

# Dawn Ephemera

Victoria Reservoir

April 2022

Through tired eyes, you watch a crescent moon move slowly through the night sky. You drive down a long winding road in the hills, turn right onto an access road, and park in a gravel car park on a hill. Looming over your head are massive electrical towers and power lines, buzzing in the dark. You sit in the front seat of your car and listen to the sound of your breath. A few minutes pass. There are periodic flashes of light coming from a security camera at the dam's entrance gate and the faint glow of the coming sunrise over treetops to the east. In the distance, there is the faint rumble of traffic.



You get out and prepare your camera and pack, feeling the cold against the back of your neck. Walking alongside the road now, you notice seedlings of parrot bush and acacia poking out of the gravel as it crunches under each step. As you walk, you watch your breath turning to mist, dissipating into the frigid morning air. To your left, there is a wire fence and you see an opening that leads into a small grave site. The burial

plot is bordered by a small enclosure constructed of logs and wooden pickets. In the dim light, you can't make out the details of the headstone.



Further down the road, you pass another car park and enter a section of Jarrah/Marri as the light builds between the trees. Kangaroos jump across the trail. The sky changes in hue and tone from moment to moment at this time of the day. Silhouettes are filled in with their details as the sun gradually rises. You realise how closely light and temperature are tied to the affect and mood of the landscape, and how these intangible qualities capture your attention as they morph and shift in character.

The trail ascends to a lookout over the dam and then descends down a series of steps to the top of the dam wall. A layer of fog hangs over the reservoir and drapes outwards over the valley to the west. Sunlight starts to peek out from around the hills to the east, illuminating the surface of the waters. Here, you become aware of the juxtaposition of the now-permanent elements of the landscape – the grey concrete of the dam wall, the bitumen access road, the metal pipes of the pumping station – and the ephemeral qualities that appear and disappear with the seasons and time of day – the water, mist and fog, and the greenery of the forest on the hillsides. The sky is changing quickly, with the wind bringing in scattered clouds.



Around the base of the dam wall there is a picnic area and the calls of birds. A small constructed stream is fringed by sedges and rushes. You spot the green and blue plumage of Australian Ringnecks, tiny olive Weebills and bright red Western Rosellas. You pass the old dam wall and follow a vehicle track along a valley to your left. The slope rising upwards is lined by Wandoo that are momentarily lit up by the clear morning light. The sky turns grey and a light rain begins to fall. Leaves and spiderwebs drip with moisture.





In the treetops you hear the squawking of pink and grey Galahs and as you round a bend, you are met with a rainbow – an arch of splendid colour that cuts clearly across the sky. Rainbows arrest our attention because they are unanticipated ephemera – they arise out of a certain combination of weather conditions and lighting and our point of view within the landscape. As quickly as they appear, they disappear with the dynamics of the wind and shifting of the clouds. The trail rises as it loops back to the start point, passing through Wandoo, Jarrah and Marri. You visit the little gravesite once more before leaving. As the rain pours down, you calculate – the baby has rested here for over 140 years.



\* sulphur \*