

The Coliseum (*Mayfield*)

Meg Vertigan BA (Hons)

Master of Philosophy (English)

March 2011

Faculty of Education and Arts

School of Humanities and Social Science

University of Newcastle

Declaration: This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Acknowledgements

The stories in *The Coliseum (Mayfield)* came primarily from members of the Newcastle community who were either Mayfield locals or had come into contact with Leo Maley in some way. My greatest debt is to George Burke, of The Coliseum, who made this project possible. George allowed me access to his private collection of letters and court documents which I have used versions of throughout *The Coliseum*. The cover photograph of The Coliseum's window display is also used courtesy of George Burke.

I would like to also thank Peter Boyd, Noel Carter, Richard Wakely, Kurt Beck, Arthur Burgess, Ian Chapman, Peter Collins and Don McNair for giving up their time to share their memories of growing up in Mayfield and their stories of Leo Maley with me.

I would also like to thank those community members who wished not to be mentioned. Your stories have given *The Coliseum (Mayfield)* some of the bleak details that many locals are unaware of.

There are many others who gave me tips and contacts, which have significantly helped my research for this project, and I am grateful to them also.

Many Newcastle government employees have given me help along the way. I would like to thank local Mayfield resident Gionni DiGravio and his team in the archives section of the Auchmuty Library at Newcastle University for access to legal documents and personal items belonging to Leo Maley. Versions of these documents were used in the "Court" chapter.

I would also like to thank local journalist, Michael Blaxland for his advice and his help in recruiting participants for this project. The researchers at the Newcastle Family History Society helped me with my original research into Leo Maley, and passed on my details to my very first interviewee, which really was the start of this project.

I am grateful to those working at the Local Studies section of the Newcastle Regional Library for their help in using equipment and research advice.

Members of the Newcastle Council and the Local court gave me invaluable advice and help in obtaining information, for which I would also like to express my thanks.

I now understand why people say their projects would be impossible without the support of their family and friends. I would like to especially thank mine for giving me the confidence to continue with this project. An extra special thanks goes to my partner, Chris, who has done everything from baby sit, to reading and giving valuable insights into my early drafts. Thanks also to Mum and Dad, Gwen Jones and Jo Parker for their support.

Finally I would like to thank Keri Glastonbury and Alistair Rolls from Newcastle University, whose patience, advice and encouragement has been invaluable.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Contents	iii
Abstract.....	v
THE COLISEUM (MAYFIELD).....	2
Preface	2
Margo	3
Woomera Memories	11
Mummy's Boy.....	12
Woomera Memories	19
Paul	20
Woomera Whisperer.....	29
Kelly	30
Woomera Memories	41
Mother	42
Woomera Memories	47
Court	48
Woomera Whisperer.....	59
Earthquake	60
Woomera Memories	91
Mark	92
His Father's Son	114
Woomera Memories	124
Epilogue.....	125
CRITICAL EXEGESIS: STORYTELLING, ARCHETYPES AND PLACE AS ICON.....	127
Chapter One.....	128
From fragments to product	128
Narrative: Deciding what to leave out.....	130
Creating character.....	132
Character: Being objective	135
Character: Stereotypes.....	136
Showing place	137
Inserting a theme	138
Chapter Two	140
Imagining the eccentric	140

Myths and eccentric characters.....	141
Eccentrics and “eccentrics”	143
Eccentrics and larrikins	146
Genius: Eccentricity generated by trauma.....	149
The ending of the eccentric	151
Leo as eccentric	153
Oral history and archetypes	154
Chapter Three	159
Imagining the Coliseum	159
Nostalgia and place as character.....	159
Storytelling and perception of place and space	163
Perception of place: Acting in space	166
Acting on place: Changing space	171
Conclusion.....	177
Works Cited.....	179

Abstract

The Coliseum (Mayfield) is about the life of local Newcastle eccentric Leo Maley. After Leo's death in 2000 it was discovered that this man who lived like a pauper, was in fact a millionaire. This fictional biography explores some of the stories that surround Leo, where memories of him have come to possess almost mythical status.

Within *The Coliseum* these myths are at times counterbalanced by other stories, making the truth about Leo Maley as intangible as his reclusive life.

The Coliseum (Mayfield) also reveals some of the many faces of Mayfield, as it exists within Newcastle; a place with perhaps as much ambiguity as Leo Maley himself.

A critical and reflective exegesis *The Coliseum: Storytelling, archetypes and place as icon* follows the creative component. This work investigates the challenges associated with collecting oral histories, how people fit stories of their lives around their personal notions of archetype-in particular, the eccentric-and how these stories in turn reflect upon and influence change in the place in which they are told.

The Coliseum (Mayfield)

Meg Vertigan



The Coliseum circa 1990

THE COLISEUM (MAYFIELD)

Preface

The Coliseum (Mayfield) is an imaginative biography of infamous Mayfield eccentric, Leo Maley. Leo Maley lived his entire life in a shop named The Coliseum. Upon his death local newspapers ran stories trying to uncover the mystery of Leo's life. His friend, Peter Boyd, put a notice in the paper announcing a memorial service for Leo Maley. Many locals attended and told their stories of Leo and The Coliseum.

The stories within this book were collected from newspaper articles, court transcripts, family letters and local stories told by people who lived within the community of Newcastle. These local stories may or may not be able to be substantiated, but they all have helped to create the legend of Leo Maley.

The new emperor of The Coliseum, George Burke, allowed access to his private collection of letters, photos, newspaper articles and other memorabilia of his predecessor. George Burke has done a wonderful job of renovating The Coliseum with respect for its history, and has always welcomed customers' stories of Leo Maley.

All the names within *The Coliseum (Mayfield)* have been changed.