

The House of Poppy Larkin (Creative Work)

**The Divided Self and the Social Environment - Barbara
Hanrahan's Autobiographical Novels and The House of Poppy
Larkin (Exegesis)**

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**This story cycle and exegesis are submitted together in
satisfaction of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts**

Discipline of English, School of Humanities

University of Adelaide

May 2012

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Abstract

The social interaction of the city of Adelaide has always been fascinating to me. The place is not claustrophobic in the way a country town can be, but neither is there the anonymity of the big Australian cities; Adelaide is still a place where your past will usually catch up with you. It is also founded on the bedrock of class difference, a place where ‘they always ask you what school you went to.’ The pressures on people to be successful in this environment can be great, and the opportunities provided to persons of certain school backgrounds can be of critical importance. In my short story cycle *The House of Poppy Larkin* a visual artist from a lower middle class background implodes psychologically under his own lack of success. Even though Eoghan has some level of access to the ‘people who matter’ in his society, his pride leads him to decline these advantages and he deconstructs and fragments. Further, he subliminally pairs himself with characters who possess attributes he needs, and invents an underclass figure on whom to project his self-loathing and who takes him to the edge.

My story cycle uses Rundle Street as a microcosm of modern Adelaide to examine these issues of society and class; its fashion boutique present is contrasted with the artist’s world of nostalgia for the more diverse and bohemian feel of the area in the 1970s. This reflects global issues regarding the increasing uniformity of cities since the world franchising of businesses, and captures the alienating effect this has on some. But, ironically, when the artist’s obsessive psychological regression is used to gain success by adopting a marketable ‘mad artist’ persona, the artist is in a way joining the ethos of the glitzy Rundle Street present. The story cycle becomes a meditation on what it means to be successful as the creation of The Artist E. captures superficial media attention in this perverse, reality TV world, where authenticity and hard work are irrelevancies.

Following a review of literature relating to Adelaide, I have chosen to compare this situation to those portrayed in the four auto-biographical novels of Barbara Hanrahan. Her work provides strikingly similar starting points to my own, with her lower class artist heroines’ obsessions with class, opportunity and success. Hanrahan’s heroines too feel crushed under the weight of class

disadvantage. Like my artist they undergo personality fragmentation, constantly pairing themselves with 'important others'. The critical distinction is that Hanrahan's artists achieve success, both professional and personal, through a *Girls' Own Annual* approach of unfailing hard work and constructive, focused ambition. Her novels caused me to reflect on the nature of my own project. Like my modern anti-hero, Hanrahan's heroines can only be whole as persons once success has been achieved, but their way of achieving it is a reflection of the ethos of the 1950s and 60s and can be contrasted sharply with the superficial manipulations which project my man to prominence. The project therefore becomes a reflection on the changes in Western society, which also reflect the transformation of Rundle Street. In not much more than a generation warped and superficial media manipulation have come to succeed over talent and persistence. The world of the Hanrahan heroines has passed and The Artist E. is king.

Declaration

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**The Divided Self and the Social Environment: Barbara Hanrahan's
Autobiographical Novels and The House of Poppy Larkin**

By Robert Horne

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May 2012

Introduction

‘It was my city Adelaide, but it was cruel.’ So says Barbara Hanrahan in her autobiographical novel *Kewpie Doll* (110). The class system of Adelaide as portrayed in Hanrahan’s four autobiographical novels (*The Scent of Eucalyptus*, *Kewpie Doll*, *Sea Green* and *Michael and Me and the Sun*), would certainly seem to be cruel. Fine Art girls sneer at Teacher’s College students, flourishing cheque books their fathers had given them (Hanrahan *Kewpie Doll* 114); exhibitions seem only for those with private school connections. The pressure to be successful creates stress, and the difficulties experienced by people outside the dominant group can lead to psychological problems.

I chose to write about Barbara Hanrahan’s work in comparison to my own after a lengthy process of reading literature and researching literary criticism on Adelaide writers. I examined thematic content and the setting of scene, with the work of two particular writers in mind. The novels of Peter Goldsworthy, especially *Wish* and the opening chapters of *Three Dog Night*, create a vivid sense of place in the Adelaide Hills. The early summer setting in *Three Dog Night* is some of the most compellingly gorgeous location writing I have read. *Rowena’s Field* by Nicholas Jose creates vivid settings in the eastern suburban foothills of Adelaide, in the Seacliff/Brighton area, as well as in the Yorke Peninsula, while his *Paper Nautilus* evokes the subtle prejudice and haunting memories of a seaside country town. The work of these two writers, while intelligent, evocative and sometimes even daring, speaks almost exclusively with the voice of the educated and privileged classes. In Barbara Hanrahan’s work I found beautiful writing which still had an edge; resentment, struggle and triumph against odds were all central to her work. My research discovered voices in her novels which, when compared to my own work, served ultimately to elucidate the contrasts between the 1950s and 60s Hanrahan wrote about and my own contemporary world of Rundle Street, Adelaide.

By comparing myself with Hanrahan I located my own work more specifically within the broader field of writing about Adelaide. Her heroines share class resentments with my own artist character, but their strategies in dealing with it are very different. They can succeed through

persistent, honest toil. While much of their resentment of the class system may have sprung from the world's failure to recognise them as the special people they thought they were, other parts of it undoubtedly come from real barriers caused by their inferior economic, social and cultural capital. Still, the result of the frustration experienced is that the central characters in all her works do not feel whole as persons, and create doubles to associate with; they unconsciously splinter themselves in ways that lead to mild delusional behavior. Still, throughout this, they achieve professional and social success through a combination of talent and hard work; their lives are orderly and totally directed towards their vindication; ultimate success provides personality completeness and persona doubles are no longer needed. These outcomes reflect some of the faith of the times: that it was possible to rise in the world in spite of class differences; that quality will win out in the end.

Reflecting on these Hanrahan heroines I have found similar starting points in the situation of my own central character, but his outcomes reflect his different personality and also, importantly, a change in the times from Hanrahan's 1950s and 60s. My character is very similar in that he is cut deeply by his own failure to achieve an exhibition of his art in twelve years of trying. He too acknowledges the class system, but instead of setting to hard work he blames his fate on the 'people who matter' in his world. Like the Hanrahan heroines he has fragmented as a person and he associates himself psychologically with other important characters in the work. But it may be that this 'artist' has little talent; we are never quite sure. Further, he has access to those who matter if he will only avail himself of them. Adelaide is not trying to be cruel to him. During the course of this work he comes far closer to the psychological edge than any of the Hanrahan characters, and when he is brought back from it by two of the people who do matter he achieves a kind of romantic and worldly completeness, as they do. But he does this by availing himself of Adelaide's system of privilege and by creating a false persona for tabloid press and television. He becomes famous through the abandonment of principle and by embracing the culture of trash, a complete inversion of the 'hard work equals reward' dream of Hanrahan's 1950s. My project therefore becomes a reflection on the changes that have produced this radically different outcome in less than fifty years of cultural history.

Construction of environment and social class: Barbara Hanrahan's autobiographical novels.

Discussion of Barbara Hanrahan's work often starts with the famous metaphor of the scent of eucalyptus, which connects the reader to idyllic childhood experiences. Her descriptions of visits to relatives in the Adelaide Hills around the township of Houghton evoke an idealised Australian countryside. The hills are fondly, even fantastically, described, but the research process reveals her deeper and more real concerns, which are central to the nature of this project.

The world of Hanrahan's heroines in the inner western suburb of Thebarton was early denuded of its eucalyptus, and replaced with pines and pepper trees 'to civilize the wild Australian landscape' (Chessell 2). The east and near north of Adelaide had long been the preferred residential locales. In contrast Thebarton had a grim industrial sense of place (Chessell 3), which is evoked in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* where the narrator remembers walking to kindergarten: 'I was far from pretty blue plumbago as I walked with my grandmother through a world of concrete and cement. Brick and asphalt, macadam and corrugated iron. Even the gardens looked sickly and grimed with dirt' (38). So a construction of social class is set up early in Hanrahan's first novel, as it is in all others, providing a backdrop of disadvantage for her heroines and emphasizing the significance of their ultimate triumphs.

There is also 'weirdness' found in her lower class suburbia: father and son neighbours share a bedroom and mingle their urine in the one chamber pot (Hanrahan *Eucalyptus* 74); her friend's skin disease and the 'storm of snowflakes' when she scratched her head (40); fat, ugly ladies in changing sheds peering at her developing chest with prurient interest (84); an emaciated and scabrous great grandfather holding her arm tight while he feels beneath her dress (54). There are dozens of such nasty anecdotes sprinkled through Hanrahan's first book.

But most importantly Hanrahan's world is dominated by perceptions of class. As biographer Annette Stewart noted in a radio interview, Adelaide was, 'a city she believed to be the most class-ridden in the world' (McCoy), or, as Hanrahan herself said, 'a world where they always

asked you what school you'd gone to' (Kerryn Goldsworthy 158). As early as nineteen there is the perception of exclusion: 'I was locked out from the room where the proper people gathered, I couldn't get in, no matter how hard I tried' (Hanrahan *Kewpie Doll* 119). As Kerryn Goldsworthy argues, 'her resistance to Adelaide is precisely what gives her a position from which to represent it, but at the same time she is constructing an Adelaide that demands to be resisted' (146). Coming from indulged childhoods, Hanrahan's heroines feel themselves well above average, and experience extreme frustration at their non-acceptance in the wider world. The private imagined world is therefore a refuge where hyper-imagination can affirm their specialness.

The Divided Self: Barbara Hanrahan

An important part of this project is the disintegration of aspirational lower class characters under the pressure of failure. Barbara Hanrahan's autobiographical fiction, 'conveys a strong impression of divided selves, the most radical division being between two selves, a true and a false' (Stewart *Woman* 31). This division of self can be seen as a reaction to class exclusion, however much of this was real or imagined: if the persona can't go up, it goes outwards, laterally into other people. So the false self is the conventional one, which pretends to be happy with society's expectations of class and gender. It is the true self which *appears* to be fearlessly deconstructing its environment in the novels. This artistic or 'true' self can split off into one which is feminine and reflecting gendered expectation and another which is free, safe and alone. But, in turn, the one which is safe and alone does not feel complete without the association with a male figure which may be a replacement for a lost father; this can take the form either of a little girl regression or of a seductress adult. As Stewart says, these 'autobiographical novels employ a main female narrator for whom there is always fragmentation' (31).

Along with divisions of self comes the merging of selves, particularly with the grandmother or 'Nan'. In *Scent of Eucalyptus* the narrator steals Nan's bloomers and escapes to the garden (159).

As the bloomers are stolen the narrator remains herself, only role-playing her Nan, but still the act is transformative as she becomes a different person: the self has divided. The Nan also appears at times as a kind of earth mother, but also at times as a non-maternal witch figure – a split personality of her own. In *Michael and Me and the Sun* the narrator has taken to England, ‘old-fashioned flannelette night gowns ... I thought it would be like taking my grandmother with me’ (11).

In *Scent of Eucalyptus* the narrator is paired up with her mother who is described as, ‘more like a sister’. They sit together in the outside lavatory of their Thebarton home and the mother tells stories of their father in what becomes an almost sexual sharing; and when they sleep together they fit together (24). But the mother in her turn is also a divided figure, sometimes admired for her beauty and talent, sometimes abject and pitiable. In *The Scent of Eucalyptus* and *Kewpie Doll* there is also the next door neighbour Carol whose house represents the chaotic other side of the ordered feminine world of Hanrahan’s Rose Street experience (*Scent* 73). The ‘mongoloid’ great aunt Reece represents another aspect of the Hanrahan persona, the ‘eternal child’ (*Scent* 24) who represents the innocent cloistered world of the author’s own home where Hanrahan grew up with Reece as this permanent invitation to slip into a regressive state, to mimic the eternal protected child world that knew nothing of discrimination or class. Further, the Nan figure and Reece are doubled up: ‘Nan and Reece share each other’s bath water, sleep in twin beds’ (*Scent* 24); ‘They are a pair’ (*Scent* 25). And this pair can also represent the two selves, innocent child and worldly witch.

In the London-based *Michael And Me and the Sun* the narrator falls in with a free and easy art school crowd, attending pub sessions in what constitutes a spiritual meeting with her lost father, whom the author had always associated with her artistic, non-conformist side (Stewart 224). ‘Always, right from the start, there’d been this other person who wanted to be like my dead father ... That part of me got free when it made the prints’ (*Michael* 14). This novel, like the later *Sea Green*, celebrates the coming of the lover/“father” figure, securing completeness that these two heroines could not find in their worldly lives. In *Sea Green* the narrator/heroine Virginia shares a cabin with girlfriend/alter ego ‘Shameless, brazen, feminine Kate’ (15) who represents Hanrahan’s suppressed sexual side. While pretending to be asleep, the narrator spies

on Katie changing to go out, taking salacious interest in her 'lemon breasts' and privately anticipating her lewd encounters with officers on board ship. When they arrive in London the girlfriend sends letters from the continent with details of her romantic life, contrasting with Virginia's steady application to serious and constructive art school work. The pairing of the two girls becomes more intense when Kate loses Jem, the desirable boyfriend she has been following to London, only for him to fall in love with Virginia in the late stages of the book. Thus the good and patient side of Virginia is finally vindicated; success comes from steady application to task, which overcomes the disadvantages of the heroine's class background. In all the novels hard work and persistence triumph over adversity.

Hanrahan was invited by Annette Stewart to be involved in the book *Woman and Herself*, which was conceived as a psychoanalytical study of her work. However, Hanrahan wrote to decline the offer:

I'm afraid that I've come to realise that conscious involvement in my own work is a danger – that it destroys my “innocent” involvement in my own world of creativity. I just don't want to feel aware of myself as a writer, aware of how I do what I do intuitively” (Stewart *Woman* xxv).

So Hanrahan's work is instinctive, self-absorbed, even subliminal, rather than detached or self-analytical, at least in her own view. Her novels contain much of what she *feels*, or intuits; she can exaggerate the forces ranged against her and move into paired personae in a constantly shifting fantasy world.

Hanrahan's persona pairings continue right up to the point of the character's emotional and worldly success. Some characters are twisted into dual selves, some represent mirror characters of the writer's repressed side and some show her fantasies about transforming herself in social class. In spite of their hatred of the snobs who saw them as lower class, the heroines had a keen eye for social advancement. In *Sea Green* her heroine Virginia falls for a South African who gained her attention: 'She got excited because he looked so Ivy League and wore expensive shoes' (143). In this same novel she slights the lower class types she meets on the ship to

England. Here Hanrahan's heroine reveals her yearning for the same construction of social class that she at other times has purported to despise. Through persistence and hard work she has won through to join the people who matter; she has proven them all wrong in a true *Girls' Own Annual* heroine vindication. This outcome is possible because of the very nature of her times and reflection on this is central to the nature of this project. While my own central character, Eoghan, feels similar things about the class system, times have changed in fifty years and his strategies for joining the successful people are crucially different.

Construction of environment and social class: The House of Poppy Larkin

Like the Hanrahan heroines my character believes the 'people who matter' in his society are against him, but it is germane to the nature of this project that he does not turn this situation through hard work and persistence. In his world quality work means nothing; it is hype and gimmick which succeed. Without class connections and lacking any obvious marketability he digs himself deeper into his own bunker, his own delusions, his own place, until his obsessive associations with other characters reach dangerous proportions. Ultimately, his way of raising himself from the mire has none of the moral rightness achieved by the Hanrahan characters; through his crazy nocturnal behaviour he has unknowingly and ironically created his own 'mad artist' gimmick, which can finally be of use to one of the people who matter.

Similar to the Hanrahan works there is a strong sense of place with which Eoghan identifies and associates: in my work it is Rundle Street in the city of Adelaide. He is alienated by the consumerist mono-culture of the area's national and international franchise fashion stores and mourns its more bohemian past. Rundle Street is presented as the place where all parts of Adelaide society have traditionally interacted or at least observed and wondered about each other. Eoghan feels a strong attachment derived from memories of the 1970s when the place was more like a complex High Street, with its owner-operated record stores, second hand shops, Indian regalia boutiques, a whole-food emporium, a Chinese gift mecca, a butcher shop, even a

fishing tackle supplier, not to mention a Christian mission dramatically juxtaposed with a gun shop (Sands CS38). The place was teeming with life and exciting cultural diversity. But more than anything Eoghan related to Rundle Street's rundown pubs with their wizened old characters clinging to the remnants of a working class culture. The replacement corporate culture he finds dehumanising; he resents it on a personal level. Globalisation 'tends to homogenise cultures into this culture of sameness, where people are focused on consuming goods and it doesn't matter where they are' (Bell). An important global issue is tapped here. At the time of writing there are no fewer than thirty-two franchised boutiques in the one hundred metres of Rundle Street from the Austral Hotel to the Scuzzi Pizza Bar. Only the Exeter Hotel is still Eoghan's home, a kind of womb, and his world of walking between reality and dreams begins when he settles in there. As he sits in the front bar he drags back issues from his past; he laments his failure; he does not give up hope of one day gaining an exhibition, the success, and above all the fame, that he craves.

Like Hanrahan's narrators E. perceives himself as excluded by social class from the people who matter. But in modern Adelaide class influence has become more covert, diluted since the 1960s by multi-culturalism and a massively expanded and diversified middle class. The power of the dominant class has been further eroded by a post-war influx of national and international capital (Playford 289). However, class influence does still exist, and, more importantly, can live quite potently in people's minds as a type of referred pressure, both a cause of and an excuse for failure. Eoghan has been unable to secure an exhibition of his art work for twelve years and he has been forced to work for Centrelink for the last three. He acutely feels his fall from artist to clerk. The 'five people who matter' become the symbol of the class system, the importance of which he exaggerates to excuse his own failure, the pressure of which leads him to psychological projection and psychotic delusion.

Eoghan has scorned the use of personal contacts to gain an exhibition, but paradoxically hangs around The Exeter hoping to bump into the 'people who matter'. In this environment he loathes both himself and the world and focuses his contempt on the one person he feels will always be below him on the social scale, living as he does on charity and Social Security. Eoghan's perception of The Stick Man shows that he bathes in the class system as much as any other person and takes his opportunities to loathe those lower than him, similar to the disdain the

Hanrahan heroine showed for her shipboard acquaintances in *Sea Green*. But The Stick Man is not completely as he seems. When it is discovered on his death that he was once a physics student at university and that his impairments were the result of an accident, Eoghan's character goes into crisis. His redemption or forgiveness by The Stick Man is required partly because he is no longer deemed a lower class figure.

Important representations of the class system come through the representations of Poppy Larkin and her old school crowd. Poppy has consciously rejected the snobberies of the social position of her birth and, while she has deliberately placed herself on the outside of her old school circle, she is occasionally drawn back to reunion lunches where she is regarded as an oddball. She has become a social worker, deciding on a life of helping and nurturing the underprivileged rather than of self-indulgence. Her choices have rankled old school friends, some of whom may have consciences they would rather had remained asleep, and her positioning catalyses the class differences between them and Eoghan. She can only be good for Eoghan, but before he can accept her love, he must reject her in a form of reverse snobbery.

The introduction of Poppy has also allowed me to explore her cousin Billy Larkin, who has inherited a fortune from his family's pastoral holdings, doesn't need to work, and is beholden to no-one. His intellectual commonsense takes no notice of social convention but he can only be what he is because of his independent wealth. Billy represents a pinnacle of South Australia's class system. The fact that Eoghan has access to this man, and doesn't use him, shows his stubborn and paradoxical nature. He wants to make it on his own without recourse to the system, but in the end he absolutely needs Billy and his contacts to get what he wants. The outcome shows that, while it may well be possible to succeed without connections if you have a strong attitude, you can still succeed with a bad attitude if you do have connections.

My two main characters, Eoghan and Poppy, beginning from different backgrounds and points of view, rebel against being drawn into supporting the delusion that class does not exist. They acknowledge that success comes through superior opportunity. They do not overlook the destruction and exclusion of Aboriginal culture and society which has occurred in South Australia and which has been covered over with hypocrisy and yet another set of delusions:

where in the 1830s Aborigines had technically been declared British subjects, there was a war being waged against them. ‘This contradiction would lead to a frontier culture in which violence tended to be covert, and its representation clothed in euphemism’ (Foster 3). The covert and euphemistic tactics used in the middle of the nineteenth century against natives are the same as those used in cloaking the class divisions in modern Adelaide. As Hanif Kureishi has pointed out when discussing English society, discussion of the influence of money is a taboo, and this leads to a ‘prohibition on thought’ (31). But Eoghan does think, and he talks too, probably too much. This has resulted in him believing in his social exclusion and he turns into his own world, which becomes fantastical and itself delusional: a world which creates the Rymill Park Possum and Charlie the Stick Man, and where his persona fragments far more dangerously than that of any Hanrahan character.

The Divided Self: The House of Poppy Larkin

Like the Hanrahan characters Eoghan’s personality associates sub-consciously outwards into other figures who embody what he needs psychologically, but, not possessing the hard work ethic, he must go much further and ultimately, ironically, creates the ‘madman’ persona which gives him success. His desire to emulate Billy Larkin’s nonchalant independence is buried deep within him and Billy may be the person for whom he has most respect in the world. But as Billy well knows, his personal power comes from his money, which in turn has come from a family history in the slave trade and mass murder of Aborigines in order to seize land in South Australia. But Eoghan is attracted to Billy’s amorality, his critical thinking and independent points of view, unheard of in a society which accepts its mythology but does not think. But Eoghan can also see the loneliness in Billy, which is the price of his independence. So Eoghan is viscerally attracted to Billy Larkin as the side of his character that wishes to be successful and dismissive of other, lesser, beings but also, in more rational moments, he is afraid of the aloneness that attends Billy’s positioning.

The Stick Man, however, embodies the dark side of Eoghan in a self-loathing which is a classic Freudian-Jungian *bête noir* projection, 'where the internal and subjective becomes confused with the external and objective' (Brown 71). Eoghan needs The Stick Man to make him feel better about himself; he is the lowest of the low. It is upon The Stick Man that his rage and delusions are centred. At what point does reality stop and delusion begin in this story? When E. enters Rymill Park his fantasy world takes over. The whole murder, forgiveness and redemption scenario with The Stick Man may be imagined to bring him closer to the compromise he needs to make in order to become successful. When The Stick Man has interactions with people in the street, Eoghan feels a kind of rage that this low type should be befriended and supported, when talented people like him are so ignored. And when E. pushes him into the Rymill Park Lake and he drowns, The Stick Man ironically and posthumously gains the fame which Eoghan has been seeking all along. So this pairing of characters does nothing but place more pressure on Eoghan to succeed and it may be that his envy of The Stick Man's fame draws him to abandon his principles and accept the assistance of Billy and his friends.

There is the possibility that Eoghan has imagined the entire persona of the Stick Man and this should be suggested by the clearly imagined character of the possum in Rymill Park who talks to Eoghan, providing philosophy and practical advice (Bennet 93), a kind of buddy figure which Eoghan does not seem to otherwise have. The possum is an important embodiment of Eoghan's psychological disintegration. It could be that the possum is the instinctive archetype that Eoghan knows he should be but is not, defending his family, always foraging and taking home scraps. A wise-cracking, Bronx-style tough nut, the possum makes cynical and pithy observations about life, undermining Eoghan's situation further. The possum has a family to feed; he has no time for self-obsessed nobodies; his very New York-ness is a suggestion that he is a construct of Eoghan's imagination.

But perhaps the most important pairing is with Poppy Larkin, who represents the loving parent relationship which Eoghan never had, and for whom he is the child she never had. Poppy's love is the unconditional kind that a parent is meant to give and which Eoghan has lacked. Of course, he resists for a long time because resistance is all he knows, but her feelings are those of a woman in love; she is the only true hero in this creative piece. Although she has offered Eoghan

everything, it is only after he has become successful that he feels he can accept Poppy. He has difficulty with an unequal relationship and must abandon his principles to become a success so he can uphold his principles regarding their relationship.

As Eoghan disintegrates into his deluded and divided state we find that he ironically becomes more attractive as a commercial prospect to Callum, a gallery proprietor who he believes has rejected him at the opening of the story. It is the very fragmentation of his character, his own weakness, which becomes the stepping stone to his success (contrasting with the work ethic and deserved success of the Hanrahan heroines). Eoghan has become noticed for his nocturnal visits to the park, talking to himself in public places, for his extreme drinking at the Exeter and bizarre comments late at night. It is only after Callum and Billy blithely rename him the 'The Artist E.', and he accepts the whole 'mad artist' cliché, that Eoghan can reconcile the three parts into which he has been split: by the death and forgiveness of the Stick Man, his acceptance of the succour offered by the connections of Billy Larkin and through his eventual opening to the embrace of Poppy.

In the broader field of writing about Adelaide both the Hanrahan works and my own both present a different kind of voice. In their shared striving for success, the central characters begin from similar positions, but the different outcomes achieved in different eras constitute a comment on cultural changes in fifty years and reveal the nature of this project. In my story cycle, Eoghan has created for himself a nihilistic world full of malevolent powers (the human pantheon of the Five People Who Matter) but the work has a warped happy ending where he obtains his exhibition at long last and he and Poppy Larkin are united. For the Hanrahan narrator heroines, chances emerge from hard work and persistence; for the artist E. they come from the abandonment of moral objections and mimicking the callous opportunism of the real world.

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