‘SUMMERLANDS’ and the interface between image and text

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All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of absence.¹
— John Berger, A Seventh Man

Introduction

Summerlands is part of a larger work, which comprises the creative component of a doctoral thesis. Both the novel-in-progress and the exegesis aim to investigate the complex interrelationship between image and text. This paper introduces and contextualises the first chapter of the novel with a brief exegetical statement.

The novel incorporates memoir, fiction, folktales and visual material, and is based on my family’s experience as World War II refugees from Lithuania to Australia. Elaborated through the microcosm of a dysfunctional family, its main themes are the dissonance between intention and utterance; the burden of memory; nostalgia for vanished worlds; and the inability of people who have survived extreme loss to relinquish the source of their trauma. The action of the novel takes place during a twenty-four hour period from the dawn of January 18, 1975, but subverts chronology by a conflation of memories dating back to the early years of the twentieth century.

The first chapter introduces two Lithuanian families who share a holiday house on the Summerlands Estate, Phillip Island, off the coast of Victoria. Segues between points of view of various characters are facilitated by the deployment of third-person narration. In this chapter, tensions that will be unravelled in subsequent chapters are indicated by a segue from Rasa to her daughter Jūratė’s emotional landscape.

The exegetical statement suggests that the image-embedded prose fictions of W.G. Sebald are a primary influence on the structure of Summerlands, and proposes the idea that images are integral to the poetics and semantics of the text, which deals with trauma, displacement, and the fragmentary nature of memory.

The Image is the Hook

I have spent most of my working life as a bookseller. I have watched many customers browsing. They pick up a book and flick through the pages, and if a book includes photographs they flick and stop at the pages that hold an image. Then they begin to flick searching for the images. The image becomes a doorway into the text.

If, as I propose, the image is not merely illustrative, but is integral to the poetics and semantics of the text, then there is no reason why images should be confined to works of non-fiction, nor why embedded images cannot function in the manner of hypertext. In this investigation, W.G. Sebald’s prose fictions play a seminal role.

Photographs both record reality and transform the way we see, and perhaps the way we read. Susan Sontag wrote that ‘photographs have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality, and of realism.’

‘We all tend to believe in pictures more than we do in letters,’ said Sebald. He inserted pictures in order to lend ‘an air of legitimacy’ to his text, going so far as to assert the primacy of image over word. Yet there is nothing to prove that the yew, which looms over the first page of The Emigrants, for example, is in fact a photograph of the graveyard the narrator mentions in passing on the same page. The reader makes that assumption without thinking. What is more interesting is the

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4 Ibid.
import this photograph will have later in the story of ‘Dr Henry Selwyn’, when on page twenty-two Dr Selwyn shoots himself. The photograph of the yew looming over the graveyard is then invested with the significance of a portent. And the quote ‘And the last remnants memory destroys,’ on the title page of ‘Dr Henry Selwyn’, becomes an epitaph suitable to the entire book.

At the end of September 1970, shortly before I took up my position in Norwich, I drove out to Hingham with Clara in search of somewhere to live. For some 35 kilometres the road runs amidst fields and hedgerows, beneath spreading oak trees, past a few scattered hamlets, till at length Hingham appears, its asymmetrical gables, church tower and treetops barely rising above the flatland. The market place, broad and lined with silent façades, was deserted, but still it did not take us long to find the house the agents had described. One of the largest in the village, it stood a short distance from the church with its grassy graveyard, Scots pines and yews, up a quiet side street. The house was hidden behind a two-metre wall and a thick shrubbery of hollies and Portuguese laurel. We walked...

In this instance, the photograph serves multiple purposes: as documentary evidence – the photograph corroborates the description of a graveyard purported to be close to the house the narrator finally leases; as an affirmation of existence – the narrator apparently passed this graveyard and took the photograph; and as enigmatic signifier – the ominous yew looming over a graveyard is suggestive of the beginning of a Gothic novel. Arguably, the first two purposes, documentation and affirmation, are instantly apprehended and require little attention, but the third purpose, signification, demands thought, a backward glance, and a reassessment,
and might result in no clearer comprehension than before. Sebald referred to this process as ‘slowing down the speed of reading.’

Robert Macfarlane likens the experience of reading Sebald to being hypnotised, enchanted, captivated, kidnapped, and that emerging from a book by Sebald ‘is like drifting slowly to a surface from a sea-bed through marine light, stunned and grateful.’ I call it seduction, certainly by Sebald’s meandering prose, replete with oblique and esoteric references, but also by photographs that are equally evocative and ambiguous.

Regardless of whether we are conscious of The Emigrants as a fiction composed of non-fictions, if we allow ourselves to be immersed in its version of reality, we become aware that there is an unbridgeable distance between the moment of experience, the memory (or the image that triggers the memory) of the experience, and the representation of that experience.

For me, the image within the text facilitates bridging the unbridgeable: invoking the dead and vanished by stimulating the imagination; by evoking a direct visceral response; by creating a space, or pause, for the eye and for thought; and by setting up subtle ambiguities, which question more than they answer.

Sebald’s image-embedded texts ignite a cognitive shift between the written and the visual, a translation between two types of communication, the former empirical, the latter intuitive and contemplative. Both text and image require a specific scrutiny, which then generates further scrutiny of the conversation between text and image. The disparate approximations to reality of text and image demand an adjustment in the reader-viewer’s scrutiny in order to elucidate latent ambiguities and conjunctions.

Authenticity rests in Sebald’s dedication as an interlocutor to the histories and stories he hears and recreates. Not only did he excavate the memories of the people he called his ‘witnesses’, but by taking on the burden of their memories, became exempt from the ‘conspiracy of silence’ he ascribed to the Germany of his parents’ generation. Sebald’s project of restitution necessitated writing ‘the history of persecution, of vilification of minorities, the attempt, well-nigh achieved, to eradicate a whole people.’

Like Sebald, I am attempting a ‘project of restitution’: an acknowledgement of the ongoing effects of overwhelming loss, and especially of ‘postmemory’, the term Marianne Hirsch coined to describe the ‘relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.’ To this end I have imbibed my parents’ memories, and regurgitate them as my own; I have transformed my memories and family into characters who bear some resemblance to my lived reality, but whose realities differ from mine.

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8 M. Silverblatt, ‘A Poem of an Invisible Subject’, in The Emergence of Memory, op.cit., p. 79.
9 Ibid., p. 80.
In Summerlands (dawn 18th January 1975) I aim to proffer an emotionally authentic version of the character Rasa’s reality by conflating the present narrative with her recollections of the near and distant past, and with images, which may authenticate, augment or contradict her story. I explore the (mis)translations that occur between written and visual languages, and the disparity between geographic and psychological spaces. I insert images into the text in order to regulate the pace of reading, and in order to multiply inherent and extrapolated meanings.

Let me begin with a picture of a dune, which happens to be a photograph of the rolling dunes of Nida on the coast of Lithuania, from a travel booklet called Take a Look at Soviet Lithuania, and with footsteps in the sand, which might be walking away or coming towards, it is impossible to say.

I begin with a scene of Lithuanian dunes, even though Summerlands is set on Phillip Island off the coast of Victoria.

I begin with a photograph from 1964, even though the main protagonists of *Summerlands* are two families of Lithuanian World War II refugees who arrived in Australia in 1948, and who share a holiday house on Phillip Island in the summer of 1975.

The photograph tells more than a simple story.

In a paper delivered at the inaugural Australian Literary Studies Convention, Mario Daniel Martín spoke of migration as a form of suicide; the reconstruction of identity demanded of the migrant as a resurrection necessitated by the subject’s metaphorical death. Some migrants find such reconstitution impossible. Especially if migration is a result of traumatic circumstances, the refugee-migrant remains trapped in nostalgia for a vanished world.

In *Summerlands* the four principal characters – the matriarch Una (Oma), her daughter Rasa, Rasa’s husband Saulius, and their Australian-born daughter Jūratė (nicknamed Jura) – suffer from this inability to fully inhabit the present. A second refugee family – the couple Lena and Mikas, and their sons Kas and Dan – have managed the necessary reconstruction of self and have adapted to their new environment. They serve as examples of integrated personalities, and as a contrast to the principal family.

In *Vertigo*, Sebald revisits his childhood home and finds everything changed, but for him that past world is ‘no more than a breath away.’ In *Summerlands*, that

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sense of being ‘out of time’, of simultaneity or synchronicity, is created by the accretion of memories in narrative and visual form.

The sands bury, footsteps are erased, winds sweep the sands, and that which was buried is once again revealed.

The photograph of Baltic dunes evokes time, memory, and transformation. It stands in for the beaches of Phillip Island. The island in turn represents the larger island of Australia, and the isolation of islands, whether from mainland or homeland, and the alienation experienced by characters who are as untethered from themselves and each other as an island, and for whom living in the present is a betrayal of the past.
SUMMERLANDS (dawn 18th January 1975)

language escapes her
the country too
English is slippery

she forgets
trips on a sound a letter a simple exchange
flagrant fragrant
should not cause such panic

the dinghy rocks in the swell
side to side to balance

the swell
wind plasters sticking plasters
droop fabric against her legs
fly blown wind blows
hair from her face her eyes
in her eyes
the mirage of green
the coast the light the words
swell
elegant fine fellow waves
scent
the smell of grass still damp from the dew *rasa*

simple exchange
*rasa* dew
one country for another
palpable difference
thoughts roll the boat rolls

words without meaning
we wanted only to escape
we are so grateful we are so grateful we are
phrases repeated like a charm

in a dream
without weight
except the hope that what has been spoken is true

the country will not let her be
the country spills

the thought curls her mouth
her round cheeks

Rasa
does not recognise this country
Rasa catapults from sleep. Fairy penguins have made a burrow in the tight clump of agapanthus directly under the window of the bedroom she shares with her husband and daughter. They are loud at night, honking their return from the sea with gullets full of fish, armies of frock-coated ladies and gentlemen calling out to their chicks, I’m coming, I’m coming. And loud when they leave in the morning and the chicks cry out, Come back, Come back. But this morning the penguins did not wake her. It was the dream. She could smell the sea and woke gasping for air.

The sun has not yet breached the eastern cliffs of Shelly Beach. The curtains are drawn; no light penetrates the swampy blue fabric of faded lifebuoys, anchors and jolly sailors. Beside her Saulius stirs, chased by thoughts he will refuse to remember when he wakes. He lies with his back turned on her as if clinging to the far edge of the bed. She keeps her eyes closed and tries to give herself over to the calming sound of surf pounding at the shore, but sleep will not come. Rasa lies on her back and edges slowly away from her husband. Inch by inch she moves across the expanse of the double mattress with the hollowed centre. Usually the heat generated by rolling together into this uncomfortable hollow is unbearable but not this summer; the unseasonable weather ought to provide a better excuse for rolling together than for inching away.

The seconds between stillness and movement, between one heartbeat and the next, between inhale and exhale, are interminable, stretch into minutes of waiting, hours of moving as slow as a snail, slower. She moves at the pace of grass growing,
of a shoot pushing aside grains of soil with the poor strength of a pale thing, breaking through into air, unfurling slowly into the light. Hours seem to pass before she reaches her edge of the bed but it has only been a few minutes. The sheets rustle with her rising, loud in the early morning silence.

This building in which Rasa is awake and others are pretending to be asleep is a holiday house where people spend those precious weeks or weekends when they are not required at work or study. Here they are meant to relax and enjoy their leisure, if they still remember how to behave with so much time at their disposal, in this part-time home they call The Shack. In this fibro-cement box without insulation from either heat or cold, of an indiscriminate sun and sea-faded colour, but which was once the green favoured for bathrooms, they choose to spend most of the summer baking (though not this summer) and an occasional weekend freezing. In winter they are meant to come here to repair and restore what has been damaged by the salt in the wind, to repaint the faded green, to replace the rust-pocked gutters and downpipes, to clean fly-screens and remove spider-webs, to plug the cracks around window sills and door frames with steel wool, to root out the nests of mice from under cupboards and air the shack to free it of the clammy stench of straw and the desiccated bodies of mice caught in traps. If all this is not done the shack will inevitably decay, will fall apart, will require greater expense and much greater effort to set right. Saulius is convinced that chaos has already taken up residence here though it is no business of his, the shack does not belong to him. Saulius is a guest here, he has no say. The fact that Mikas does not do all that ought to be done appals
his sense of taking appropriate precaution. In Saulius’s dreams the shack trembles and creaks, the walls fly apart and the roof folds back, timbers splinter and exposed nails catch at clothes and skin, the wiring writhes and the plumbing leaks greasy brown sludge. The cost of neglect is apocalyptic. He cannot comprehend Mikas’s attitude.

This is not the first summer that the Šaltaitis family have imposed on the Bražaitises, though neither Lena nor Mikas would have called their presence an imposition – they are sociable people and careless with their compassion and generosity – but Saulius smarts under the burden of their open-heartedness. He would rather be in Murrumbeena than on Phillip Island; he would rather be painting his house than pretending to relax in a house that needs painting. In fact, in previous years he has done exactly what he preferred to do – he has left his wife and daughter on the island and returned to Murrumbeena alone. In previous years he has used the excuse of essential home maintenance or some pressing technical matter at the CSIRO, but this year, when the invitation was extended with no expectation of acceptance, for some reason he could think of no excuse, his mind went blank. So it is that this year two families – Elena and Mykolas Bražaitis and their two sons Kastytis and Danius, and Rasa and Saulius Šaltaitis and their only daughter Jūratė – these seven people are forced to step around each other, to wait longer for the shower and the toilet, to put up with the various quirks of habit, behaviour and diet that emerge in very close quarters over the three weeks of this so-called family holiday, so-called because they are not real family. They are the ersatz aunts and uncles and cousins that lack of blood relations has conjured from proximity and shared experience.

In previous years invitations had been kindly declined or, if accepted, had been curtailed, not long enough for enmities to surface through the veneer of polite exchange. It is not surprising that now, nearing the end of their third week together, civilities have begun to fray and a spirit of restlessness, which has never manifested itself before, has descended on the shack. At least on the inhabitants of one bedroom more than the other, and hardly touching the two sons asleep in the Kombi van
parked under the scraggy shade of the tea trees; descended on those who have been disappointed again and again by what fate has brought them, and even on their daughter whose life so far has been very short, but who already recognises sorrow and knows how it tastes; on Rasa, Saulius and Jūratė restlessness has descended in full-force, restlessness and the aggravating spirit of memory which brings with it dissatisfaction and a chafing against the bonds of the past.

Jura turns her face to the wall feigning sleep and prays that her mother does not notice. She is soaked in her mother’s stories and squirms under their yoke. On Christmas Eve her mother made a great show of presenting her with a diary, as if the blank pages already held something of value. Her mother has become more motherly since Oma died, full of good advice and life lessons in an attempt to fill the gap left by her grandmother’s passing. Now Jura writes stories to exorcise her mother. I am not you, she writes. I cannot be you. She writes stories to invoke the ghost of her grandmother, calling her my first mother, my real mother. She feels the loss of her first mother and rails against the attempts of her birth mother to take her place. While Oma was alive her mother acted like a sister, as complicit as a girlfriend. They knew where they stood. Everyone in the family had their place – four people in balance around a square table. Now there are three and the table teeters – they don’t know where to sit and move the table against the wall hoping that the empty space will be less obvious. Come back, she writes. And Oma appears… waiting for a bus to Chadstone, on an escalator in Myer, under the strawberry lightshades of the Strawberry Lounge. Oma appears and orders a four-point plate of assorted sandwiches and says to Jura

my dearest Jūratė I will always love you I love you My dearest I love you We all love you Remember…
... notes on scraps of paper, an envelope full of reassurance, a scatter of paper, words of love fall from the sky like sepia stained butterflies. She is covered.

Tears blot the page.

Jura tests the sound of the sentence but it doesn’t sound right – she does not write in ink, her tears cannot blot the paper. She fills the diary with her grandmother’s stories; she fills the gaps in her memory with stories she makes up; she makes up what she cannot possibly know. The diary fills with sentences that don’t sound right and with drawings. The drawings are becoming more and more risqué – fashion models dressed in lewd clothing, round breasts laced into hourglass bustiers, skirts slit to the hip, puppy-dog eyes and pouting lips. She is ashamed of herself and takes great care to hide the diary from her mother.

Rasa slips on a pair of her daughter’s worn tracksuit pants – too long for her, they bunch at the ankle – and pulls a parka over her nightie. She crosses the room, careful not to disturb Jūratė asleep in the single bed. Jura feels her mother bend over her and plant a kiss on her head. She hates her mother’s sloppy kisses but wills herself to be still and breathe deeply.

Rasa turns the handle of the door as quietly as she can. She knows Saulius is not asleep – he lies too still and holds his breath. She imagines his eyes are wide open in the dark and that he hears her leave. Her figure could be mistaken for a shadow slipping past the door of the master bedroom where she imagines Lena and Mikas are still asleep, but they are not. They have been whispering in the dark, woken perhaps by her snailing across the sheets, by her naked feet crossing the linoleum covered floor, by the sound of her lips against Jura’s forehead, or woken simply by sensing the restlessness in the room next door.

In any case Lena and Mikas are awake and whispering. They live by touch, these two, reaching out with conscious and unconscious gestures, pats and squeezes reassuring each other of their presence, and they live by plans and schemes for the future, for their own comfort, of course, but more importantly for their boys, for Kas and Dan, and for a good life. In the dark they whisper, seriously at first, trying to fathom what ails the family they’ve taken in – why Rasa has become so brittle, why Saulius can’t sit still, why Jura hardly speaks – but under cover of the sheets their good intentions soon devolve into the language their bodies prefer to words. They touch. They stroke bare flanks and thighs and breasts, and soon they are giggling like children. They warn each other to stifle the sound of their lovemaking – a palm across a mouth, a finger nipped playfully between the teeth – because it would be too ghastly if Saulius or Rasa, let alone Jura, overheard their happiness.

Rasa slips through the dark lounge room between the tatty sofa and the coffee table, avoiding that nasty corner of the kitchen bench on which she has so often banged her hip-bone. She opens the front door. The wind coming off the sea brings the smell of rotting kelp. The tea trees beside the shack sway and creak and the full blue heads of agapanthus bow to the ground. A strong and unexpected gust rips the door from Rasa’s hand and slams it shut, which is exactly what Rasa was trying to avoid. The noise catches in the dreams of the two young men asleep in the Kombi van but doesn’t wake them...
in the wave’s embrace Kas rides, arms wide, fingers touching water both sides, the crystal hollow, cool sparks, he smiles and

the door bangs into the deeper note of the wave bellowing in his ears

the door bangs

an epic conflagration, shards of glass writhe and twist into phantasmagoric shapes and carry Dan up, up, Dan is constellation, he dances on stars, he laughs the shards the flaming sparks…

There is dew on the shorn couch grass. Rasa shivers in the cold. In broad daylight she would take the gravel path down Southwick Street and Mandeville Road like a civilised person, but this early she cuts through the neighbours’ yards. The shack of the Summerlands Estate nestle between stands of stunted eucalypts and casuarinas, close together but unfenced, the unwritten laws of quarter acre blocks played out in trees and bushes and mutual discretion. Rasa crosses Southwick Street and startles a pair of rabbits. They are covered with lesions, nearly blind, riddled with the myxomatosis introduced to control the rampant population. It is a terrible death. But necessary. The island is overrun with rabbits that threaten the penguin habitat.

Rasa skirts the Taškūnas’s front yard and their blue painted shack – heavy curtains shield the sleepers inside against the dawning light and the prying eyes of trespassers – and wades through the tall grass between the Taškūnas and the back of the Grinčevičius place. Every second neighbour in Summerlands has a Lithuanian surname. This is how it happens: one family buys a cheap block, tells a friend, the friend buys the block next door and suddenly everyone at Lithuanian House is talking about building beach houses, how much cheaper Phillip Island is than
Portsea or anywhere on the Mornington Peninsula, how much quieter than Torquay and closer than Lorne. They joke and call Summerlands Estate the Litho Ghetto. Only Saulius is insulted by the nickname. He splutters with indignation. It is not clear to his daughter whether he objects more to ‘Litho’ or ‘ghetto’; whether the shortening is more offensive, even though Lithuanian is full of diminutive terms of endearment, or the implications of the word ‘ghetto’; whether he objects more to comparison with the Jewish calamity or whether he is appalled on their behalf. He does not fully understand his rage himself and would be at a loss to explain it. When at last he notices the blank or incredulous stares around him – it is as if the others have forgotten – his face turns to stone.

The cuffs of Rasa’s pants soak up the dew and she lifts her feet high. It is too cold for snakes. She repeats the mantra and stamps down hard for good measure, flattening the brittle grass, summer dry despite the recent rain. Saulius told her that the only way to avoid snakes was to make sure they heard you coming. She lifts her feet like a Red Indian, like Winnetou. She bends and lifts her feet in a stamping dance. Before she realises what she is doing she has raised a hand to her mouth ready to make the woo-woo sound of the Indian war cry.

From childhood she knows Winnetou, Hiawatha, the prairies of the Wild West, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre. She would recognise America from her reading. If she ever landed on British soil, she would recognise the darks woods of Dunsinane, moors, hedgerows, daffodils, the Lake District and Tower Bridge. But Australia seems like a translation of a translation, English words set down to represent a world for which there are no English words. Even in the Bony books, a recent passion she shares with Jūratė, scouring op-shops for Arthur Upfield’s murder mysteries, the old world intrudes on descriptions of vast desert skies and the ancient lore of nomadic tribes – the half-cast inspector’s name is Napoleon Bonaparte, for God’s sake! And he is made to hum tunes from opera as if to prove the dominance of his white side. The new words they learn are crumbs scattered through an English story.

The Grinčevičius’s house is treated timber, stained brown like the summerhouses in Palanga where Rasa and her mother used to holiday. This is the house she would buy if Saulius could be persuaded. He says it’s too expensive, it’s too much work, it’s a bad investment and why would anyone want to return to the same place every year? But she thinks it’s better than going nowhere every year.

The view from the Grinčevičius’s front deck is the one she covets. She would sit looking out over Shelly Beach and Western Port Bay and watch the colour of the water change from cobalt blue to viridian as the clouds roll over the sea. In winter she would sit there wrapped in blankets, warm her hands on a mug of cocoa, and watch storms rage over the deep bruised sea and the white-tipped waves break in jagged lines. In summer she would lie back nearly naked on a banana lounge with a book in her hand, look up for a moment from the page and blink at the clear daze of sky. Not this morning. Not this summer. This morning she can hardly make out the ridge of the mainland. Point Leo is shrouded in mist. ‘How!’ she greets the wallaby grazing on the Grinčevičius’s front lawn. She looks around. He pricks up his ears and stares at her for a long second, as if asking, Are you mad? Then bounds across Ventnor Road, a lesson in how to die.
Two station wagons with surfboards tied to roof racks have pulled into the car park. Two bleary eyed mums and a dad peer out through their windscreen at the iron-grey sea and sky, and down into the dregs of their thermos cups. They are here because Shelly is a beginners’ beach, sheltered and relatively safe for their sons who are still too young to drive and far too young to brave the dangers of Woolamai where the experienced surfers ride. These sons, who have badgered their parents to get here so early, sit on the hood of the Falcon and the Kingswood with their wetsuits pulled down to the waist and blankets wrapped around them like teepees and stare with hungry eyes at the waves which refuse to rise. The tide will not be high until well after nine.

Rasa was hoping to have the beach to herself. She hurries past wishing she had dressed properly but the boys and their parents pay no attention. At the top of the path she kicks off her thongs. Her feet obliterate the surface hieroglyphs left by the penguins’ webbed flippers, hundreds of three-pronged signs crisscrossing. In the Bony books she read how aborigines stand on one leg, still and silent, and scan the far horizon and understand what has been and what is coming, and lower their eyes to the ground and understand the patterns of the earth beneath their feet. Her bare feet make more noise than *kadaitcha*, the emu-feathered, silent slippers of assassins, the bone pointers. Rasa is the first this morning to add human tracks to the tide washed sand.

The sand squeaks and Rasa is reminded of scaling the rolling dunes of Nida and how as children they pretended to be afraid of coming across Neringa bent under the weight of the sand she carried in an apron as large as the sail of the largest yacht. How every time a cloud covered the sun they quivered with fear and excitement imagining that Neringa cast her giant shadow over their play, and suddenly angry with them for disturbing her endless work of replenishing the dunes she would flap her giant apron and let loose an avalanche of sand and they would be buried with the perfectly preserved remains of whole villages from the ancient days.

In and out, the tide washes the sand clean of penguin tracks and human footprints. After each high tide the beach returns smooth, if not exactly pristine. Ridges of seaweed and broken seashells mark the high water line, regular as the
waves that leave their deposit on the sand. Poised at the water’s edge, Rasa challenges the sea to catch her, toes curling in the cold. To the east a bitter yellow stains the sky. In and out, the wavelets leave a ruffle of foam that snatches at her feet. She jumps back and retreats up the beach, scanning the banks of shells for a perfect specimen amongst the shards. The sand of Shelly Beach is coarse with splinters being slowly ground by the action of the waves. There is seldom a whole shell but she has found a penguin skull bleached white by the salt and the skeleton of a sea urchin. Jūratė likes to collect these. She forgets that her daughter is sixteen and has put the collections of childhood aside. Rasa picks up a pitted dog winkle, nothing special, and puts it in her pocket. She picks up a bleached bone of driftwood and holds one end to her shoulder, sighting down the length of her arm to the crooked tip. Silberbüchse was the name of Winnetou’s famous silver rifle. She wonders whether children still read Karl May or the adventures of Hiawatha and Minnehaha. Ha-ha! The cold seeps through her parka. She should have dressed properly. She wraps the parka tight around her and hugs her chest.

The sky is lighter now, a yellow stain reflecting off the heavy clouds and turning the sea lime green. Rasa wonders whether children still read Jules Verne. She had wished for uncles like Sam and Sib, comic characters who finished each other’s sentences and sniffed tobacco from a tin, but more importantly, who gave into her every whim. She had wanted to be like the fearless and determined Miss Campbell. *The Green Ray* was her first rather innocent romance, a ponderous adventure to which her heart nevertheless raced. She assumed Verne’s green ray was as imaginary as the Wild West of Karl May, until she witnessed the phenomenon herself. This acid yellow is nothing like the colour of that dawn, a colour she remembers as the colour of hope, the sliver of light breaking through the pristine line of the horizon where the sea and sky meet with untoward intensity, and a saturated emerald green radiating for a few seconds from the rising crescent. She thought her need had invented the sight, and a brain fuddled by the month at sea had supplied the extraordinary vision. Later she thought of it as Australia’s particular welcome, the country reaching out to her alone. Even after she understood the optics of the green ray, she continued to think of her vision as a gift, and that she, like Miss Campbell, would be blessed with the ability to see into her own heart and understand the thoughts of others.

A seagull flies low overhead and squawks. Startled, Rasa looks up at the bird. There is no one left to confirm her memories. Mama is gone and Lena always contradicts.

At last the wind shifts and makes the waves race, and rattles through the spiky grasses of the dunes. She hears the surfers go by laughing. They cannot see her in the hollow where she has taken shelter. She shivers and takes a packet of Salem from her pocket. Her hands cup one match after another but the restless *mini* spirits perched on her shoulder blow them out. She wants the smoke to warm her, but she lets her head fall to the arm hugging her knees and the hand holding the cigarette to drop to her side. She remembers how the storm began slowly with the wind blowing through the night, and in the morning the black clouds, as solid as monsters from ancient myth chasing each other across the sky. She remembers the waves roaring and how terrified she had been at that moment. And she remembers the sea as calm as the dome of the sky and the dazzled eyes with which she had seen the green ray. But she is not like Miss Campbell after all; she is not fearless; she has ignored the call
of her own heart. And she is like Miss Campbell; she has been granted insight and knows her daughter and her husband better than they know themselves. Or so she imagines.
**Image Credits**

Unless otherwise stated, contemporary photographs are shot by Francesca Jurate Sasnaitis (FJS), and archival photographs come from the collection of Elza Sasnaitis (ES) and Ignas Sasnaitis (IS).

p. 2. FJS, ‘Voigtländer Camera, a gift to my mother on her 21st birthday, 1948’.


p. 7. (top) Dunes of Nida from T. Butkus, op.cit.


p. 9. ES, Island of Rügen, Germany, c. 1944.


p. 11. IS, Beach, location unknown, date unknown.


p. 16. FJS, Penguin skulls and seashell collected on Phillip Island.

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Research Statement

Research Background

In literary theory, particularly in relation to Holocaust studies, and in the field of visual studies, W.G. Sebald’s image-embedded texts have been the subject of considerable investigation and inspiration. However, research has rarely been applied to an analysis of the role of image-embedded texts in representations of ‘postmemory’ and the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Research Contribution

The novel Summerlands proposes the idea that embedded images are integral to the poetics and semantics of the text, and demonstrates how images document, supplement or disrupt text. This will ultimately demonstrate that the interface between image and text exponentially multiplies inherent and extrapolated meanings, and is requisite for unlocking both familial and collective memory.

Research Significance

By exploring the (mis)translations that occur between written and visual language, and the disparity between geographic and psychological spaces, Summerlands uncovers the effects of mediated memories, which can neither be fully understood nor avoided, on the children of survivors of collective trauma. Through the repetitive patterns of stories, and the multiplicity of apparently coincidental and chaotic visions, Summerlands contributes to the literature of postmemorial experience by exposing an emotional truth, which is more authentic than historical accuracy.