Might Hear You*, Elliott begins *Edens Lost* with 'The Writers' Picnic.' Although departing from this familiar scene of 'The Writers' Picnic,' the second half of the novel sees Elliott take on the identity of Beatrice St James to muse on the possibility of love, and what it might mean to live the life of a writer.¹⁹ Hardly read in Australia, let alone written about, *Edens Lost* also reveals the influence of Elliott's radio writing, his career in live TV, and the theatre, on his writing as a novelist, illustrated in his skilled experimentation in characterisation, narrative perspective, and slick and humorous dialogue. In many ways, *Edens Lost* seems to have been treated like many of Elliott's later novels that are set predominantly in America, with full recognition of these works stymied by a critical misperception informed by a false dichotomy of differentiated national/global settings.²⁰ However, by identifying *Edens Lost* as a distinctly intermedial novel of the mid-twentieth century, we are able to reread the novel in relation to its shared Australian and American settings and references, which articulates the way that the modernity and proto-transnationalism of the novel also obliquely gestures to the queer/closeted particulars of Elliott's own expatriation. In this frame, it is possible to read Elliott's closeted evocation of stymied and forestalled queer desire through the character of Beatrice, as a consideration of Elliott's literary self-construction, his self-perception as a writer, and the literary presence of his American life and networks.

Recalling *Careful, He Might Hear You*, *Edens Lost* begins with the Sydney funeral of Angus's mother, the celebrated author and absent and abject maternal figure, Victoria, who is seen off by a cortege of bohemian literati reminiscent of the cast of 'The Writers' Picnic.' Unlike *Careful, He Might Hear You* or *Fairyland*, the narrative perspective of *Edens Lost* is divided between the orphaned and culturally aspirational Angus, the austere and sophisticated Eve St James, and her precocious and self-consciously dowdy daughter, Beatrice St James. In this frame, these characters are linked to Elliott, Helena Sumner and perhaps even Katharine Susannah Prichard and Stella Miles Franklin, and Elliott's revisiting of these formative scenes and moments sees a reconsideration of the theme of real and imagined origins. At first, Elliott leads the reader to believe that Angus is our protagonist: like PS, he is depicted as marked by tragedy reminiscent of Elliott's own experience, and the opening section of the novel is focalised through Angus's perspective of the funeral and his meeting with the St James family. Taking up the invitation of Eve, a well-to-do though eccentric connection of his mother, Angus moves to a half-decrepit simulacrum of the Hydro Majestic Hotel owned by the St James Family in the Blue Mountains. Of course, the real Hydro Majestic is also marked by associations of theatricality, eccentricity, inauthenticity, and colonial pretension—a famous architectural chimera, the hotel is made up of cobbled together buildings from several periods and dressed with clashing ephemera drawn from all corners of the Colonial world. From its inception, the Hydro Majestic was seen in some quarters as a kind of 'theme park' simulacra, a tacky colonial reimagining of the luxury of an 'old world hotel.' In *Edens Lost*, the hotel is surrounded by pristine bushland and is presided over by the ailing Judge St James—a figure explicitly recalling the judge who pronounced on Elliott's childhood custody case, upending any stability in his young life. Angus is struck by the vibrancy and potential in the landscape, and he believes this beauty is mirrored in the St James family. As the novel progress, Elliott reveals this to be the scene of a 'Writers' Picnic' in miniature, and the self-complicated lives of the St James family and their upper-class pretence is mirrored in the displaced squalor and grandeur of the hotel. Elliott brings this opening section of the novel to an abrupt close in a manner that is evocative of the tension and hysteria of the Gothic thunderstorm in *Careful, He Might Hear You*. Through

a series of melodramatic events and veiled conversations, Elliott reveals half-known secrets about the lies and adultery that bind together the St James family. Shown to be held in a precarious stasis of quasi-colonial nostalgia and aristocratic decay structured by Judge St James's un-life of constant forgetting, the family is thrown into sharp contrast to their surrounds and is revealed now as more like the displaced and decaying edifice of the hotel than the teeming bushland.

This is where similarities to *Careful, He Might Hear You* end, and the novel begins to anticipate *Fairyland*, as Elliott disperses intimate details of his biography through his characters, manifesting another literary self through a series of gender inversions that also recur in later novels. Midway through *Edens Lost*, and toward the end of the Second World War, Elliott's focus shifts to Beatrice St James. Drawing more clearly on aspects of his life in radio and television, and evidencing a more expansive roster of scenes and settings (including some from America), *Edens Lost* sees a clear embrace of the possibilities Elliott felt a life in America would afford. Vitally, Elliott figures these possibilities through a schema of representation of social space and social temporality, juxtaposing the nostalgic watercolour of Part I, to the retrograde and 'brown' tone of the novel's return to war-time Sydney in Part II, to the celluloid modernity of America in Part III, depicting the immediate post-war era and the pent emotion of a society not yet recovering from war. Recalling the same period depicted in the posthumously published fragment *Radio Days* (1993), this section of the novel faithfully evokes the frenetic energy and precarity of the then burgeoning radio industry, and depicts Elliott's genesis as a writer in the 'millhouse' of George Edwards's production company (Clarke, 'Radio Days' vii). As the reluctant writer of a series of hugely successful radio dramas, Beatrice is clearly invested with biographic markers drawn from Elliott's pre-war life. As Dennis Altman remarks:

I read *Edens Lost* when it was first published, in the early days of gay liberation, both knowing and not knowing that only a gay man could have written this book. In fact neither the protagonist, who is clearly Elliott himself, nor any other significant character is homosexual, and the book contains some unpleasant gibes at those who are assumed to be. But rereading *Edens Lost*, I felt it was clear that Elliott threw a great deal of his own experiences and emotions into the characters, and the book is dominated by complex and unhappy women caught up in relationships they cannot always control. Elliott may appear to be Angus, but he expresses his deepest feelings through the smart but unattractive daughter Bea, whose infatuation for an American serviceman is crushed as cruelly as was Elliott's own. (Altman, 'Crushed' 1)

In her public persona as D.K. Durfee the radio writer, Beatrice presents as romantically experienced, insightful and world weary—most people think 'D.K. Durfee sounds like a man'—while in private life Beatrice sees herself as still a child: 'a big, ovine, placid, cool-eyed girl with plaited blond hair' (*Edens Lost* 92–93). Frustrated by the societal dictates of her time, Beatrice seems dislocated and outside the networks of attraction and sexual exchange that constitute the social world of American officers and Australian women. Wryly (though obliquely) obscuring a wartime affair with an American G.I., Elliott transposes this desire onto Beatrice who is disappointed by the callousness of the G.I. Awakened to the sexual world, Beatrice is no longer able to write her radio plays; she spends her time obsessively haunting bars and hotels looking for the G.I.

In *Edens Lost*, Elliott is seen to negotiate his sexuality through Beatrice. By recalling his years working as a scriptwriter for George Edwards through the figure of Beatrice, Elliott is able to write covertly of his own romantic disappointment. Like Elliott, Beatrice perceives her work at the studio as drudgery, and feels it is beneath her intelligence and abilities; the ridiculous fantasy of the material she produces causes a deep ennui in her. And yet, Elliott suggests that it is precisely Beatrice's inexperience of the world—and her naivety relating to 'romance' and men—that allows her to produce these much-desired scripts at such a prodigious rate: 'she couldn't explain her odd powers. The stuff flowed out of her. . . . she could never remember what she had said, it was gone from her in the instant of being created' (93). Beatrice's skill is depicted as a form of auto-writing, tied to a strange caveat: the moment her attention is drawn toward (even the suggestion of) a 'real romance,' her capabilities as a writer diminish and her work suffers; deploying a similar configuration in other accounts of the writer's craft, Elliott draws on an interconnected sense of social/romantic distraction as writer's block in other scenes of writerly genesis, genealogy, and social displacement. Beatrice thinks: 'the fact was that everyone said she knew nothing about real people and that this was what so phenomenally unhampered D.K. Durfee' (151). While this subplot seems a fairly conventional depiction of the vexed post-war life of a woman worker/writer, ever-constrained by patriarchy, Elliott's choice of inspiration for Beatrice's abortive romance recalls the specific details of one of his own post-war affairs.²¹ This event recalls details described in Clarke's biography and in later interviews of Elliott's immediate post-war plans to rendezvous with a former American lover he'd met during service—significantly, although Elliott had reportedly been on the list of potential immigrants with the US embassy from at least 1936, it is also implied this affair was another factor in his eagerness for expatriation to the United States.²² Like Elliott, Beatrice is disappointed by the soldier's failure to show at their planned meeting, and also like Elliott, Beatrice is later dismayed to hear that the soldier is to be married. In Beatrice's case, this is as much an augury of her own sense of undesirability as it is of the encroaching return of pre-war domesticity, hetero-romantic social primacy, and her coming exclusion from independence and the workforce. For Elliott, the event is recalled with a kind of tragic acceptance, and the sense that this socially stymied and constrained experience of sexuality and romance is to be his 'lot' as a homosexual man: importantly, this is one of the few scenes in the earlier novels tied to moments specifically relating to Elliott's own romantic life.

By conveying this experience through Beatrice's seemingly puerile narrative, Elliott encapsulates the tragic and incisive revelations of post-war, pre-Stonewall life in conventionality. Through Beatrice, Elliott veils his queer critique in registers associated with the middlebrow domains of celebrity appreciation and gossip, central to many mid-century constructions of both the denigrated realms of female life and art, and the space of male homosexuality, shame, camp, and the closet. *Edens Lost* articulates these dynamics as it moves from post-war Sydney to America, glossing over any clear resolution to Beatrice's disappointment and the trace of Elliott's own forestalled romance. Instead, Elliott turns to the glitzy-modernity and posturing of a reduced St James family in exile. Beatrice is absent from this frame, and through cattish diversion, Elliott is seen here to gesture to another modality of the closeting he performs around his private life—turning to gossip, the St James's in exile do not speak of Beatrice's career as a success but an abnormality; her status as a writer casts her as a failure of heteronormative domesticity and womanhood. Now residing in one of the homes of Stevie's American husband, Eve, and a prematurely aged and paunchy Angus, orbit Stevie's life in a perverse redux of their years at the Hydro Majestic. The plot of this final section of the novel continues to adhere superficially to seemingly conventional subjects of the family drama. At the same time, Elliott's writing of matters of marriage and adultery in the context of modern America draws on a vague and undisclosed sense of sexual freedom as social transgression in

contrast to the vilification Beatrice faced in Australia—indeed, after the abortive consummation of Bea’s one-sided affair with Corey the American G.I., she is harangued from the hotel and told not to ‘ever show her face in here again.’ ‘*Honi soit,*’ Beatrice replies, as she’s told to keep her ‘gutter language’ to herself (183). And yet, despite the frequent encoding of America as an exemplar of choice, opportunity and personal freedom, in Elliott’s oeuvre, in many senses, it is this facet of Elliott’s life that remains more shrouded in mystery than any other. Though Elliott later framed his homosexuality as central to his expatriation, he is taciturn about what this meant for his romantic and sexual life: indeed, though enjoying a long-term relationship in later life with the Hitchcock screenwriter, Whitfield Cook, it was not until *Fairyland* that Elliott was able to clearly connect his own romantic experiences to those depicted in his novels. Like Beatrice, Elliott is seen to repeatedly obscure intimate discussion in favour of his characteristically hilarious—though also often seemingly trivial—celebrity stories, mimicking those strategies of self-deferral and distraction illustrated in his negotiation of White’s slight, discussed in the introduction to this essay. Here, we see a key register of Elliott’s textual closeting in the configuration of self and self-revelation as literary footnote, addendum, and penumbra.

By the time *Fairyland* came to press in 1990, Elliott was at the very end of an enduring literary life and had been all but forgotten domestically. *Fairyland* sees Elliott perform a fictional coming out as he re-stages his childhood, once again returning readers to ‘The Writers’ Picnic’ and Sydney of *Careful*, *He Might Hear You*, *Edens Lost* and the 1930s and 40s. Republished for the first time in Australia in 16 years by Text Classics in 2012, this potential moment of reappraisal of Elliott’s life and work has largely been ignored. Elegising maternal abandonment and reflecting on social displacement, the *bildungsroman* *Fairyland* recalls now recognisably characteristic and formative themes found throughout Elliott’s oeuvre, as it also completes the story of PS and Elliott’s life—remarking to Kate Jennings that ‘*Careful* and *Fairyland* are the closest to my life,’ Elliott reveals that *Fairyland* depicts ‘the same boy later on, which is quite obvious’ (Jennings, *Trouble* 109). Performing a form of ‘backwards coming out’ through the figure of Seaton Daly—what Kathryn Bond Stockton identifies as a process of self-(re)writing that remakes ordinary narratives of selfhood by describing a queer childhood—*Fairyland* depicts Elliott’s closeted homosexuality as vital to an understanding of his life, his expatriation, and his writing.²³ Indeed, Elliott’s representation of Sydney in *Fairyland* is a refusal of all identifications of nostalgia: in his introduction to the republished novel, Altman describes Elliott revealing that he believed ‘Australia was a homophobic, “puritan,” “wowser”-ridden country,’ with an arts scene ‘fifty years behind the times’ (Altman, ‘Scenes’ xi). As a record of closeted queer life, Seaton is a figure who is doubly outside the conservative, class driven, homophobic and bigoted nostalgia of Australian society. Traversing the queer underground of 1940s Sydney, Seaton’s transgressions are mapped onto bygone spaces of Australia seen throughout the oeuvre: revealing a love affair with a closeted officer during active service in Mataranka, Seaton believes he has become inculcated with an understanding of Australian masculinity—he has a liaison with an unlikely figure in Sydney’s Marble Bar, and is later brutally bashed in the Wynyard station beat. This analysis draws on this, and other autobiographical moments, to reveal Elliott’s depiction of Australia in terms of a critique of the parochial and homophobic aspects of cultural nationalism. Within this rubric, Elliott’s Sydney is attuned to the secrecy and violence of queer life, replete with its own customs, language and hierarchies.²⁴ The representation of Seaton Daly as coming into this world (and eventually fleeing its violence) draws together the diverse elements of Elliott’s early and late life, and his influences from across the various networks and modalities of his artistic production.

In rewriting the foundational moments of his fiction, *Fairyland* also draws Elliott's writing into a genealogy of now (largely) lost proto-queer novels that represents a period of transition in the working-class and queer sociality of the vanishing suburbs and haunts of Kings Cross, Darlinghurst and Surry Hills. Recent work by Gary Wotherspoon provides a lineage of these novels and an articulation of their coded representation, while Jeremy Fisher's work describes the marketing, production and even censorship of such works as intertwined with the politics of colonial and heteronormative mediation and censorship of nonconformist gender/sexual representation. In this frame, and much like the novels of Tsiolkas, *Fairyland*'s representation of Sydney also sees a depiction of many now-vanishing modes of queer sociality and spaces of male homosexual congress (Moore, 'Poofs'). Elliott depicts the urban and suburban underworld of beat culture—a cultural terrain vaguely gestured to in *Careful, He Might Hear You*—as a potential site of homophobic violence, yet one that is also inherently resistant to delimiting identity categories in its facilitation of anonymous and polymorphous erotic flows. Wotherspoon usefully delineates the nature of the beat, claiming:

Technically, any place for picking up other men constitutes a 'beat': however, the term was less often used to refer to hotels, restaurants and coffee shops (although it occasionally—and not incorrectly—was). Usually the word was confined to those outdoor areas where meetings and pick-ups could take place. There were also a larger number of these outdoor beats around Sydney. Once again they had to fulfil several criteria: there had to be a legitimate reason why men would be there, and they had to be places where one could legitimately strike up a conversation with another person—to ask for a light, for example, or ask the time. These were the opening moves in what might or might not become a pick-up, depending on the range of responses from the other party. (*City* 67)

As in Vidal's ground-breaking novels, *The City and the Pillar* (1948) and *Myra Breckenridge* (1968), or Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964), the depiction of these social-sexual spaces and practices work as more than titillation, representing the way these heterotopias worked as vital points of human connection operating counter to the confines of restrictive suburban 'normalcy.' Today, the legacy of closeted subjectivities and taboo sexualities is increasingly precarious, partly because these practices fundamentally trouble the heteronormative-capitalist nexus that is the basis of modern society, and partly because of recent political movements toward greater social acceptance have seen many of these formerly vital spaces and practices consigned to the margins within the marginality of queer history.

In a form of confessional autobiographic writing, Elliott replays and remakes previously depicted moments of the life, with a newly revealed critical perspective of Australia. As with the 'weird sisterhood' of Helena Sumner, Katherine Susannah Prichard, and Stella Miles Franklin associated with artistic genesis and literary self-construction in 'The Writers' Picnic' of *Careful, He Might Hear You*, the rewriting of this moment in *Fairyland* also sees a self-writing of kinship that speaks to the queer valences of the bohemian, and literary spheres. Recalling 'The Writers' Picnic,' *Fairyland* opens with the young Seaton being taken by ferry to a picnic in Sydney's North Shore. Seeing a sign directing him to 'Fairyland,' Seaton asks about this and is told by a jocular passer-by of the 'Manly Fairies'—a geographic and sexual pun beyond the child's ken. Although Seaton cannot make sense of this reference, a reader attuned to the history of Sydney's queer underground would understand the allusion to the Manly Ferry Wharf that was the site of a well frequented and famous beat in Elliott's time (Knobel). While male homosexual beat culture also features later in Elliott's *Fairyland*, this depiction sees an alignment with scenes of literary origins (occurring in the recurrent *topos* of

the ‘writers’ picnic’) and the manifestation of a narrative of queer childhood. Stockton demonstrates how all children are queer constructs retroactively endowed with an ‘innocence/knowledge’ that estranges the (queer) child from the average adult (Stockton, *Queer Child* 8). Indeed, the gay child is only possible once the grown adult announces the death of his or her ‘straight life,’ thereby retroactively erasing their ‘straight childhood,’ creating what Stockton calls a ‘backward birth’ that positions the individual’s gay childhood in a temporality that is always already out of joint (Stockton, *Queer Child* 54–55, 193–98). Stockton’s troubling of narratives of heteronormativity, linear progression, and development through the ‘backwards’ temporality of the queer child, works ‘to prick (deflate, or just delay) the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up, and do so by exploring the many kinds of sideways growth depicted by twentieth-century texts’ (Stockton, *Queer Child* 11). In this frame, the coded reference to a beat culture the child Seaton could never know, coupled with a barely coded reference to queer sexuality, draws Elliott into a tradition of representing non-conformity, particularly of gender and sexuality (in the ostensible un-sexuality of the child) as a fey, supernatural, and otherworldly quality. Like the child protagonists of Kenneth ‘Seaforth’ Mackenzie’s or Boyd’s fictions, Elliott’s child figures unknowingly transgress boundaries of normative masculinity and heterosexuality by the very nature of their precocity, creativity, and emotional sophistication. Recalling the language and imagery of White’s self-description as a ‘changeling’—voiced in *Flaws in the Glass* through the figure of his mother Ruth—as interconnected with his literary coming out and sense of a self as a writer, Elliott’s *Fairyland* also refigures ficto-autobiographic scenes of artistic genesis, explicitly connecting these spaces with thematic markers of otherworldly perception, nascent otherness, and homosexuality (White, *Flaws* 46). Later in the novel, Seaton speaks in this language, remarking that among ‘these people’ he was a ‘changeling’ (34).²⁵

In returning to these scenes, Elliott is recalling the displacement and ostracism he would have experienced as a young queer man in a hypermasculine and homophobic cultural milieu. That Elliott perceived his early life, sexuality, war experience and expatriation as interrelated has arguably been obscured and occluded by the shibboleth of the author/mother, work/child trope discussed earlier in this essay. Tellingly, the characteristic trope of self-authoring into literary life through connections gained from a deceased writerly mother is absent from *Fairyland*. Elliott’s depiction of Sydney and Australia in *Fairyland* does not see a negotiation with the maternal, but the conception of self as writer through personal experience coinciding with queer becoming and consummation. Finding guidance among the ‘closet cases’ and aged shop-boys populating Sydney’s department stores, Seaton learns of the *materialities* of homosexuality and gay male culture from figures evocative of nineteenth century tropes of the Sedgwickian bachelor:

Large photographs, yellowed now and dim, of naked boys on some Greek island. Hot and incensed at the presumption, Seaton could only stand sweating while Mr. Lemoyne turned the pages. Not outward obscenity, no out-and-out sexual calisthenics had been recorded, but the implication was worse; the artificiality of love had been implied in the groupings of the naked boys, some with garlands of flowers in their hair, their hands reaching toward each other in beseeching attitudes of lust and the requitement of it, standing beside ponds or in front of waterfalls, seated on rocks in twos and threes, their pubescent genitals translucent as white grapes. Becalmed by concupiscence, they gazed at each other with subdued melancholy; some held lyres in their hands, some offered fruit. They all looked like Accomplished frauds.

‘Pure art,’ breathed Mr. Lemoyne heavily, and to Seaton’s horror, he put an arm on his shoulder, enticing him into the Grecian isles. ‘Not all would agree but fortunately mercy is above their sceptred sway, wouldn’t you say dear Seaton? These are the young Apollos in their virginal prime, caught in the instant they awoke to the music of the bacchanal perhaps, anyway to some music heard only by a few, as you and I are only too well aware. If you will allow me to quote the tragically ill-famed Oscar who was sent to prison for it, it is the love that dare not speak its name.’ (70)

Clearly paralleling the allusive language of the closet, Elliott draws together male homosexual desire and Classical culture—‘the Grecian isles . . . young Apollos.’ Imbuing this scene with senses of theatricality and pretension at once evocative of the high canonicity of Wilde, Elliott calls on this citation of the Classical world to evoke those coded associations of closeted subjectivity as a scene of ‘Accomplished frauds’ using ‘Pure art’ and the figure of Wilde to accost young men. As in *Edens Lost* and the stories of *Radio Days*, this depiction is vaguely derisive while at the same expressing a sense of affection, affiliation, and sympathy for these figures. Indeed, Seaton is seen to embrace parts of this life taking up the witticism, knowingness, and cultural intelligence of camp, and theatricality. Eventually moving into spheres of professional writing associated with advertising, Seaton gains the ability to leave Australia and live a more open life, made possible by the inclusivity and community epitomised in the symbol of the global city of New York. We might say then, that whereas Elliott’s earlier renegotiations of his literary ur-scene in *Careful, He Might Hear You* and *Edens Lost* are structured by death and preterition, and the figure of his mother, *Fairyland* embraces queer sociality and connects itself to queer history in ways not explicitly seen in the earlier novels. In another sense, the novel’s correspondence to life reinforces Elliott’s depiction of Seaton as coming into queer self-knowledge through friendships with figures who (though they may be accused of being crass stereotypes) speak to forgotten histories and subjectivities of closeted desire, as it also works alongside his depiction of Seaton as discovering his homosexual identity through the taboo and illicit experience of beat culture.

Alongside this gentler evocation of queer identity, Elliott articulates the threat, and later reality, of homophobic violence. Figures explicitly evocative of tropes of stereotypical Australian manhood represent a constantly beguiling threat and attraction, charging scenes of eroticism with the spectre of danger and scenes of potential danger with the trace of eroticism. Building towards Seaton’s bashing in the Wynyard station beat, Elliott depicts a series of failed pick-ups that brilliantly characterise this ambiguous potential of eroticism/violence that structure anonymous and closeted encounters. Part of this danger and violence is clearly embodied in the discrete figure of Seaton’s assaulter; at the same time, Elliott also gives broader expression to the potentially violent ambiguity of the homoerotic undertow of hegemonic Australian masculinity. Here, Elliott embodies the homosocial narrative of national origins and belonging in the figure of the jackeroo drinking a schooner in Sydney’s Marble Bar.

Leaning against the wall near him, thin as tin, gaunt, the sun of years burned into the deep-lined flesh of the face, unshaven under the wide-brimmed dirty hat, a jackeroo perhaps, boundary rider from out west probably, cattle or sheep country, the ultimate in manhood, the shearer, maybe, who, drunk, would knock your head off in the country pub over a slight disagreement because his type lives in action not words, the epitome of raw, brazen, outdoor paddocks Australia. For a few moments their eyes met and then, shockingly, unbelievably, the boundary rider winked at him, surreptitiously winked, and the wink was as daring as nudity in

the street, concupiscent and inviting. The wink as good as said, come on over here a minute, cobber, and I'll give you the sweetest feel of your darling little arse. (145)

A (not so) subtle gesture of critique and recognition of the elided historic homo-social/sexual history of 'mateship,' Seaton Daly's imagined intercourse with the embodied national archetype is a deeply queer, satirical gesture towards heteronormative and masculine notions of national belonging. Charged with potential violence and eroticism, this depiction humanises the archetypal figure, undermining the hetero-masculinist mythos surrounding this representative body, reminding us of the realities and lived experience of polymorphous sexuality occurring within the perverse logics of hetero-masculine heterotopia.²⁶ To put this differently, Elliott articulates those secret histories and experiences of male homosocial/homosexual bonding and experimentation that occur within paradigmatically 'masculine' or heteronormative spaces like the military, boarding school, and the seminary.

The capacity of a sly wink to elicit shared connection is also undercut by the potential danger of misrecognition, and Elliott clearly articulates this through the circumstances of Seaton being savagely bashed in the Wynyard Station beat known as 'Gomorra' (199):

So Gomorra. Gomorra was the underground station Men's at Wynyard, all that subterranean white-tiled netherland of yellow lighting and where the men assumed monumental nonchalance, standing around the white porcelain fixtures like mannequins, heads up innocently, pretending not to be looking down or sideways, but wanton, taking unearthly time buttoning up, darting lightning glances at one another with faces as immobile as marble but playing the game Rat called 'a tisket, a tasket, let's see what's in your basket.' Others less daring were lined up at the wash basins, washing and rewashing their hands, all the time watching in the mirror what might be going on behind their backs and late in the evening when few were there it often could be observed that there were two pairs of feet to be seen under the door of one of the pay toilets. But there was an unspoken code of behaviour. . . . One never contravened the myth of sanctity that hung over the washroom like the reek of disinfectant. Outside was different, in the margarine light. (199)

As Moore identifies, beat culture is 'at the core of male homosexuality in Australia in both its pre- and post-liberation forms' and although dangerous and 'in and out of vogue, they are a way of life for many homosexual and bisexual men' (Moore, 'Poofs' 324). Here, Elliott gives expression to the reality that beats 'attract their share of openly gay males . . . but most of the users are heterosexually identified Australians' and that beats are 'integral to the sexual web binding together both closeted and uncloseted homosexual men, as well as both homosexual men and homosexually active non-homosexual men, cutting across all ages, classes, and races' (Moore, 'Poofs' 322). Indeed, 'a breathless middle-aged businessman had once taken Seaton and surprised him by adding that he did not have much time because "I have to meet my daughter"' (200). Like Vidal's break-out work *The City and the Pillar* (1948) or Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964), *Fairyland* brings a degree of candour and realism to the depiction of this world, in ways that were still viewed as shocking and radical in Australian writing at this time, as clearly evidenced by the popular and critical response to this same terrain in Christos Tsiolkas's *Loaded* some five years later in 1995.²⁷

Standing as a meditation of parochial bygone Sydney, *Fairyland* is also an evocation and celebration of the tribulations of mid-century queer life. Represented through memories and fictional temporalities of childhood that are marked by familial and class displacement, so too is the nation marked as a displacing hostile milieu. Within this reoriented sense of Elliott's life, *Fairyland* draws New York and the United States into exchange with Australia by articulating the social forces that led Elliott to flee Australia. In drawing attention to the occluded and specifically queer dynamics of Elliott's literature, this essay reinvigorates understanding of Elliott's writing. Proffering new readings of *Edens Lost* and *Radio Days* alongside a reconsideration of *Careful*, *He Might Hear You* and *Fairyland*, the work I have undertaken in the research and writing of this essay speaks to the exciting scope and potential for new analysis of Elliott's full significance. Vitaly, *Fairyland* suggests the unrecognised significance of Elliott's presence in American televisual and cinematic cultures. In this frame, a renewed perspective on Elliott's self-writing as an intertwining of Australian and American experience offers new, vital and generative perspective on multiple aspects of Elliott's fiction. As Elliott's final literary artefact and definitive authorial expression of the details of his own life, the novel collapses borders of time and space, modifying claims to the ostensible biographic authenticity of all ficto-biographic expressions throughout Elliott's oeuvre. Indeed, the newly revealed connections between Elliott's novels accessed through 'The Writers' Picnic' call for the reconsideration of his fiction. In another sense, by drawing attention to this space of childhood as a site of literary self-construction, my reading has articulated a thematic progression across Elliott's fiction, working to unmake artificial and delimiting divisions in critical appraisal between Elliott's Australian/American fictions, thus uniting and enhancing understanding of his commercial-artistic production in American live television, the many artistic and celebrity networks he moved in, and his writing for the theatre and later the novel. By drawing these frames together, I have illustrated that attention to this dynamic of writing self through writing childhood in 'The Writers' Picnic,' enhances understanding of the flows of appreciation, recognition and legacy around Elliott's expatriation, his fiction, and his place in our literary culture.

NOTES

¹ David Marr recounts in a footnote that White claimed that Elliott never spoke to him again after winning the prize, intimating that a misunderstanding led to a delay in Elliott receiving the \$9,500, causing some ill-will (*Letters* 525).

² A different version of this story appears in Dennis Altman's introduction to the republished *Fairyland*. Altman claims that director Neil Armfield told David Marr the story, who then told Altman (viii). Also differing from White's account of the evening is his letter to R. Stow cited in Marr, *Letters* (499, 504); and Elliott to Kate Jennings (102–12).

³ The introductions to two relatively recent works on Australian-American transnational cultural flows delineate the historic elision of this relationship in scholarship: Dixon and Birns's *Reading Across the Pacific*, and Paul Giles's *Antipodean America*.

⁴ Dennis Altman's *Gore Vidal's America* features Elliott as a literal and figurative footnote (12, 176–78); Clarke's biography includes personal statements from Elaine Steinbeck and Shirley Hazzard describing their respective friendships (ix, xi, 195–96, 248, 251); Elliott recounts his meeting with Steinbeck and his friendship with Elaine in 'You Must Like Your Work.' Brigitta Olubas writes: 'Hazzard's friendships with expatriate Australian writers provide yet another perspective on her ongoing engagement with Australia and Australians. Most important of these was Sumner Locke Elliott, whose writing career, like Hazzard's, belonged largely to the years of his expatriation, although unlike hers, his was supported by prolific writing for stage and television.' ('Home and Away' 537).

⁵ Alomes's *When London Calls*; Bennett and Pender's *From a Distant Shore* feature Helena Sumner and Elliott briefly (65), focusing on an account of WWII and Anglo-Australian paradigms, in which Elliott is mentioned in relation to an emerging culture of 'original Australian plays' (19).

⁶ Geoffrey Dutton excerpted this section of *Careful*, in his 1966 anthology *Modern Australian Writing*.

⁷ I'm referring here to the writing and reading practices discussed and identified in the Preface and Introduction to Edelman's *Homographesis*; see also pp.49–52, 62–63.

⁸ White to Shirley Hazzard and Frances Steegmuller, Melbourne 2 Oct. 1977 (Marr, *Letters* 499).

⁹ In a letter to Shirley Hazzard and Francis Steegmuller, Patrick White mused that it is 'strange how Sydney stays so wonderfully fresh in [Elliott's] mind' (Marr, *Letters* 409).

¹⁰ Ferrier's *As Good as a Yarn with You: Letters* (103–04, 207, 251) offers evidence in support of the suggestion that Elliott's links to Miles Franklin and Katherine Susannah Prichard in early life had an impact on the form and content of his later novel-writing.

¹¹ Sharon Clarke suggests that Elliott's turn to novel-writing was finally catalysed by the failure of his Broadway debut production, 'Buy Me Blue Ribbons.' In Australia, Elliott's career as a successful screen adaptor and live television writer was all but unknown, and what little memory people had of him was associated both with the success and controversy of *Rusty Bugles* and his earlier 'middlebrow' work in radio.

¹² In an interview with Clyde Packer, Elliott frames his expatriation to America in relation to his mother, suggesting that he was 'drawn there from the womb,' owing to her own much-publicised solo journey across continental America during her pregnancy, while searching for an American publisher.

¹³ Elliott has been read in queer canonical formations by Dessaix, and identified by Barlow and Dale, and Dennis Altman ('Crushed'), as holding potential for queer re-readings.

¹⁴ As discussed, the framing of Elliott within expatriate criticism, focused on Anglo-Australianism, has resulted in the occlusion of key queer dynamics in Elliott's writing. Simon Schofield highlights the degree to which class, sex, and gender bias may potentially play into the production of these critical narratives, suggesting that the occlusion of queer figures has to do with a desire to avoid sexuality (for example, in discussions of Roy de Maistre, White, and Boyd) or an inability to reconcile (queer) life and work, which reifies already established critical narratives.

¹⁵ Cited in Sharon Clarke's PhD thesis, 'Sumner Locke Elliott: writing life' U of Wollongong 1995 (20).

¹⁶ A survey of Helena Sumner's earlier works reveals a transition in her writing coinciding with the First World War, from short stories predominantly focused on romantic scenarios around courting and marriage to works focusing on war, the military, and themes of honour and duty. Some examples include: 'Men' (1914), 'Mobilising Johnnie' (1915), 'The Hardest Fight' (1915), and 'The One Shall be Taken—' (1916).

¹⁷ This canon might include Leonard Mann's *Flesh in Armour* (1932), Martin Boyd's *When Blackbirds Sing* (1962), Randolph Stow's *The Merry-go-round in the Sea* (1963), William Nagle's *The Odd Angry Shot* (1975), David Malouf's *The Great World* (1990), and Alan Seymour's play *The One Day of the Year* (1958) (Garton, 'Marked Men' 110).

¹⁸ Even recently perpetuated in Bruce Elder's 'Literary Links' (3).

¹⁹ Clarke remarks in her introduction to the recent Text republication of *Careful, He Might Hear You*, that Elliott 'inscribes much of his own experience in the character of Bea St James, a successful radio writer whose fame and creative talent are of little consolation in a life torn by family deficiencies and disappointing personal relationships' (x).

²⁰ Recent works that are part of a broader 'transnational turn' in Australian literature, such as those of Giles; Dixon and Birns; Olubas on Shirley Hazzard; and Morrison on Christina Stead, have been instructive in seeing how traditional configurations of expatriation focusing on Anglo-Australian dynamics delimit analysis of works by writers whose lives and work touch and connect multiple nations and modalities of un/belonging, offering the transnational (and even the cosmopolitan) as a more generative framework. (See Dixon and Rooney's *Scenes of Reading* and Dixon and Birns's *Reading Across the Pacific*).

²¹ In addition to 'The Writers' Picnic,' this scene is also recalled in *Fairyland*.

²² Thomas Keneally claims: 'in informal conversations, Sumner Locke Elliott . . . made it clear to me that his immigration to the United States in 1948, where he became a pioneering television drama writer, was, to a notable extent, due to Australia's small-community hostility to homosexuals.'

²³ In *The Queer Child*, Chapter One, Kathryn Bond Stockton describes the heritage of this idea as traced through Eve Sedgwick's work on embodied queer histories and childhood in 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,' also described in Stockton's 'Eve's Queer Child.' For further reading see Chapter Four of Elspeth Probyn's *Outside Belongings*. Walter Mason's unpublished Honours thesis represents the only extant long form scholarly engagement (at any level) with queerness in Locke Elliott's fiction.

²⁴ Like Jeremy Fisher in his account of the works of Stuart Lauder and Wal Watkins, and like Gary Wotherspoon's consideration of texts ranging from Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), to Jon Rose's *At the Cross* (1961) and Kylie Tennant's *Tell Morning This* (1967). See Wotherspoon's 'Glimpse'; Fisher's 'Jon Rose, Stuart Lauder and Wal Watkins.' An extract of *Fairyland* was featured explicitly in this context in Sayer and Nowra's *In the Gutter*.

²⁵ For broader theoretical examination of the trope of the 'changeling' with a focus on Western traditions in literature and philosophy see Daniela Caselli's 'Eerie Changelings.'

²⁶ For accounts of this history see Martin's 'Dead White Male Heroes.'

²⁷ This history is explored in detail in the introduction and first chapter of Andrew McCann's *Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique: Politics, Obscenity, Celebrity*. Anthem Press, 2015. See also Dale, Leigh. 'Christos Tsiolkas, "Career," and Anti-Capitalist Critique.' *Literary Careers in the Modern Era*, Springer, 2015, pp. 129–43.

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