INTRODUCTION
The Katharine Pritchard International Design Competition was held in conjunction with the Widgee student landscape architecture conference held in Perth, in September 1997. The competition site, located in the Darling scarp near Perth, was the home of the literary and political figure Katharine Susannah Pritchard. Her novels include Widgee Bullocks, Comrade and Intimate Strangers. She was also a prominent Communist party member from the 1930s till her death in 1969.

The brief called for a "Katharine's Place" to become a memorial to Katharine Susannah Pritchard’s works and ideals, and as an undercurrent to the functional aspects of a writer’s garden which could accommodate five writers and an audience of 100 people for performances.

The judges for the competition were Vladimir Sitta (design co-orientated landscape architect), Des Smith (architect), Julie Irving (artist), and Don Laidre representing the existing Katharine Pritchard Writers Centre.

The joint winners of the competition: Julian Bolletter, student at the University of Western Australia, and Matthew Bradbury from the University of Technology in Auckland, present their respective designs for the site.

KATHARINE’S PLACE
FICTION, REALITY AND AMBIGUITY
BY JULIAN BOLLETHER

The process of creative writing involves an exploration of the entwined and ambiguous worlds of fiction and reality. The design illustrates this exploration and translates it into the field of landscape architecture.

Katharine Pritchard’s novel Intimate Strangers details the breakdown of a marriage culminating in the attempted suicide of the husband. The novel was apparently fictional, but two central characters mirrored to a certain extent Katharine and her husband, Jim Throsel. Jim’s realisation that the failing marriage depicted in Intimate Strangers was in some sense his own is believed to have led him to shoot himself on the veranda of their Mundaring Property (see lower section of plans).

The act of suicide poses key questions: the suicide can be regarded as fiction being fulfilled to become ‘reality’. However, if this could be argued that the suicide was reality becoming fiction. The location of Throsel’s suicide on the veranda of the house can be identified as a point at which notions of ‘reality’ and fiction intersect.

SHADOW GARDEN
Among other things the shadow is a sign of the unconscious. In Plato’s cave, the flickering shadows mark our ignorance, which the art of literature struggles to overcome. The shadow is something ambiguous and undefinable, a grey zone between presence and absence.

Accommodation for five resident writers, specified by the brief, consists of translucent boxes, of the dimensions and orientation of Katharine’s shack, scattered in the wild back half of the garden. The transience of the wall construction allows the panels to become animated by shadows during the day and night. The shadow boxes become purely writing spaces, with the functions of everyday existence being located in the house.

The shadow boxes are cocooned in a dense layer of Plumbago bush, which Katharine used to conceal Communist Party documents during the anti-communist police raids of the 1930s and 40s. The sea of Plumbago cocoon and conceals the writers, creating intensely private space. Existing trees are also seeded to create a densely shading and concealing canopy.

PERFORMANCE SPACE AND SUICIDE
The suicide of Jim Throsel after reading the unfinished manuscript of Intimate Strangers represents a collision and confusion of notions of fiction and reality. The veranda thus becomes a symbolic point of intersection and ambiguity. The veranda forms a mirror line around which the house is flipped to create a public reading space for the writers. This space is constructed of wooden platforms which step off the veranda. Walls are constructed of compressed fabric, with lights creating an intense play of shadows on the panels during readings.

The term of the reading space as a negative image of the house plays on the ambiguity between fiction and reality through a tension between positive and negative, inside and outside, building and landscape.

It is this ambiguous and entwined nature of reality and fiction which in one sense characterises both Katharine Pritchard’s life, and the work of all fictional writers.