

# MSO

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# CLASSROOM

## WRITING (ABOUT) AUSTRALIA

Writers have penned patriotic testimonies to place (a territory, country or nation) for millennia. Yet often, in the pursuit of universally representing the place, these works ignore significant aspects or experiences within that landscape. Dorothea Mackeller's well-known poem *Core of My Heart* (later known as *My Country*), for example, presents a romanticised view of the Australian landscape, as expressed in its infamous second stanza:

I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror  
The wide brown land for me!

Mackeller's poem overlooks the devastation that colonisation had wrought on the landscape and its First Nations peoples. However, numerous poets since have responded to *My Country* with their own poems, which provide alternative, frequently heartbreaking perspectives, as in Wiradjuri man Kevin Gilbert's *New True Anthem*, which opens:

Despite what Dorothea has said  
about the sun scorched land  
you've never really loved her  
nor sought to make her grand  
you pollute all the rivers  
and litter every road  
Your barbaric graffiti  
cut scars where tall trees grow

Numerous contemporary Australian poets, including First Nations poets, have responded to Mackeller's poem. Indeed, Australian Poetry Journal's *Transforming My Country* project published a chapbook of these responses, which can be found at this link: [Australian Poetry Chapbook — Transforming My Country](#)

### TASK 1

Pick one example from the *Transforming My Country* project. Write a short paragraph about that work, answering the following questions:

- How does the poem respond to Mackeller's *My Country*? What image of 'Australia' do we gain from the poem?
- What do we find out about the speaker, in the way that they describe the landscape and/or their experiences? What do they want the reader to know or to 'see'?
- What devices does the poet employ (e.g. metaphor, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, use of space) and how do they enhance the poem?

### TASK 2

For this task, you are to write your own response to Mackeller's *My Country* as a ten-line poem. Begin each line with 'Australia is ...'. (This repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines is a poetic device called 'anaphora'). When you have written your poem, reflect on the effect that anaphora has generated in/for your poem.

### TASK 3

The modern dance performance *Appalachian Spring*, choreographed by Martha Graham to music composed by Aaron Copland, depicts a young couple – American pioneers – setting up house on the American frontier. The dance depicts hope and fear, devotion and defiance. Watch the performance online. (You can find the 1959 version, featuring Martha Graham as the Bride, on YouTube.) Of course, Australia has its own settlement narratives, and we might imagine a similar performance representing our own colonial contexts.

Frederick McCubbin's infamous painted triptych 'The Pioneer' depicts a similar scenario to *Appalachian Spring*, with a couple settling in the Australian bush. For this task, you are to write a short story, play script (one scene) or poem that draws on one of the three scenes from McCubbin's triptych 'The Pioneer'. However, rather than referring only to the white settlers depicted within the frames, you should also consider what is not depicted – for example, the voices and perspectives of First Nations people, or of animals or trees, or of the landscape itself. Aim for at least one page of written text.

# BIOS



## NICHOLAS BOCHNER

After training in Adelaide and London, Nicholas spent 3 years as Artist-in-Residence at the University of Queensland as part of the ensemble *Perihelion*, forging a strong reputation as an exponent of contemporary music. He joined the MSO as Assistant Principal Cello in 1998. Since then he has appeared as a soloist, chamber musician and recitalist. He has also taught cello and improvisation at the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM).

Nicholas has always had a strong commitment to music education and community engagement. In 2010 he was awarded the Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship to study the LSO's iconic Discovery program and the use of improvisation in training classical musicians at the Guildhall School of Music.

In 2016, Nicholas' considerable experience as an orchestral musician and his passion for communication led him to undertake a fellowship at ANAM where he developed, conducted and presented educational concerts for primary school children. During the fellowship he was mentored by Paul Rissmann, Graham Abbott and the legendary Richard Gill AO. Since then he has presented educational concerts for children and adults for MSO, ANAM and the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra.

In 2020 he was named the MSO's Cybec Assistant Conductor for Learning and Engagement. He is also the conductor of the Melbourne University Biomedical Students' Orchestra. In support of his work as an education presenter, Nicholas has been studying conducting with Benjamin Northey and won a coveted place at the TSO's 2019 Australian Conducting Academy.



## JESSICA L. WILKINSON

Jessica L. Wilkinson has published three poetic biographies, *Marionette: A Biography of Miss Marion Davies* (Vagabond 2012), *Suite for Percy Grainger* (Vagabond 2014) and *Music Made Visible: A Biography of George Balanchine* (Vagabond, 2019). In collaboration with composer Simon Charles, Marionette was developed into a performance work of voice, music and sound; they released an album in 2018. Jessica is the founding editor of *Rabbit: a journal for nonfiction poetry* and the offshoot *Rabbit Poets Series* of single-author collections by emerging Australian poets. She co-edited the anthology *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry* (Hunter Publishers, 2016), and is an Associate Professor in Creative Writing in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne.



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