

**Just Getting Light, a novel,  
and  
The Railway Librarian, an exegesis**

**Ashley Hay**

**Submitted in 2012 as a  
Doctorate of Creative Arts thesis  
University of Technology, Sydney**

### **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Production Note:  
Signature removed prior to publication.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Professor Catherine Cole and Professor Paula Hamilton for their encouragement, guidance and supervision both ahead of this project's beginnings and throughout its span, and for all their philosophical, structural and editorial guidance on the two manuscripts that form this thesis. Also many thanks for their patience with the unexpected changes in circumstances and geography that have manifested along the way. Thanks, too, to Professor Paul Ashton for his enthusiasm for the possibility of this project, and for a semester's supervision in the middle of it.

Thanks to Mark Tredinnick for knowing that a bookcase on a stand that spins is called a "spinner" or a "biblioteque", and to Sue Beebe for knowing that the corrugated glass in old cupboard doors is properly called "reeded". Thanks to Professor Peter Pierce and Professor Elizabeth Webby for their thoughts on the origins of the Lawrentian name "Mullumbimby".

Thanks to the librarians at the University of Technology, Sydney, at the Fryer Library and the Social Sciences and Humanities Library at the University of Queensland, the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales, the State Library of Queensland, the main library at the University of New South Wales, and the library at the Albury campus of Charles Sturt University.

Thanks to the University of Technology, Sydney, for the award of an APA Scholarship, without which this project would not have been possible.

The article on the Northern Lights referred to on p. 113 of the novel appeared in the *National Geographic* of November 1947, vol. xcii, no. 5.

The extracts from D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* that appear on p. 116 and pp. 168-169 of the novel are taken from the edition published by Penguin in 1954.

The poem that appears on p. 119 and pp. 124-125 is Siegfried Sassoon's "Everyone Sang".

The story about fruit-picking that appears on pp. 123-124 is inspired by Will Lawson's "Three Locomotives and a Billy of Blackberries," published in *Smith's Weekly* of March 18, 1944.

The poem that appears on p. 132 and p. 204 of the novel is William Butler Yeats' "On Being Asked for a War Poem".

The extracts on deep-sea diving in a bathysphere that appear on pp. 145-146 and p. 154 of the novel are taken from William Beebe's 1934 memoir *Half Mile Down*.

The extract from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* that appears on p. 155 of the novel is taken from the edition published by Penguin in 1986.

The poem that appears on p. 170, pp. 180-181, p. 218, and p. 242 of the novel is based on "Angel", a poem by Justin Moon, and has been adapted for this narrative with his permission.

The articles read in the newspaper on p. 199-200 of the novel are taken from *The Sydney Morning Herald* of June 14, 1949.

The poem that appears on p. 222 of the novel is William Butler Yeats' "Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven".

The image and text of the unpublished poem by Federico García Lorca that appear on pp. 297-298 come courtesy of a copy of the book owned by Daniel Perez-Bello – this is his translation. Thanks to him and to Richard Neylon.

Thanks to Gail MacCallum for her reading of and editorial advice on both the novel and the exegesis. Thanks to Julianne Schultz at *Griffith Review* for publishing an extract from the novel as it went along, and to David Winter for his usual lovely editing of that chapter. It appears in the novel, slightly altered, as chapter 19.

Thanks to the whole family – Hays and Beebes – for the time and space to complete this. Thanks to Leah Burns, Lilia Bernede, Ilithiya Bone, Charlotte Wood, Tegan Bennett, Geordie Williamson and Ruth Blair for encouraging and helpful conversation along the way.

And thanks to Les Hay for not minding my imagining this story. It is for him.

The novelistic component of this doctoral project is a work of fiction. Some of its locations do exist, as did the inspiration for some of its moments. But these events and their characters are all the stuff of imagination.

Addendum: A revised version of this novel's MS was published as *The Railwayman's Wife* by Allen & Unwin in April 2013.

## **Contents**

Acknowledgements	iii
Contents	vi
Abstract	vii
Just Getting Light – a novel	1
The Railway Librarian – an exegesis	247
Prologue	248
Place	259
Poetry	290
Time	324
Postscript	354
Bibliography	358

## Abstract

This thesis consists of two components – a novel, *Just Getting Light*, and an exegesis, *The Railway Librarian*.

Set in Thirroul, on the south coast of New South Wales, *Just Getting Light* follows Anikka Lachlan, a young woman widowed by the accidental death of her husband, Mac, a railway man. As part of her compensation for this accident, she is offered – and accepts – the job of librarian at the local Railway Institute Library.

At the heart of the novel are three points of resonance: Thirroul, the south-coast sea-side village where D. H. Lawrence wrote *Kangaroo* and where Anikka Lachlan lives; “Angel,” a poem discovered by Ani after her husband’s death that she takes to have been written by him for her; and 1948, a watershed year in the clear-view of hindsight, and a year with its own literary reflection in George Orwell’s *1984*.

*The Railway Librarian*, an exegesis, considers these three elements in a series of essays that not only documents some of the research and reading that fed into *Just Getting Light* but also explores the two-way shuffle between discovery and imagination, and the nexus that exists between grief and memory, war and time.

In unravelling ideas about places and their names, the first essay, “Place”, seeks to unravel the book’s place itself, as both a lived environment and a literary one. The second essay, “Poetry”, explores the connections between the book’s defining emotion – grief – and the inspiration behind one of its most crucial plot points – a discovered poem. In the final essay, “Time”, the interplay between time, war and memory is examined alongside the necessary abbreviations and amalgamations memory makes to accommodate the temporal in both living and writing.