



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

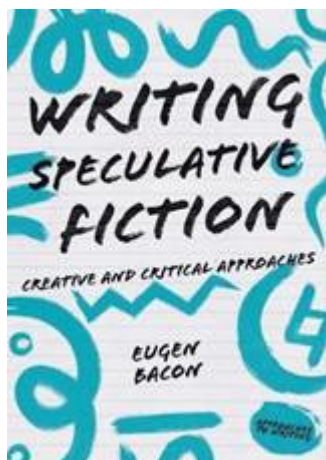
ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://www.textjournal.com.au/>

TEXT reviews

- Eugen Bacon, *Writing Speculative Fiction*
review by Bronwyn Lovell
- Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley (eds), *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice*
review by Amelia Walker
- Craig Batty and Zara Waldeback, *Writing for the Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches, 2nd Edition*
review by Tom Drechsler-Savage
- Trent Hergenrader, *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers*
review by Pablo Muslera
- Jason Tougaw, *The Elusive Brain: Literary Experiments in the Age of Neuroscience*
review by Jean-François Vernay
- Jean-François Vernay, *The Seduction of Fiction: A Plea for Putting Emotions Back into Literary Interpretation*
review by Nataša Kampmark
- Julianne van Loon, *The Thinking Woman*
review by Doris Pushpam
- David Carlin and Nicole Walker, *The After-Normal: Brief, Alphabetical Essays on a Changing Planet* and Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, *The Hundreds*
review by Moya Costello
- Moya Lloyd, *Butler and Ethics*
review by Maya Nitis
- Dallas Baker, *Ghosts of Leigh and other plays*
review by Stayci Taylor
- Joshua Lobb, *The Flight of Birds*
review by Lynette Washington
- Katharine Coles, *Look Both Ways: A double journey along my grandmother's far-flung path*
review by Jen Webb
- Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*
review by Kevan Manwaring
- Lisa Belleair, *Aboriginal Country*
review by Ali Cobby Eckermann

- Marion May Campbell, *Third body* and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa, *Poems: New & Selected*
review by Dominique Hecq
- Dominique Hecq, *After Cage* and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa, <<*terrain grammar*>>
review by Sarah Pearce
- Omar Sakr, *The Lost Arabs* and Paul Hetherington, *Palace of Memory*
review by Simon-Peter Telford
- A Frances Johnson, *Rendition for Harp & Kalashnikov*
review by Mags Webster
- Tricia Dearborn, *Autobiochemistry* and Shey Marque, *Keeper of the Ritual*
review by Cassandra Atherton

TEXT review

**Writing in a genre where ‘nothing is out of bounds’:
Speculative Fiction as a transformative force***review by Bronwyn Lovell*

Eugen Bacon

Writing Speculative Fiction

Macmillan Education UK, London 2019

ISBN 9781352006056

Pb 69pp AUD39.95

In *Writing Speculative Fiction*, novelist, short story writer and academic Eugen Bacon has produced a broad and accessible introduction to the genres, subgenres, and hybrid genres that fall under the contentious classification of ‘speculative fiction’ – including fantasy, fairy tales, dark fantasy, myths, legends, magical realism, science fiction, gothic, cyberpunk, utopia, dystopia, alternate history, steampunk, horror, and the paranormal. Speculative fiction is a genre ‘where nothing is out of bounds’ (8) – and overviewing its mercurial characteristics in one volume is quite a feat.

The book itself is hybrid in nature – it reads as much like a textbook as a writing guide, with example stories and poems illustrating different approaches and techniques, along with several illuminating and inspiring quotations from masters of the craft, as well as a series of creative writing exercises at the end of each chapter. Bacon also gives a breakdown of common literary and cultural theories such as autobiographical theory, postmodernism, postcolonialism, narratology, feminism, Marxism, and queer theory as critical frameworks for the reader to further explore and interrogate speculative fiction texts at greater depth.

Writing Speculative Fiction is permeated by an upbeat and playful tone that is entertaining and motivating. It is an informative and enjoyable read that will

serve as a valuable resource for creative writing students and their teachers, and indeed anyone interested in the mechanics of writing and publishing dynamic and engaging speculative fiction. The book is packed with helpful advice for writers of any genre – covering diverse topics such as form, characterisation, voice, plotting, poetic expression, research, establishing a writing practice with discipline, and discerning reputable online publishing markets.

While outlining the generic ‘rules’ typically touted for writing in the realm of speculative fiction, Bacon rouses writers to challenge and contravene such prescriptive and predictable conventions. She convincingly argues that ‘genre labelling is no more than a device of commercialization’ (58) and encourages writers of speculative fiction to be inventive and disruptive – to blend and cross genres; to dissolve boundaries between different styles; to subvert tropes; to rewrite, revise and remix classic tales; and to eccentrically experiment with dissonant themes in order to ‘break from traditional thought and resultant binaries’ (113). Bacon incites us to commit writing as a radical act.

The most compelling aspect of the book’s rhetoric is its dedication to the andragogical function of writing. ‘As authors’, Bacon says, ‘we offer, in our stories, possibility. We offer insight’ (136). She advises us to ‘think of writers as heralds, as inclined to speak for social change’ (136) – noting that the worldbuilding inherent in speculative fiction provides us with ‘the foundations to cultivate inclusive worlds and characters’ (7). Bacon asserts that many speculative stories ‘carry underlying political statements’ (156), and that through such skilful literary activism, a ‘text can be more than it is’ (157) and a writer can be ‘a champion of change’ (135).

Bacon considers writers of YA fiction in particular as beholden to a certain duty of care when it comes to empowering today’s youth through storytelling:

The writer as a champion of change can first break the silence and then equip the young adult – and society – with awareness that destructive situations are resolvable with self-awareness and as simple an action as a call for help in the right direction. A productive YA novel will help combat helplessness. (135)

She maintains that books are a force for transformation and that YA authors should ensure that the narratives they weave for young audiences do ‘not penetrate vulnerability and derail self-esteem’, but instead ‘evoke hope, resilience, self-awareness, optimism, expression’ (135). This is the power, privilege, and indeed responsibility of writing for the next generation.

Bacon believes it is what we bring to a text as readers that will determine what we get out of it. She invites us to ‘consider reading as a quest for meaning, with the self as the source of value and interpretation’ (155). She advocates reading openly so that we might transcend our preconceptions. ‘Good literature’ she says, ‘irrespective of subject, style or theme – will offer a forum for open minds’ (136). In this way, Bacon promotes reading for more than pleasure. She champions literature as a tool for the constructive transformation of ourselves and society.

Writing Speculative Fiction is gunning for a writerly and readerly revolution. Bacon urges both writers and readers to do the intellectual work – to be aware

of the ways in which we are culturally constructed beings, and to endeavour to write and read beyond ourselves. Bacon encourages us as readers and writers to think and create differently, to expand our normative ways of perceiving the world and humanity through the wonder of speculative fiction and its strange, fantastical, horrifying, and edifying 'what ifs'.

Dr Bronwyn Lovell is a science fiction poet and scholar. Her poetry has featured in Best Australian Poems, Meanjin, Southerly, Cordite, Antipodes, Rabbit, Verity La, Mascara, and Strange Horizons. She has won the Arts Queensland Val Vallis Award and the Adrien Abbott Poetry Prize. She has been shortlisted for the Judith Wright, Fair Australia, Newcastle, Montreal, and Bridport Prizes.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

‘Besideness-writings’: Creatively critical, and critically creative strategies for inquiry*review by Amelia Walker*

Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley (eds)
The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice
 Routledge, Oxford / New York 2018
 ISBN 9781138674837
 Pb 303pp AUD62.99

As practitioner-researchers, how do we discuss and analyse our work without losing the creative drive that inspired us in the first place? (i)

This is a vital question for writers, artists, musicians and performers among other creative practitioners in academic contexts. *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* collates a diverse array of responses to the problem, thereby demonstrating the extensive possibilities of critical writing as a creative act. It spans disciplines including but exceeding creative writing, visual art, curating, architecture, drama, dance, choreography, music, and translation. Many chapters are co-authored by practitioners from different fields, providing examples of how transdisciplinary collaborations can operate in and beyond the arts, and of the benefits such collaborations bring. Because my own disciplinary background – and that of *TEXT*'s predominant readership – is creative writing, this review focuses on the volume's relevance for creative writers in universities today (although the scope for this new publication extends well beyond this). I shall consider two areas in which I believe *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* bears strong practical applications:

one, undergraduate learning and two, research, particularly for PhD candidates and in other higher degree by research contexts.

In my undergraduate teaching experience, students of creative writing commonly express two major apprehensions. The first entails anxieties around – or inability to find purpose in – critically analysing their creative work. Such students may even object ideologically to the analytic act, arguing that it bleeds the magic from what should be tacit, intuitive processes. Such objections reflect a point observed by Hecq, Hill and Theiler (2015) – the persisting false cultural dichotomy between the critical and the creative. This dichotomous viewpoint also feeds the second form of anxiety commonly seen in creative writing undergraduates: that they feel relatively confident with analytical writing, but fear they lack some elusive X-factor or gift supposedly necessary for producing poems, stories, plays and other creative texts.

The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice destabilises assumptions that creative and critical processes need be dichotomous and opposed. This book is thus filled with valuable tools to redress the student anxieties I have described, and to open learners' minds to wider ways of writing and/as thinking. The book draws on seminal theorists and philosophers including Deleuze and Guattari, Judith Butler, Susan Sontag, Sara Ahmed, Helene Cixous and Donna Haraway. It could thus provide students with a novel way in to these thinkers' ideas. A key concept worth classroom discussion is that of 'besideness-writings' (8). Editors Emily Orley and Katja Hilevaara term this a kind of 'writing with' (7) or 'alongside' in explicitly 'complementary' sorts of ways (6). Adopting a position of besideness entails 'letting go of "beneath", "behind" and "beyond"', which challenges 'traditional hierarchical and dualistic positions' including restrictive practices of 'tracing beginnings and analysing intentions' (7). This 'allows a different dynamic of power to be articulated' (7). Rather than merely discussing creative work, criticism can extend or take a different approach to it. Criticism can even become in itself a new creation that in turn 'generates further creative and critical work' (8). Far from deadening or shutting down artistic processes, the critical act thus becomes a way to open up and discover new possibilities. Art and analysis are not opposing but reciprocal, and mutually beneficial.

The possibilities of 'besideness-writing' are illustrated in different ways throughout *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* as a whole. Its chapters typically discuss and demonstrate creative-critical interrelationships. They describe benefits in working across perceived divides and they explicitly demonstrate critical-creative reciprocities, for instance by presenting arguments in forms of poetry, prose, theatre, photographic essays, fictocritical writing, or similarly playful ways. Exemplary of this is Susannah Thompson's argument 'for an art (writing)', presented through a suite of poetic aphorisms. These are wonderfully quotable and could work beautifully as classroom discussion points and/or on lecture slides. Thompson succinctly and efficiently raises a vital distinction when she notes, '[t]he critic may be an interpreter ... but our object is not to *explain*' (25, original emphasis). In the classroom, this could provide a prompt for exploring how interpreting and explaining processes differ. Thompson also elucidates how '[f]or the critic as artist, art writing *is* creative practice' (26) because theory and practice 'are NOT exclusive endeavours' (27). Taking a broadly Deleuzian approach, she calls for a writing that is *both/and* rather than *either/or* – a writing in which:

We meld anecdote and theory.

We foreground the subjective voice.

We speak our own argot, our own vernacular.

We revel in puns, polari, plagiarism. (27)

The above points provide explicit strategies for students to apply in their writing. Thompson's example could additionally help dismantle preconceptions of critical writing as necessarily formal or objective in voice. As a classroom activity, Thompson's provocations could provide a leaping-off point for (re)considering what constitutes 'formal' and/or 'objective' as opposed to 'informal' and/or 'subjective' writing, and of how a perceived 'objective'/'subjective' split might relate to notions of a critical/creative divide.

Important to note, however is that although I am recommending *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* as a strong tool to inform undergraduate teaching, this is not the book's intended purpose or audience. Caution would need to be taken with using chapters from the book on course reading lists. Many parts of it are complex, theoretically and linguistically. Those using it for teaching would need to carefully select suitable extracts and frame these to make them engaging and accessible. Two chapters that I believe could prove particularly useful as readings include 'Yoko Ono Fanfiction' by owko69 (Owen G Parry) (95-102) and 'The Construction of Self(ies)' by Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller (248-256). Parry engages Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'minor literature' in order to call for a re-seeing of fanfiction as a form of literary criticism. Interspersed with humorous, readable examples, Parry's chapter would easily build into a learning task involving students writing their own fanfiction as a form of critical engagement with books, shows, films, musicians, public figures and/or contemporary topics. Whalley and Miller's chapter examines the photo-based social media platform of Instagram, particularly the curious slippages between 'Rinsta' (real) and 'Finsta' (fake) profiles. While 'real' pages typically offer an 'edited, polished, curated' online presence for potential employers and/or partners, 'fake' profiles host 'the unruly body... the unbounded, the out of control, the ugly' (250). The rinsta / finsta relationship thus blurs received assumptions about what is fake versus real. Whalley and Miller's chapter could offer a springboard for classroom engagement with postmodern theories about truth, representation, the construction of selves, and more. In a creative writing classroom, this could segue into an ekphrastic writing exercise using images from social media. It could also support exercises in writing creatively about how social media usage shapes relationships with others and/as selves.

Having considered how *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* could inform pedagogy at undergraduate levels, I turn now towards its applications in research contexts. One of the 'main motivating forces' behind the book's creation was Orley's 'experience of giving a yearly talk to postgraduate students about using performative and other modes of creative writing in their theses' (xx). With co-editor Hilevaara, Orley therefore sought 'to bring together a range of models of writing (in the loosest sense) by practitioners who are thinking about their own work or work that has inspired them' (xx). In this, the book certainly succeeds. Were it possible to hop in a time machine and deliver my younger, PhD candidature-commencing self a care package of

tools from the future, this book would be among them. Each of its thirty-seven short chapters demonstrates a different way in which it is possible to write both critically and creatively about topics and practices of the arts. Reading them all is akin to sampling every item on a menu before deciding what one will order to eat for real (or better, jumping in the kitchen to invent a new dish not on the menu but inspired by the tasting experience). While eleven of the chapters deal specifically with creative writing (including for theatre), all bear relevance for creative writing research, for in architecture, visual art and numerous other contexts, questions and challenges familiar to our field emerge and are addressed in similar yet different ways, revealing multiple exciting options.

Many chapters provide strong examples of what creative research writing can look like. These include PA Skantze's long poem-as-essay in 'Lyric Theory' (30-38) and Iain Biggs's provocative investigation into '*notitia*' as 'a form of listening that attempts "to recover the neglected and perhaps deeper roots of what we call thinking"' (40), which Biggs illustrates through two cases of creative research projects in healthcare settings. Taru Elfving's 'Writing With Fungi, Contagious' (108-115) likewise demonstrates exciting possibilities for creative research writing and will particularly interest those exploring ecopoetry. Building on the case Isabelle Stengers (2008) presents for writing as 'transformative', Elfving asks, 'could it [writing] also follow a fungal logic, become contagious?' (109). With reference also to Felix Guattari's (2008) 'transversal thought', Elfving broaches 'the urgent task of reimagining co-dependence', tackling 'the inseparable processes of subjective, social and ecological transformations' (110). Similar themes resonate in the thoughtful and poetic reflections of Salomé Voegelin, who in 'Writing About the Sound of Unicorns' (129-134) urges readers to 'listen to a mushroom and a bicycle' in response to the dilemma of '*how to listen out for something you do not know*' (129, italics in original). Voegelin thereby theorises a 'writing the possible impossible' that sings writing's capacities to bring up the silenced, overlooked or not-yet-known and signal possibilities for positive social change (134).

Also of note are the four chapters (six through nine) that in different ways play with usages of para-text and/as parallel texts. In 'Footnoting Performance', Mike Pearson with John Rowley and Richard Huw Morgan (61-65) hyperbolically test the limits of the footnote, which on most pages of their chapter consume more space than the main text. Indeed, the chapter's first page does not even include any chapter text as conventionally understood: it is entirely consumed by notes clarifying aspects of the title, author names and preliminary information. This raises questions about what defines main as opposed to supplementary text. Then in chapter seven Mojisola Adebayo offers 'An Extract from *Asara and the Sea-Monstress*' as a 'play with theory' – a section of the 'practice-as-research doctoral thesis' in which Adebayo presented, using two columns, a play script (on the left) and 'a series of connected critical notes' (on the right) (66). The rationale behind this, Adebayo explains, was 'to reveal how the play and theories are in dialogue with each other and illuminate each other' and also to challenge 'the hierarchy of critical over creative writing' (66). In chapter eight, 'Same Difference' (73-80), choreographer Nicola Conibere also uses columns, but differently, for in Conibere's chapters both the left- and right-hand columns are simultaneously critical and creative, ultimately merging together and then followed by a series of images that wordlessly speak for themselves. Conibere

notes that this approach ‘owes a debt to long histories of writing practices and authors including shaped and concrete poetry’ and entailed ‘organising words on the page a bit like bodies on a stage, an exercise that articulates the shared practices of choreographer and writer as putting things in relation’ (73). Chapter nine, ‘Critical Groundlessness’ (81-87) by Diana Damian Martin, takes the parallel text in another direction yet again, presenting on the left ‘documents of a lived experience: criticism reflecting on a referent of focus’ and on the right ‘a related argument, a broken-up, brief incursion into possible ways of viewing and grounding this mediated experience’ (81). For Martin, ‘criticism’ as ‘documents’ of ‘lived experience’ includes letters, computer screenshots, lists and scripted snatches of dialogue. This again challenges preconceptions about creative and critical practices as neatly divisible. Martin argues compellingly for research writing that ‘makes the process of thinking visible’ as ‘by nature unfinished and fractured’ (86).

There are many more chapters I would ideally like to discuss: each brings something valuable and unique, and each will offer bespoke insights to different researchers pursuing varied concerns. However, those researchers will do best to discover this book and its highlights for themselves. In the space here remaining, my priority is to consider what research candidates and their supervisors can draw from the book’s structure. Considered in its entirety, *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* is finely-curated, reflective of a keen awareness that ‘[f]orm is not a container for scholarly content: it is part of the scholarship’ and of ‘criticality’ as something ‘embedded, often, in the shape, style and tone of the writing itself’ (12). In addition to Jane Rendell’s skilfully dialogical and interconnected ‘*L’avant-coup*’ (Foreword) and ‘*L’après-coup*’ (Afterword), the book contains three ‘Middlewords’ that draw together ideas from across multiple chapters and act as conclusions to – or perhaps more accurately, extensions of – the three sections into which the book’s chapters are arranged. Creative play with form-as-content is also strongly evident in the book’s introduction, an elaborately polyvocal feat presented in the form of a play script presenting lines of dialogue between the book’s editors, key theorists, inspiring figures, and contributors to the book itself. This approach draws on, yet remakes, mainstream conventions of the traditional scholarly book introduction – that is, of setting a context, acknowledging precedents, and indicating the contents of the chapters to come. This is a valuable example for postgraduate research candidates and supervisors to consider and discuss when it comes to questions of structuring creative writing theses in ways that demonstrate rigour yet still foreground play. It is also useful for creative writing researchers generally as we broach demands to demonstrate our worth in line with formal research evaluation criteria.

Overall, *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice* is therefore well worth ordering for the university library. For learners, teachers and researchers engaging creative writing for purposes of inquiry, it constitutes a valuable resource of practical application to the real questions and challenges we face as creative *and* critical learners, teachers and makers operating in the academic space today. It also reminds us how our concerns, as creative writers in universities, connect with those of practitioner-academics across a multitude of other arts-based fields of inquiry, signalling a rich scope for increased dialogue, collaboration and exchange across our differing-yet-connected contexts.

Works cited

Guattari, F 1972 *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955-1971*, trans Ames Hodges, Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, Cambridge MA return to text

Hecq, D, C Hill, & S Theiler 2015 'Looking for excellence: A comparative review of the splintering of the Arts and the Sciences', *TEXT* 19, 2:
http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct15/hecq_hill&theiler.htm (accessed 9 June 2019) return to text

Stengers, I 2008 'Experimenting with refrains: Subjectivity and the challenge of escaping modern dualism', *Subjectivity* 22, 1: 38-59 return to text

Amelia Walker lectures at the University of South Australia. She is presently secretary of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs and with Pablo Muslera co-edits TEXT reviews. She is also a member of the editorial board for the peer-reviewed queer writing and diversity studies journal Writing From Below. Details of her recent publications may be found by clicking on the 'output' links at her staff home page: <https://people.unisa.edu.au/Amelia.Walker>

TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

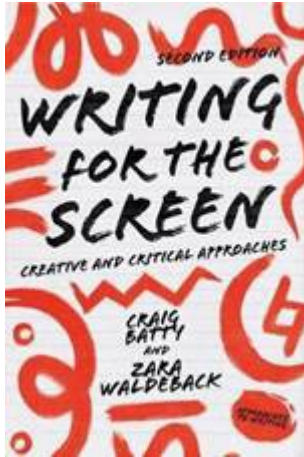
General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

A renewed tool in the screenwriter's toolbox

review by Tom Drechsler-Savage



Craig Batty and Zara Waldeback

Writing for the Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches, 2nd Edition

Red Globe Press, London UK 2019

ISBN 9781352006025

Pb 271pp AUD39.95

In recent years, the media landscape has been redefined by the invention of virtual reality and various social media platforms supporting video distribution. Responding to such innovations in the presentation of stories, Craig Batty and Zara Waldeback have updated their original 2008 publication to tackle these emerging trends to confront the diversification of technology and culture in relation to screenwriting. To thrive within an everchanging media landscape, Batty and Waldeback encourage their readers to embrace this change as a means to unlock creative potentials across form, content and overall approach to the practice. As the life of a writer is guided by stories occurring both on the page and in the world around us, aligning ourselves with these stories allows us to initiate an active engagement with how they shape our lives and craft.

In contrast to an ever-changing world, we soon realise how key aspects of storytelling have remained unchanged. This is made evident in the first part of *Writing for the Screen* with its focus on the basics of screenwriting. While devoting four chapters to character, plot, visual storytelling and dialogue, Batty and Waldeback avoid the convention of a 'how to write for screen' guide through original reiterations of familiar ideas and emphasis on implementation within creative practices. This becomes more evident in the second part, which builds on the foundations discussed in the first to offer innovative ideas on how screenwriting can evolve. This second half revises the same four aspects of screenwriting (as above) to offer alternative means

for thinking about structuring plot or developing character, amongst others. With this, they offer original insight to writers that want to challenge a more conventional approach and encourage new creative directions to be experimented with. The more advanced ideas would be of great use to aspiring screenwriters; challenging them initially, then revisiting this book later to continue developing their craft. Generally, discussion within each of the chapters will identify key elements related to a given topic and its role in relation to various other aspects of the screenwriting process. Each of the sections provide tools to assist with a specific aspect of screenwriting, while also identifying common problems that arise. Case studies are also used throughout, providing examples of films that demonstrate how dynamic core principals are in applications. While representing a specific detail with a case study, any advice offered extrapolated remains general enough that it may be applied in development of original stories; these rules are always malleable, it is a matter of how you use them to improve your own writing.

Throughout, emphasis is placed on the application of theory within practice to ensure the focus remains on working creatively in every aspect of screenwriting. In addition to the four main chapters on script development, both parts of the book address the industry and culture surrounding screenwriting. Much of this relies on the authors' having a background working in or with industry. Drawing on personal experiences, Batty and Waldeback describe what it is like working in entertainment industries; even highlighting differences between writing for film, television and web series. Being a successful screenwriter is more than just producing compelling scripts; you need to know how to market your work, collaborate with others and adapt to the changes in how stories are distributed to viewers. Beyond the specifics of writing craft, this book encourages screenwriters who are starting out to think about how they plan to position themselves within the industry. At various points, they specify habits and behaviour that distinguish amateurs and professional screenwriters to encourage a self-awareness in the reader to see potential mistakes in their approach to writing. The burgeoning screenwriter is encouraged to connect with the journey of their own professional development, to embrace their process as an intimate learning of their craft. Speaking to aspiring screenwriters, Batty and Waldeback avoid the figure of a tormented writer to advocate the healthy pragmatism of a 'professional at work' mentality. They are clear, the role will take dedication to the craft, an openness to new ideas and an ability to meet deadlines. Emphasis on this alternative proposes the view of writing as less of a personal struggle and more a service to the greater community; being able to bring clarity to local cultural trends and raise awareness around important social issues. In focusing directly on practice, Batty and Waldeback have improved upon the conventions of a basic 'how to writing' book by giving a holistic look at what to expect when writing for the screen.

Lastly, two chapters of writing exercises support the discussion of putting ideas into practice. Each chapter is located at the end of both parts and demonstrates how to apply the preceding chapters. The exercises work as thought-experiments to develop specific aspects of any script. Each offers the reader a different way of thinking about writing for screen, then gives them the opportunity to try it out and see what they come up with. Even experimenting with throwaway scenes may provoke new perspectives on a character or a new direction to explore a story further. More than anything, Batty and Waldeback encourage writers to experiment in their work to

extrapolate a story's full potential. The general spirit throughout the book is a call to stop restricting the task of writing to the linear-development of a script, but instead as dynamic processes of incremental change. In practice, this understanding of creativity opens up a range of pathways uncovered while writing. The ideas found within this book reveal the seemingly infinite number of ways to approach the many tasks involved in screenwriting.

With this second edition's inclusion of recent culture and media trends, Batty and Waldeback updated the initial publication for this new creative landscape. By covering a range of topics, *Writing for the Screen* is ideal for educators or students looking for a primer that can instruct independent screenwriting or serve as a solid course textbook. It provides clear explanations of key aspects of script development interspersed with more advanced philosophical ideas for a student to contemplate as they progress with their career. In addition, its portrayal of what it is like working within a creative industry offers practical advice for those striving to achieve success in screenwriting. While students and early-career screenwriters would benefit greatly from this, it would be a matter of diminishing returns for more established screenwriters, who may need to read over many familiar ideas to find the more original insights. That being said, it is difficult to criticise this book of what it does not do because what Batty and Waldeback set out to accomplish is achieved over its duration. This is a book that is made to be picked up and used by anyone willing to apply themselves to the craft of screenwriting. We are encouraged to embrace new story ideas and innovations in storytelling technologies in order to unlock their creative potentials. One final note, to those interested, it is worth mentioning the companion book, *The Creative Screenwriter: Exercises to Expand Your Craft* (2012), wherein Batty and Waldeback further discuss their understanding of the role of creativity within the practice of screenwriting.

Works cited

Batty, C & Z Waldeback 2012 *The Creative Screenwriter: Exercises to Expand Your Craft*, Bloomsbury Academic, London return to text

Tom Drechsler-Savage is a PhD student in the School of Creative Industries at the University of South Australia. His research focuses an ecocritical study of American cinema. He is also a professional videographer and filmmaker.

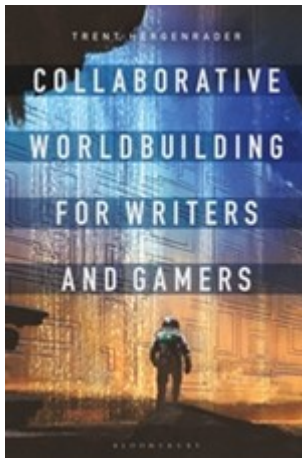
TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviewseditor: Simon Telford textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review**All together now: Conspiring in a new reality***review by Pablo Muslera*

Trent Hergenrader

Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers

Bloomsbury Academic, New York 2018

ISBN 9781350016668

Pb 280pp AUD 35.67

Part thesis statement about the benefits of collaborative storytelling, part instruction manual on how to create fictional worlds through the patented structure available on his website (collaborativeworldbuilding.com), Hergenrader's book is an interesting blend of writing theory, social commentary, and marketing. In terms of the latter, the tools for co-operatively building your version of a high fantasy world, post-apocalyptic narrative, or science fiction opera (to name a few), are available on Hergenrader's website, to which the reader is directed at regular intervals.

The communal worldbuilding process was developed through Hergenrader's creative writing courses at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), and the book is at its most engaging when it tackles the broader philosophy behind this process. Hergenrader argues that 'collaborative worldbuilding projects engage contributors intellectually, creatively, socially, in ways that sole authorship does not' (19). As well as reducing the time it takes to build a complex fictional setting through a division of labour, team creativity offers a 'built in critique group', and the increased diversity gained from multiple viewpoints (19). While admitting that many writers will prefer to pursue their own solo projects following the collaborative exercise, Hergenrader believes that the process will be useful in participants' future endeavours, as it develops both creative and critical writing skills (19).

While obviously a champion of constructing fictional worlds by committee, Hergenrader also references objective arguments against it. He cites fiction authors M John Harrison and Lincoln Michel, who see worldbuilding as an indulgence, an exercise that interferes with storytelling by mapping encyclopedias of superfluous detail (5). Hergenrader rebuts this with a question: 'does every form of creative writing always need to be in service of a story'? (5). This of course entirely depends on the purpose of an individual piece, as well as its intended audience. Hergenrader argues that such fictional inventories aren't wasted efforts, but '[repositories] for story-making material that can be selectively drawn upon' (5). He cites modern urban fantasy author China Miéville's experience with the manuals from fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*, whose 'mania for cataloguing the fantastic' inspired Miéville's own creative process: his motivation for writing a 'secondary-world fantasy' was to 'invent a bunch of monsters', irrespective of how many ever made their way into his novels (6).

Having presented some support for his case, Hergenrader then outlines his process. His worldbuilding template is primarily defined by three broad terms: scope, sequence and perspective (34-38); these are useful as starting points for creative collaboration, where pivotal historical events, the limits of geographical detail, and narrative focus are commonly agreed. This theory is applied to existing texts, such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Lucas's *Star Wars*, and Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, to demonstrate the necessity of defining these boundaries early in the creative process, such as defining societal structures, and how social forces interrelate. Hergenrader argues that an engaging fictional world is always in flux (53-54), and dwells on the variable importance of governance and economic factors depending on the narrative. He cites Tolkien's Middle Earth as lacking granular detail in governance, and the Death Star in *Star Wars* as 'an enormous capital investment for the Empire' (66), such that its destruction is an important plot point as a financial disaster as well as a major military defeat.

Hergenrader also makes some interesting points about the problematising of race relations in Tolkien's world, with race tolerance between elves, dwarves and humans contrasted against the Othering of the treacherous 'Easterlings', an allegory for 'Turkey, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East' (67). Fantasy novelist Michael Moorcock's critique of class relations in Tolkien's world, with Sam and Frodo exemplars of its rigid hierarchical system, is also cited (67). Hergenrader himself criticises the patriarchal gender relations and a lack of diversity in the portrayal of sexuality in the *Lord of the Rings* (67-68): 'Middle-earth is a rather chaste, sex-starved place to begin with' (69). This is certainly a fair point in isolation, though applying contemporary values to a text published in the mid-1950s ignores the expectations of that society, and that a significant part of Tolkien's target demographic were children.

The rest of Hergenrader's book focuses on demonstrating his collaborative worldbuilding process through case studies, where a new fictional world is created by a group of participants, who log their notes and concerns at each stage. This is revealing, as everything from initial genre (such as a vigorous debate whether a steampunk world could possibly include magic), to general scope of the narrative (decades, centuries, or millennia?), and more granular details of the nascent society are hammered out – in the main case study, sexual diversity and egalitarian gender relations are mutually agreed upon. Hergenrader recommends using a common wiki, where each participant can

upload their allotted portion of the world's common history, as well as their individual narratives within it. Templates for each section are also provided and compared to existing role-playing encyclopedias (such as Wizards of the Coast's *Monster Manual* [2015] from *Dungeons and Dragons* 5e), to demonstrate the dramatic value of narrative description. The 350-word Kobold entry in the modern *Monster Manual* exemplifies this, with accompanying graphic and character details, showing the creature's behaviour, common variants, and ability to be highly effective in numbers despite a lack of individual strength (96). While the major utility of such entries is obviously to serve as opponents to array against the players in a role-playing game, Hergenrader implies that such attention to detail in the narrative description can also provide valuable fodder for general creativity, to populate fictional worlds with believable antagonists serving as crucial foils to the protagonist.

This recalls Miéville's comments on the value of inventing fantastic creatures as a creative exercise in itself (6). It also leads to the crux of the purpose of the book, and its possible broader scope. Inherent in the title is that collaborative worldbuilding is for writers *and* gamers, and while role-playing game enthusiasts seem to be the immediate audience for this book, Hergenrader's collaborative worldbuilding website has served primarily as a vehicle to teach his creative writing classes at RIT. Hergenrader's pedagogical method includes role-playing sessions in class, based on the collaborative worlds created, as well as the construction of several different worlds over the semester, contrasting different genres (222). He believes that this method can be useful for literary analysis of texts ranging from *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Godfather* (222).

Most creative writing lecturers wouldn't dispute the value of any exercise which engages students and encourages them to analyse literature from different perspectives (though one might doubt the necessity of buying into Hergenrader's patented method: literature has been successfully analysed for centuries without the collaborative worldbuilding card templates, for example). This begs the question about the wider utility of the book for independent authors not taking these classes. Hergenrader suggests that creating such a collaborative world could be useful as points of entry for individual narratives, such as in the yearly NaNoWriMo contest, where entrants are challenged to write a full novel in the month of November (216). He argues that with the collaborative world created, a ready-made setting is available to be populated by new characters and plotlines that feed off it, driving inspiration in the same way existing fictional worlds such as that in *Star Wars* have led to countless new narratives. As an alternative to the model of the solitary author spinning tales in a garret, or the embedded writer dutifully researching their genre monomaniacally, Hergenrader's collaborative worldbuilding offers a broadening of scope, in-built critique at each stage of the process, but also all of the possible conflict that comes with any group exercise fuelled by a variety of personalities and motivations.

As if anticipating this final complication, he concludes that

A world's history is not a single incontrovertible narrative, but rather an aggregation of a number of subjective viewpoints, where the points of greater overlap suggest to us some broad truths. (222)

Regardless of any complications inherent in collaborative creation, it's difficult to argue with *this* broad truth. Hergenrader's coda argues for shared creativity as a way of 'seeking to address today's bitterly divided world' (225). On that basis alone, the book justifies its publication.

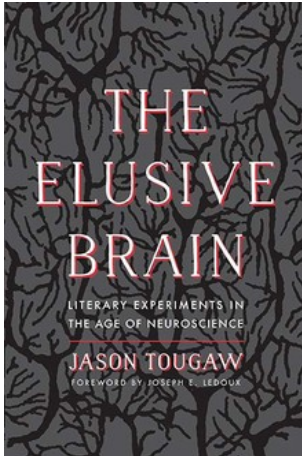
Pablo Muslera is a writing lecturer at the University of South Australia, and co-edits the reviews section of TEXT. He has recently returned from running creative writing workshops for the New Colombo program in Malaysia. He has had a long-term interest in role-playing games, and is fascinated by intertextuality between fantasy worlds and literature, such as in Tolkien's borrowing of Macbeth for Lord of the Rings.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Exploring ‘the paradoxical monstrosity of art’

review by Jean-François Vernay



Jason Tougaw

The Elusive Brain: Literary Experiments in the Age of Neuroscience

Yale University Press, New Haven/ London 2018

ISBN 978-0-300-22117-6

HC 282 pp USD40

Jason Tougaw is the author of a memoir tackling neurodiversity, *The One You Get: Portrait of a Family Organism* (2017) and of *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (2006), a comparative study mingling fiction and medical case histories. His compelling new book, *The Elusive Brain: Literary Experiments in the Age of Neuroscience*, which expands his past interests in pathology, pathography, the rhetoric of disability, neurodivergence, literary culture and the medical humanities, is a welcome addition to the growing bibliography of Cognitive Literary Studies, and more specifically, one of its subsets: Neuro Lit Crit – succinctly described as ‘literary criticism informed by “neuroscientific vocabulary”’ (27).

In the last subsection entitled, ‘The Elusive Brain’, of his 2014 *New York Times* article, James Gorman comments, as follows, on the enigmatic quality of this obscure organ which underpins all cognitive mechanisms:

No one expects the brain to yield its secrets quickly or easily. Neuroscientists are fond of deflecting hope even as they point to potential success. Science may come to understand neurons, brain regions, connections, make progress on Parkinson’s. Alzheimer’s or depression, and even decipher the code or codes the brain uses to send and store information. But, as any neuroscientist sooner or later cautions in

discussing the prospects for breakthroughs, we are not going to “solve the brain” anytime soon – not going to explain consciousness, the self, the precise mechanisms that produce a poem. ([Gorman 2014: 1](#))

It is within the context of this budding scientific field, showing great potential yet vulnerable to neurospeculation, that Jason Tougaw has authored his third book tackling neuromania [\[1\]](#), Neuro Lit Crit, neurodivergence, brain memoirs, autistic autobiographies, neurodiversity, the neuronovel, neurocomics, and the like. His self-confessed ‘aim is to account for a broad range of literary responses to neuroscience and neuromania – and to contextualise them in relation to philosophical, social, and scientific debates about the brain’s role in the making of life and self’ (5). Not only is Jason Tougaw venturing in uncharted waters, but he is also treading on dangerous ground as the credibility of Cognitive Literary Studies is often undermined by accusations of indulging in reductionist views, neurospeculation, epistemological carelessness, and neurobabble offering a veneer of scientificity. Besides, as Terence Cave notes, a misonesis of sorts seems to work against the field:

...cognitive methodologies and explanatory frameworks have not yet begun to inflect the common language of literary study; indeed, they often meet with resistance both from those who remain attached to traditional modes of literary history and criticism and from those who pursue variants of the literary theory that characterized the late twentieth-century scene. ([Cave 2016: 15](#)) [\[2\]](#)

In this particular context, Jason Tougaw’s *The Elusive Brain* is at once a brave challenge to the mainstream resistance and an invaluable contribution to neurohumanistic ways of reading into the subjectivity of literary creation.

The book’s multi-chapter division, occasionally interspersed with short interludes, creates a well-paced rhythm which enables the author to touch on several aspects of brain matter and its relation to some innovative literary experiments which triangulate the dynamics between biology, culture and self. By entering Jason Tougaw’s literary laboratory, readers will be exposed to personal accounts and literary representations of the brain-self relationship, thus making some headway in this murky area, which still largely remains a conundrum in brain science. Literary language and literature as a whole are graced with the ability ‘to create speculative knowledge that works as much through feeling as it does through thought. Literature pushes up against questions neurology can’t answer’ (24).

While the neurological works by, say, Richard Powers, Temple Grandin, Oliver Sacks and Kay Redfield Jamison – which Jason Tougaw convincingly analyses in *The Elusive Brain* – are illustrative of a streak Ortega and Vidal identified as ‘brains in literature’ (35), they are also textual evidence of the fruitful dialogue that disability studies and Cognitive Literary Studies can engage through neurodivergence and the insights the latter might yield into social injustice. What is more, these writings have a valuable social function insofar as they are bound to fuel the advocacy and activism of the neurodiversity movement by taking up the cudgels for a more inclusive vision of neurological identity.

Jason Tougaw essentially analyses five literary subgenres featuring neurological narratives (i.e. brain memoirs, ASD autobiographies, Neurodivergence fiction, neuronovels and neurocomics) which ultimately disclose the felicities and limitations of brain science and point to the self as an entangled sum of many constituent elements.

Brain memoirs, despite their wide variety and different mind styles (as exemplified by the writings of Howard Dully, Jill Bolte Taylor, Alix Kates Shulman and Siri Hustvedt), tend to unanimously reveal ‘the writer as organism’ (75) and share a handful of commonalities which are duly listed by Jason Tougaw. Their exploration of brain/self dynamics in the form of a quest of identity in a state of flux is, however, markedly different from that of neurotypical memoirists: ‘Where many traditional memoirs take selfhood for granted, brain memoirs investigate how mind, brain, body and culture interact to create or perform selfhood, and that investigation has social, scientific, and philosophical implications’ (76).

The informing books by Naomi Higashida, Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay and John Elder Robison provide telling examples of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) autobiographies which resonate with neurodiversity politics. After contrasting these narratives of atypical cognition with brain memoirs, Tougaw interestingly observes that advocates of autistic culture have shifted from parents whose child is on the spectrum to ‘aspies’ (i.e. people who identify as autistic) sharing their insider’s perspective of neurodivergence. Animated by a sense of social justice, these authors, whose discourse is modelled on their mind styles and patterns of thinking, tend to be subversive by turning ‘the rhetorical tables on neurotypical norms – a common move in neurodiversity discourse’ (105) and by pointing to the shortcomings of neurotypicality. Ultimately, they navigate a path through preconceptions of ASD, trying to come across as ‘different and not defective’ (114).

The chapter that follows this is about what I would call ‘neurodivergence fiction’, mainly written by authors who are not affected by their subject-matter and so who are meddling with neurodiversity politics from the outside: ‘Their authors appropriate neurological difference in order to experiment with novel narration styles’ (131) and create *sui generis* characters, rather than generic ones with which neurotypical readers would readily identify. The intellectual challenge is greater, given that

When a narrator represents some form of neurodivergence, interpretation becomes an exercise in working out relations between neurological difference and neurological norms. In that sense, it calls on readers to engage in imaginative niche construction. (140)

The major ethical pitfall of these stories, as Tougaw puts it, is ‘their propensity to be received as portraits of lived neurological difference’ (155).

The discussion of neuronovels by Thomas Harris (*Hannibal*, 1999), Ian McEwan (*Saturday*, 2005), Siri Hustvedt (*The Sorrows of an American*, 2009), John Wray (*Lowboy*, 2010) and Maud Casey (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 2014) enables Jason Tougaw to examine the implications of representing the physical brain in fictional worlds. Commonly associated with this genre is its recurring fantasy of how ‘touching brains may reveal the stuff of which self is made’ (157). Composed in the age of neural plasticity, these neuronovels shed new epistemological light on interiority, subjectivity and the elusiveness of the brain, in an attempt to enrich ideas of selfhood and consciousness through counterfactual thinking. The aesthetic representation of this organ of soft nervous tissue made of 90% fat and water is both literal and metaphorical:

While the conscious or semiconscious thought of imagination or affect cannot be found in physical brains, there is also a sense that various forms of unconscious cognition take place in the activity of our nervous systems. (159)

Neuro-graphic narratives are the subcultural fifth form of these literary experiments, to be found in the last chapter – a richly illustrated one – of *The Elusive Brain*. These fantasy-packed stories, feeding on meta-representation, are analysed in comparison with the neuro-imaging obtained through brain-scanning technologies. For Tougaw,

neurocomics visualise a particularly vivid version of an idea implicit in most brain memoir and neuronovels: We need to find more effective means of communicating how knowledge about our brains is produced. (191)

While the inclusion of neurocomics frames has the usefulness of a few thousand words, the translation of the French captions, which has been poached from various sources, is occasionally approximate. For instance, Fig 9 (209) would rather translate as ‘You wouldn’t think so, but this flood of absurdities takes root in my brain. Images are born’.

Tougaw’s cognitively stimulating study impacts on several fronts: it gestures toward an exploration of ‘the paradoxical monstrosity of art’ [3]; it attests to the ever-increasing popularity of cognitivism and its influence on various disciplines such as the humanities; and it demonstrates that embracing the inter-implication of literature and neuroscience is a fruitful venture which, paradoxically enough, is a no-brainer.

Notes

[1] Neuromania is defined in the text as ‘a term generally used as pejorative shorthand for a host of institutions – including neuro-education neuro-marketing, euro-economics, and neuro-self-help movements – that bypass the explanatory gap, exaggerating and oversimplifying recent developments in neuroscience’ (4).

[2] See my review of this book in ‘Book reviews: Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism by Terence Cave’. *Transnational Literature* 10, 1 (November 2017): <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

[3] ‘The paradoxical monstrosity of art is that its practice forms an apparent separation of the human species from all other creatures while simultaneously returning us to our material and evolutionary lives as creatures’ ([Brophy 2009: 15](#)).

Works cited

Brophy, K 2009 *Patterns of Creativity: Investigations into the sources and methods of creativity*, Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York

Cave, T 2016 *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Gorman, J 2014 ‘The Brain, in Exquisite Detail’, *The New York Times*, (7 January), Section D, 1

Jean-François Vernay is a creative writer and scholar, author of several books, the latest of which are The Seduction of Fiction: A Plea for Putting Emotions Back into Literary Interpretation (Palgrave) and its sequel: La Séduction de la fiction (Hermann). He is currently working on a project entitled Cognitive Readings of Australian Culture. He blogs at <http://jean-francoisvernay.blogspot.com>

TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor:

Simon Telford

textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Psycholiterary analysis: Let me not to the marriage of emotion and intellect admit impediments*review by Nataša Kampmark*

Jean-François Vernay

The Seduction of Fiction: A Plea for Putting Emotions Back into Literary Interpretation

Palgrave Macmillan, Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland 2016

978-3-319-39453-4 (eBook)

Pb 124pp EUR54,99

As part of the Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism series, Jean-François Vernay's 'plea for putting emotions back into literary interpretation' is a critical investigation into theory and practice of literary criticism with the aim of finding new directions which 'would do justice to the values of literature' (viii). The original edition of this book was published by Complicités in Paris, in 2013, under the title: *Plaidoyer pour un renouveau de l'émotion en littérature*. Having diagnosed the field as suffering from 'intellectual asphyxia' (xxi), Vernay argues that a path to healing leads through a rehabilitation of emotions. Vigorously opposing the Cartesian polarization of body and mind whilst building on advances of neurobiology which have shown that emotions assist cognition, Vernay proposes a psycholiterary approach which integrates psychology and literary analysis.

In an attempt to rescue literature from dehumanisation and desensitisation inflicted by objectifying interpretations which demand an interrogation of the text, an act of reading is envisaged by Vernay as one of seduction whereby 'the pleasure of the text' (12) is communicated to the reader with the aim of fostering a love of reading. Accepting Roland Barthes's view that desire lies at the heart of conception, reception and interpretation of literature, Vernay terms the writer 'a professional seducer' (xxiii) whose fiction brings 'mental

pleasure' (24) to readers. This centrality of desire to the literary process leads Vernay to investigate a symbiotic relationship of psychoanalysis and literature and their shared interest in the power of language, the readable subject, affects, and the mind. As both psychoanalysis and literature strive to improve the understanding of the human mind by delving beneath the surface, the inter-implication between Freudianism and fiction reveals itself best in the act of scopophilia where the analyst's and critic's tendencies to invade intimacy are indivisible from the analysand's and writer's tendencies to display intimacy.

Not wanting to neglect the pleasure of the text nor theoretical reflection on it, Vernay offers an approach which endeavours to reconcile emotion and intellect, the professional reader with the non-professional, and literature with the sciences. Being one of multidisciplinary approaches, psycholiterary analysis recognises the value of the unconscious, supporting the subjectivity of literary interpretation and urging critics to write in the first person while investigating the aesthetic pleasure of fiction. It draws parallels with operational concepts of the psyche, attempting to ascertain the impact of the affects in the inner workings of both writer and reader. Philosophy and cognitive sciences coalesce in this approach, working together towards a better understanding of the dynamics of the mind.

Vernay assumes the role of a psycholiterary critic while explicating his approach. Thus, he not only writes in the first person but discloses the pleasure he derives from a diverse set of texts from writers, social theorists and philosophers as eclectic as Jean Baudrillard, Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, Hans Robert Jauss, Plato, Clément Rosset, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Gaston Bachelard, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, and Paul Ricoeur. These may be personal favourite giants on whose shoulders Vernay chose to stand on in his attempt to break new grounds in literary criticism, but any dedicated student of literature would greatly benefit from the texts of these theorists. Herein lies another value of Vernay's book: it gives a succinct review of twentieth-century philosophical and literary critical thinking. Moreover, as noted by Carolyne Lee, the book's translator from French into English, it is the 'synergy of ... French/European and English/American/Australian traditions of scholarly criticism, that ... endows [the book] with so much potential for intercultural insight' (xiii).

From chapter to chapter, Vernay presents gradually constructed and logically built arguments, weaving together different strands of his multidisciplinary approach. Establishing the professional reader (literary critic, teacher, student etc.) as his target audience in Chapter 1, Vernay throws a life line to literary criticism which is drowning in metadiscourse in Chapter 2. 'Conceived as an added value to a literary work', argues Vernay, criticism 'must contain neither wordiness ... nor paraphrase' (14). After confirming the importance of context for the creation of a literary work in Chapter 3, the two following chapters elaborate on the central metaphor of seduction, revealing a symbiotic relationship between psychoanalysis and literature which consists no longer of 'the application of psychoanalysis to literature, but rather, of their interimplication' (33). Chapters 6 to 8 focus on the interplay of fact and fiction, real and imagined, and the issue of truth in literature, story-telling and myth-making, concluding that fictional texts are outside truth valuations because they are products of the novelist's imagination. For Vernay, the novel

is a site of ‘the fictional pact, in which the writer deceives and the reader willingly accepts the deception by suspension of disbelief’ (53). Finally, in the form of the psycholiterary approach to fiction which ‘articulates the osmosis occurring between the author’s psyche and the reader’s’ (61), the concluding chapter offers the answer to the question of how the exploits of fictional characters can trigger genuine compassion in readers.

As a review of key discussions about three main points of literary triangle consisting of the writer, text and reader, the book is highly recommended to both students and teachers of literature.

Nataša Kampmark lectures in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University. She is the author of Tri lica australske proze [Three Faces of Australian Fiction] (2004) and the co-editor and translator of Priče iz bezvremene zemlje [Tales from the Timeless Land] (2012).

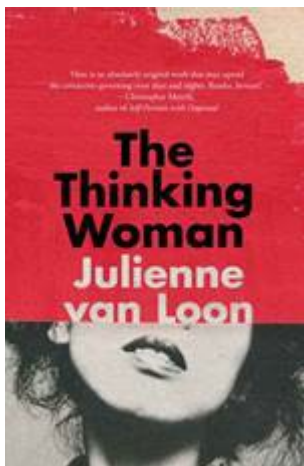
TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review**Creating hurricanes through thought***review by Doris Pushpam*

Julianne van Loon

The Thinking Woman

NewSouth Publishing, Sydney NSW 2019

ISBN: 9781742236308

Pb 248pp 34.99 AUD

The Cartesian dictum ‘Cogito Ergo Sum’, I think, therefore I am, states that the proof of our existence lies in our ability to contemplate our existence, to doubt, to think. Julianne van Loon in *The Thinking Woman* forces us to confront this notion as part of a six-chapter, part memoir, part study of philosophical thought. With the help of six women prolific in their fields of study, van Loon critically interrogates thought, the importance of the act of thinking, and what it means for our existence. She starts with a chapter titled ‘Love’, followed by ‘Play’, ‘Work’, ‘Fear’, ‘Wonder’, and ‘Friendship’. Each is an amalgam of van Loon’s lived experiences and her intellectual engagement with the ideas of women thinkers including Laura Kipnis, professor of media studies at Northwestern University in Chicago, novelist Siri Hustvedt, socialist feminist Nancy Holmstrom, French feminist and structuralist philosopher Julia Kristeva, psychoanalyst and feminist critic, Marina Warner, and the cultural historian Rosi Braidotti. This polyvocal discourse leaves the reader with a wholesome and new understanding of the dynamics of life.

According to Chaos Theory, or the Butterfly effect, one small change in a system can change everything. For instance, a hurricane can be triggered by the flapping of a butterfly’s wings from weeks earlier. *The Thinking Woman* is the flapping of a butterfly’s wings capable of triggering a hurricane within us. Every chapter is an opportunity for self-reflection and change. For instance, in the chapter ‘Love’, van Loon together with Laura Kipnis delves love’s

undercurrents, and discusses the idea of being against love, exploring the word 'against', not to mean opposed to but 'bolstered by' (42). This chapter asks us to consider what we know about love and relationships and how much we have allowed society to dictate what goes on in a relationship, from the notion of marriage to the stigma associated with divorce, the science behind adultery and the idea of working on a relationship. It forces us to confront our own idea of love and for some, gives them the courage to ask the question, 'Why do I stay?' The chapter allows the adventurer on the path of love to stop and consider where their notion of love comes from. It provides an alternate understanding of love and relationships, where the individual is at the centre: not necessarily a player in a game where winners must walk down the aisle. This flap of the butterfly's wings creates more avenues to consider in finding love without sacrificing one's sense of self.

The second flap of the butterfly's wings brings change in the form of an opportunity, an opportunity to consider our choices and the agency we have in our lives. As in the first chapter, van Loon shows us that we have choices. She addresses Fear in dialogue with Julia Kristeva, a structuralist philosopher, psychoanalyst and contributor to feminist criticism, discussing power and control in fostering fear, how fear differs in how it affects men and women, the many perspectives on fear, and the need to face fear in order to inspire change. Van Loon states that fear is about control, more specifically the loss of control and power. She explores how women have a vastly diminished internal locus of control when compared to men and this, along with the running commentary of women's plights in society such as rape, sexual violence, physical violence, and threats on their being, renders them powerless. Here agency comes into play in the act of facing our fears and taking control. Van Loon and Kristeva talk about facing our fears by recognising the root of it then acting accordingly to confront it, saying, 'We, each of us, need to examine the perpetual play between inside and outside, a constant, and perhaps constantly surprising, process. This is so even – or perhaps especially – in the face of that thing that horrifies us most' (130). The need to face our fears, which comes from changing the power dynamic in society ensures the decrease in fear as van Loon states, '... fear and violence both decrease as women participate more fully in civil society' (147). The chapter addresses control and power and how it is in deciding to take control of our fear that we have power, and this leads to positive change. Choice and agency are at the heart of most of the chapters, each one bringing you closer to some form of eureka.

All the flaps of the butterfly's wings add up to create beautiful chaos, achieved in this case through thought. At the heart of this chaos is the individual. Van Loon addresses identity in various ways through the different chapters. For example in the chapter titled 'Work', van Loon and socialist feminist Nancy Holmstrom discuss self-ownership and what it means for women in the workplace, the loss of identity as one partakes in a capitalist economy and the need to come up with an alternative that allows for some form of fulfilment. On the loss of self, Holmstrom states, 'Of course we are not, in fact, just our labour power, but the capitalist apparatus makes it increasingly difficult for many of us to be substantially and wilfully active much else beyond... It gets into everything ... every aspect of nature, including our bodies, the air, the water, everything.' (93). This chapter is an opportunity to recognize that we as a society have accepted that there is a certain dynamic involved in working that goes far beyond just our labour; we

give our mind and body. It allows us to ask the question ‘Who am I if not my labour?’ (109). Another important aspect of identity that van Loon brings up along with feminist philosopher, Rosi Braidotti is the necessity of camaraderie in shaping identity in the chapter titled ‘Friendship’. Van Loon shares the story of her friendship with Jo who she met in university and how through the years their friendship was a constant until Jo’s untimely death. It is a powerful chapter that captures how friendship truly shapes who we are. You find yourself reminiscing on the friends you have and realize their impact on your life. The mingling of van Loon’s story with Braidotti’s idea that the formation of identity is a collaborative effort as well as her explanation of interconnectedness creates a newfound appreciation for those people in your life that have given you parts of them and in the process created a version of yourself that you would never have experienced otherwise. It is a powerful chapter on the bond we share with others and how our identity is shaped through these relationships. We learn through these chapters that we are the choices we make, the control we take, we are an amalgamation of the people we call friends and the parts of ourselves that we choose to accept. *The Thinking Woman* makes us realize that the question ‘Who am I?’ is not one we ask ourselves often enough. We abide by social structures and in the process lose our ability to make choices, to have control and ultimately, we lose ourselves. Van Loon makes us aware of this.

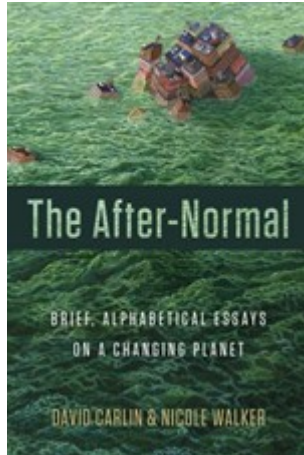
It is important to note that van Loon introduces the reader to a pool of scholars who have contributed to the ideas discussed. ‘I wanted to celebrate the contribution made by women in the intellectual sphere...’, van Loon states and she does so by intertwining seamlessly both her story and the works of female thinkers (5) Often in her conversations with the ‘thinkers’, they bring up different ideas like the Kantian notion of radical evil and Hannah Arendt’s application of it, the Marxist concept of alienation and Ann Cahill’s essay, ‘The Phenomenology of Fear’ among others. The ideas presented are bolstered by these discussions and allow the reader to broaden their scope of knowledge. The format is an effective means of educating one without making them overwhelmed.

In *The Thinking Woman*, we are confronted on our ability to question, to go against the grain, to dare to look at our own ideologies; their origin and their shortcomings and we come to the realization that perhaps we have been settling all our lives. It makes us aware that we have wilfully traded in our ability to think for a life of indolent comfort. We eventually realize that our ability to form a thought that is solely based on self-interest and self-gratification has atrophied. We have been conditioned to be less and sometimes to not *be* at all. Van Loon emphasizes that it is in recognising our freedom to choose and breaking free of the structures that keep us imprisoned by their norms and traditions that we are able to form and shape our identities. This process of becoming is facilitated by the knowledge that our way of being is neither right nor wrong; it just is. *The Thinking Woman* is a call for us to think about our existence, to ponder it along with others and to recognize the agency that we hold in our lives. It tells us that we have choices, that our choices aren’t less valid just because society doesn’t agree, that we are allowed to be and in doing so, we become. Each chapter is a flap of a butterfly’s wings that allows the reader the opportunity to think about their lives; where they are and where they are going so that they can be hurricanes. It also allows the reader to change any aspect of their life, whether it is working on friendships they have neglected, seeing love through new eyes,

giving play a try again or finding our sense of wonder. By sharing aspects of her life, van Loon encourages the reader to reflect on their own lives in relation to the areas discussed and this leads to healing and enlightenment. We confront our trauma and realize, page by page, that we are changing. By the end of the book, we see that we are not the same person we were when we first began, we are on our way to becoming hurricanes.

Doris Pushpam is a current Creative Writing research degree candidate at the University of South Australia.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford****textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review**Letters and numbers***review by Moya Costello*

David Carlin and Nicole Walker

The After-Normal: Brief, Alphabetical Essays on a Changing Planet

Rose Metal Press, Brookline MA 02446 2019

ISBN 9781941268171

Pb 224pp, AUD24.65



Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart

The Hundreds

Duke University Press, Durham 2019

ISBN 9781478002888

Pb 184pp, AUD34.85

If you work with a template, such as that provided by a manual or a number set, you already have a structure for your writing: you don't have to construct one. For David Carlin and Nicole Walker, in *The After Normal*, the template

was a survival guide for entering ‘these unprecedented times of swift climate change’; so, they co-opted, not without irony, ‘the form of an A–Z “how-to”’ (xi). For Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, in *The Hundreds*, it was a word count for a writing exercise. Their exercises ‘in following out the impact of things’ are in ‘hundred-word units or units of hundred multiples’ (ix). They brought this number set to the concept they were developing: ‘the new ordinary’ (ix). The phrases ‘after normal’ and ‘new ordinary’ are mirror images of each other.

Carlin and Walker specify the trajectory of their book in their Preface: ‘noticing, witnessing, and responding with care, love and justice’ (x). Berlant and Stewart come to their purpose in the third entry of the actual text in their book: ‘Dilations’. *The Hundreds* is an experiment in ‘keeping up with what’s going on’ (5) and in this entry, they denote the approach of the book: ‘attention and riffing’ (5). Noticing or paying attention is now a fully standardised requirement for ecological writing (see Harrison 2013). Both books have come about through another survival strategy: that of co-operation/collaboration. This strategy is demonstrable in both nature and culture: forests are sophisticated networks of multispecies cooperation (Carlin 125-126), and public transport is about an ‘unwritten contract of cooperation’ (Carlin 148).

Walker has a reflexive note on the genre of these mini creative nonfictions within *The After-Normal*: ‘fiction is actually the genre that requires certainty. The essay is the one with all the questions’ (106). Berlant and Stewart say their pieces are poems ‘because they’re about making’ or *poiesis* (117). Their book is full of Derrida-type aphorisms (see Derrida 1989), short Stein-esque conundrums or astonishing conceptual leaps – for example: ‘Shoes are worn in many senses’ (18), or ‘Achievements produce defences against their own openings’ (91).

Both books are *for* writing in a dual sense that they advocate for writing as an environmental strategy, and as exercises for a writing workshop. *The Hundreds* is also about reading or how reading is written, to quote Astrid Lorange’s (2014) book title on Stein.

For those readers anxious about potential lack of reading pleasure in texts that are characterised by the presence of brevity and the absence of narrative arc, here’s Stephen Muecke (2019) in one of the deconstructed indexes to the Berlant and Stewart book:

Who needs a long narrative arc anyway, when fragments have their own subjective affordances? Long narratives are Wall Street investments in character. Literary monuments. But here there are hundreds of glimpses, flashes like in the fire opals from Lightning Ridge. A glimpse, a figure half seen in the mist, is an emergent concept or feeling that has its value in its evanescence. (154)

In Berlant and Stewart’s riffs, it’s not surprising that among the notes struck are anger-inducing tension and shuffling anxiety, in a struggle to live an

‘ordinary’, decent life. There’s ‘the wish to bomb unbearable schmucks and the desperate desire for loved ones to die their own way’ (93). In a gym, a man makes a verbal, aggressive move against a woman (23-24), or Texas is noted as a place to work on oil rigs, or in prisons or detention centres (89). The after-normal or the new ordinary include the extinction of the albatross in the Atlantic, their death from ingestion of plastic at their birthplace on Midway Island (Walker 4), the shift of bird populations north to survive (Walker 165), and much more.

I’ve wanted, in these contemporary times, an explanation for the rise of right-wing politics and its persistence with earth-destroying policies. For example, the ‘fossil-fueled Koch brothers’ lobbied against extending public transport in Tennessee (Carlin 167), when public transport is about the reduction of carbon emissions and the spread of a civil society. Carlin says that climate change is seen as a ‘socialist conspiracy’; either that, or the right-wing feel their own coming loss of a license ‘to conquer, subdue, extract, control’ (64).

These books are generated by troubled times. Carlin and Walker wanted to move ‘beyond useless despair’ (x) and toward wonder, where it is found. Berlant and Stewart push off a story, getting a momentary capture that’s ‘the machinery of generation’ (126), to see what can happen. These books disturb and create ‘what’s continuous, anchoring you enough in the scene to pull in other things as you go’; they shift ‘around the qualities of things that have and haven’t yet been encountered’ (Berlant and Stewart 5). ‘This is a time,’ Carlin says, ‘in which the friction caused by the urgency of what we face makes new ideas and new alliances suddenly thinkable and makeable’ (185).

Works cited

Derrida, J 1989 ‘Fifty-Two Aphorisms for a Foreword’ *Deconstruction: Omnibus Volume*, A Apadakis, C Cook & A Benjamin (eds), Rizzoli, New York return to text

Harrison, M 2013 ‘The Act of Writing and the Act of Attention’, in M Harrison, D Bird Rose, L Shannon & K Satchell (eds) *TEXT Special Issue 20: Writing Creates Ecology and Ecology Creates Writing*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue20/Harrison.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2019) return to text

Lorange, A 2014 *How Reading Is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown CT return to text

Muecke, S 2019 ‘Untitled’, in L Berlant & K Stewart *The Hundreds*, Duke University Press, Durham: 153-154 return to text

Dr Moya Costello is a writer, and an Adjunct Lecturer, Schools of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University. Her scholarly and creative publications are in a range of journals and anthologies. She has four books published: two of short creative prose (Kites in Jakarta and Small Ecstasies) and two short novels (The Office as a Boat and Harriet Chandler). She has been awarded writer’s grants and fellowships, has been a Writer-in-Residence at Monash University, judged several writing competitions and been a guest

at the Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Gold Coast, Yamba, Bryon and Bellingen writers' festivals.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

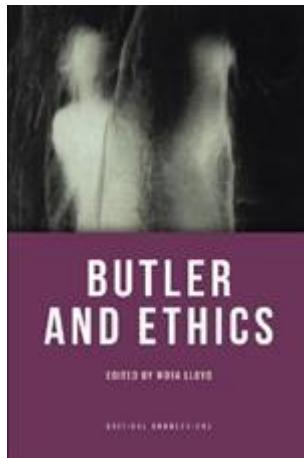
General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford

textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Dehiscence in politic and ethics?

review by Maya Nitis

Moya Lloyd

Butler and Ethics

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2015

ISBN 9780748678853

Pb 232pp AUD72.99

The importance of the ethical for Butler ... is that it marks a critical temporality, one that gives the rhythm to any project of a collective self-making... As the relation of address, the ethical “inaugurates time and again the political”. (133)

Today’s edited collections might risk laying out a neoliberal smorgasbord of neatly packaged and digestible bricks of so-called knowledge, a suspicion which *Butler and Ethics* hardly dispels at first glance; yet the volume quickly proves to offer a nuanced, energetic and needed engagement with Judith Butler’s work, which has been increasingly concerned with ethics in the last decade and a half. It thus constitutes an important contribution to embattled interdisciplinary inquiries into the intertwinement of ethics and politics. Moreover, the transdisciplinary approach in wrestling with concrete current, historically situated conditions, makes it an arresting and relevant read.

A collection of essays may be difficult to summarize without lumping the individual contributions together and betraying their differences, although such difficulty may also evidence a certain breadth of this particular book. A number of the pieces seem to grope for systematicity, for instance, by filling theoretical gaps in ‘the topic’ – which is not singular since the conjunction in “*Butler and Ethics*” invites being read backwards and forwards, and the direction may indicate whether one is interested in stylizing Butler’s thought to respond to a given issue, or in how it challenges what has so been

understood by ‘ethics’. These two significantly varied approaches frame this volume, the tension between which is amply played out in the editor’s contribution to which I will return.

Taking up Butler’s worry that a focus on ethics may dislocate politics (Butler & Connolly 2000), the relationship of ethics and politics constitutes the central concern of *Butler and Ethics*. Nevertheless, Butler is charged with enacting just such a dislocation by Bonnie Honig (2010), an issue addressed by multiple authors in the volume. If an anthology can be said to have a central aim, this book aims to present the interdisciplinary engagement with Butler’s rethinking of the ethical-political as an inter-relation and the debates about its implications among queer, feminist, political theorists. I will delve deeper into this discussion following the requisite summary of the contributions clustered around a. limits that condition ethics as failure, b. performativity undermining dichotomies and c. the connection between these two themes.

Taking the reader on an invigorating journey through ethical-political intertwinement that connects the varied contributions, the opening essay warrants particular attention, bringing together the themes of performativity and failure. Nathaniel Gies’ capacious reading offers a generous lead into the collection, replying in advance to some of the more fastidious criticism of Butler’s engagement with ethics. Gies’ ‘Signifying Otherwise: Liveability and Language’ addresses the terms of knowability and the way in which Butler’s ethical-political considerations displace the demand for certainty that has conventionally grounded ethics and agency. The displacement operates on two fronts: through the opacity of the subject to itself and the impossibility to fully master or author linguistic/social norms, as Mills also lays out. Gies says:

when Butler points to aspects of subjectivity irreducible to the operation of norms, she does not retreat to but further displaces a traditional account of agency ... for Butler the recognition of limits, incoherence and failure is not a qualification of the project of expanding possibilities for life but a goad to it: “new modes of subjectivity become possible...when the limiting conditions by which we are made prove to be malleable and replicable”. (23)

This reading succeeds in leaving behind dichotomies and moving towards an alternate logic arguably at the heart of Butler’s ongoing project of unfolding thought irreducible to dualisms.

A number of essays take up what Catherine Mills calls ‘an ethics of failure’ in ‘Undoing Ethics.’ Rather than evaluating to what extent such a designation captures Butler’s approach, I want to query how it brings together the focus on limits constitutive not only of an ambivalent notion of the so-called subject but also of agency and politics, as Jenkins takes up (136). The attention to limits as constitutive rather than simply limiting – or in Foucault’s language, as productive rather than strictly prohibitive or repressive – challenges Butler’s commentators to engage a non-sovereign conception of action and agency (Foucault 1990). Although the shift from Foucault’s productive power to Butler’s conditioned collective agency – more in tune to working with what is already there than creation, which may indicate a more radical break with power’s proximity to mastery – is not marked, a consideration of these themes can yield such an insight. Collective agency constitutes another subtle concern

coursing through the pages. Mills reads in Butler ‘an ethics of failure’ rather than of relationality, bringing a feminist focus on ethics to a prominent queer theory theme of failure. While she sees the constitutive role of limits and opacity for Butler, Mills argues that Butlerean relationality remains problematic in so far as it relies on ‘commonality’ (43). Against the reading of relationality as source or cause of responsibility, Mills sees it as a locus thereof, while positioning opacity as the onto-epistemological condition of ethics in a relational context (51). Seeming to object to any notion of commonality, be it dependency or opacity, Mills holds out for a more radical ungrounding of ethics via Butler’s turn to cohabitation.

Also moving against conventional ethical ‘ought’s’ in ‘Butler’s Ethical Appeal’, Sara Rushing argues that the search for systematicity in Butler’s commentators misses the nuanced shift from prescription – that hasn’t seemed to work yet in at least a few thousand years – to a nudging, solicitation and subtle moving towards embodying the changes sought: ‘This body of words has aesthetic appeal, a certain poetry to it, which is meant not so much to communicate ideas as to induce an experience ... or to perform it iteratively across multiple texts and talks, and to solicit a community of solidarity’ (82). Thus recognizing the limits of agency and/as prescription enables a shift to performativity. This performative (and perhaps perlocutionary) aspect is key to Butlerean ethical-political work and also illuminates both the necessary attention to language and the interest in affect addressed by Rushing and Schippers. Rushing argues that affect takes on an important role in Butler’s ethics, acting as a ‘synapse firing’ between ethics and politics (84). This connector deflects Honig’s charge of displacing politics but remains to be more directly addressed according to Rushing. In ‘Violence, Affect and Ethics’ Birgit Schippers also focuses on the subterranean role of affect in Butler’s ethics, arguing that it ‘construes the subject ... in three forms:’ desire, trauma and excitability. Unlike Mills, Schippers sees Butler’s affective subject as thoroughly relational – since it is always dependent on others – and irreducible to the philosophical subject disciplining or stripped of its passion. Thus Schippers brings Butler’s decentering of the subject to bear on the philosophical project and its classic rejection of visceral and sensual modes of knowing (96).

The struggle with dichotomies is no stranger to performativity, and the extent to which a thinker moves away from dualist ideology. Hence even when making a convincing argument, inattention to its dichotomous structures or to the categories on which it relies forestalls the performativity of knowledge production that enables movement toward dialogical practices of solidarity. Lloyd’s ‘The Ethics and Politics of Vulnerable Bodies’ not only portrays but also enacts the struggle with non-dualistic thinking that resonates throughout the essays. She answers her own complaint against Butler for not providing prescriptions, with the astute insight that to do so misreads Butler’s account of *ethics as non-prescriptive* (183). Yet Lloyd returns to lament the lack of clear steps for action (185). This problematic seems to rest on the attribution of a dualism to Butler, which misses not only the way in which Butler’s account shifts from dualism toward cleavage thereby splitting and retaining the movement without static bifurcation, as Gies points out, but perhaps also Lloyd’s own prior insight regarding Butler’s ‘dialectic without synthesis’ (Lloyd 2007). The difficulty here testifies to the entrenchment and stakes of dualist logic. Lloyd’s awareness of this is poignantly alluded to in a note

citing Butler's call for 'an insurrection at the level of ontology' (2004: 33) in place of simple extension of inclusion of content (188).

Both Chambers and Walker can be seen as replaying the struggle between dualist and performative approaches. Unlike the rest of the essays Samuel Chambers focuses on Butler's earlier work and *The Psychic Life of Power*. His main claim is that an account of social formation is missing there, forcibly removed from a reading of Althusser. He provides this 'missing account,' arguing that its absence is consequential and allies Butler with liberal theorists in her *Frames of War* (2009) since it necessitates a resort to tautologies in place of such an account. Also unsatisfied with Butler's theorization of the ethical-political relation, Drew Walker wrestles with Butler's evocation of a futural universal human condition in 'Two Regimes of the Human'. Rejecting the possibility of any universal, he splits a human figure into a spectral one concerned with survival and a performative one concerned with limits, arguing that only the latter is subversive. Walker worries that locating the process of dehumanization as a condition for what counts as human distracts from specific political dehumanization.

Before wrapping up this discussion, I want to return briefly to 'Signifying Otherwise: Liveability and Language', where Gies connects two central aspects of Butler's work: language and liveability. He accurately suggests that both echo themes already at the heart of her earlier writing on feminism and gender. Tuned into thought that does not function according to either/or models, Gies shows how the opacity, uncertainty and limitations addressed by Butler do not constitute a hurdle for ethics or politics but are their very conditions, a point also made by Mills and Jenkins (52, 136). Such a move radically rethinks western conceptions of politics based on exclusion, instead offering a thoroughly contingent and at the same time sustainable apprehension of the ethical-political in relation – conditioned by flux and failure. Instead of lamenting the danger to Butler's work carried by the heavy heritage of Levinas' problem-laden considerations of ethical demands, or the contamination of the face introduced by Butler's always 'promiscuous obedience' to this notion (Butler 2000: 226), Gies illuminates the significance of such a reworking. Reading Butler and Levinas through one another, he poignantly and evocatively proposes to read the Levinasian 'face' à la Butler 'as a kind of "human drag": 'The face shows the instability of all attempts to offer "the human" as a clearly defined category in the same way drag points to the instability of normative gender categories' (21). Performativity has long been questioned about the relation of language and that which may or may not exceed it; this very issue contributed to the impetus for *Bodies That Matter*, whose trope of mattering has become endemic in contemporary social debates (which Walker takes up in a critical register). Resisting the dualist vocabulary generally imposed on the question of language and its other/s thereby subtly discarding it in advance, Gies shows that for Butler this simultaneously ancient and current conundrum operates as an irreducible dehiscence, or cleavage, that, like failure, is a constitutive condition rather than a hindrance to agency (22, 33).

Fiona Jenkins' 'Sensate Democracy and Grievable Life' also offers a *practice* of dialogical elaboration rather than argument thereby attending to its own performative mode of writing as doing. Such practice yields a performative 'we' at stake in Butler's trajectory. Jenkins provides insight into Butler's rethinking of the Kantian transcendental 'I' in *Giving an Account* (2005)

without which no experience is possible – a kernel of the oft-criticized philosophical/grammatical Subject – in terms of the always (inter)dependent “we”. In what can be read as another reply to the insistent worry about the lack of an ethical program, the very inquiry into what constitutes the ‘we’ replaces the Habermasian normative question (131). This shift from prescription to an ethical-political critique that includes and translates among writing, speaking and collective action characterizes performative agency on this account (130).

Providing access to Butler’s innovative trans- and per-formative approach, Jenkins returns to a concept of temporalized universality, at work also in other contributions in divergent ways. Aligning the ‘temporalised political *task* of universalisation’ with translation provides the link to language and a futural temporality needed to understand Butler’s approach, which, without such orientation tends to be misunderstood as yet another conventional positing of a pre-existing commonality (121). Although Jenkins does not call this a ‘hopeful universal’ as Butler might, she articulates the *deciding absence of a given* in Butler’s universal calls. Such a reading of universalization as a task of translation recalls Walter Benjamin to whom Butler has increasingly turned in the past decade.

This anthology evidences both the editor’s and the contributors’ sustained and careful engagement with ‘the leading social theorist of our generation’, offering interdisciplinary breadth and depth in dealing with the nexus of ethics and politics (West 2011: 92; cited on 193). The lack of attention to how Butler’s interaction with Benjamin characterizes her ethical-political work constitutes an omission (except briefly by Jenkins), but I will focus on what *Butler and Ethics* does accomplish. The divergent essays display a struggle with a consequential shift in the studies of ethics and politics ushered in by ongoing intervention in these conventional disciplines by minoritized traditions voiced from feminist, race and queer studies. While the volume as a whole may not exemplify a performative approach to language and knowledge, it provides a compelling collection of insights that enable readers to apprehend the conditioning intertwinement, or as Lloyd puts it: ‘inter-imbrication’, of ethics and politics (167). Hence not only do some essays offer inspired and inspiring practices of reading-as-writing, the work as a whole provides an important and multifaceted discussion of the innovative trans- and per-formative approach, and thereby untethers thinking and knowledge from reduction to given oppositions that still dominate mainstream knowledge production.

Works cited

Butler, J 2000 *Antigone’s claim: Kinship between life and death*, Columbia University Press, New York return to text

Butler, J 2004 *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*, Verso, London return to text

Butler, J 2005 *Giving an account of oneself*, Fordham University Press, New York return to text

Butler, J 2009 *Frames of war: When is life grievable?*, Verso, London return to text

Butler, J & W Connolly 2000 'Politics, power and ethics: A discussion between Judith Butler and William Connolly', *Theory and Event* 4, 2. Available at:

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/32589> (accessed 31 October 2019) return to text

Foucault, M 1990 [1976] *The History of sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans R Hurley, Vintage, New York return to text

Honig, B 2010 'Antigone's two laws: Greek tragedy and the politics of humanism', *New Literary History* 41, 1: 1-33 return to text

Lloyd, M 2007 *Judith Butler: From norms to politics*, Polity, Cambridge return to text

West, C 2011 'Prophetic religion and the future of capitalist civilization', in E Mendieta & J VanAntwerpen (eds) *The Power of religion in the public sphere*, Columbia University Press, New York return to text

With degrees in English, Political Science and Philosophy, among others, Maya Nitis has embarked on a route through German Studies pursuing interests in pedagogy and critical theory, focusing on its feminist, Black and queer branches. Languages of Resistance 1: Performativity and Cultural-Political Translation, Nitis's first book published in 2014, addresses the revolutionary in the intertwinement of language and reality, primarily through the work of Judith Butler in relation to that of Walter Benjamin. Nitis has also published in areas of feminist pedagogy and queer knowledge production in journals including Diacritics and Feministische Studien. Maya is currently working on a dissertation provisionally titled Literary Agency and Unfinished Knowledge, which queries an agency specific to literary endeavors and gives rise to a conception of knowledge undermining dominant goals of mastery.

TEXT

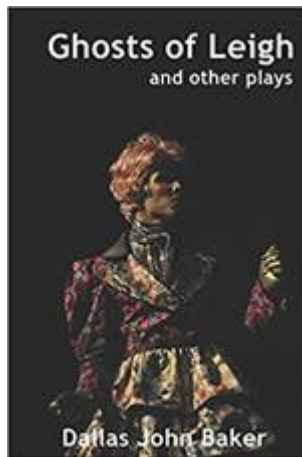
Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Scripted explorations of gender and sexuality offer a rich sense of place*review by Stacy Taylor*

Dallas Baker
Ghosts of Leigh and other plays
 LineWright 2018
 ISBN 0648397211
 Pb 196pp AUD65.84

There is growing attention to script writing as a legitimate critical methodology and to its attendant artefacts as scholarly research outputs (Kimber 2014, Beattie 2015, Batty et al 2015, Batty, Sawtell & Taylor 2016, Kerrigan & Batty 2016, Lee et al 2016, Batty & Taylor 2018 – see works cited below). Dallas John Baker is himself a leader in the field of producing scripts as research and theorising the process (Baker 2012, Baker 2013a, Baker 2013b, Baker et al 2015, Baker 2016, Baker 2017, Baker 2018a, Baker 2018b, Batty & Baker 2018 – see works cited below). In this collection of four short scripts, Baker offers the reader the chance to experience these works as discrete texts that contribute to an emerging field of script writing ‘as a mode through which theories and ideas of various types can be illuminated, tested out and, in some cases, transgressed’ (Batty & Taylor 2018: 377). In this way, Baker addresses a lack of such opportunities for readers, given ‘there have been few avenues available for the publication of dramatic scripts as creative writing’ (Baker et al 2015: v4) because ‘the publication of scripts has traditionally only happened post-production, as a kind of validation of the script’s successful production, either for stage or screen’ (Beattie 2013: 1).

Ghosts of Leigh and other plays comprises two theatre scripts and two screenplays, not necessarily to be considered *for* the stage or *for* the screen, but rather ‘artefacts of a writing practice’ where it is anticipated that ‘by not

signalling the mode of production or reception (stage, television or cinema), the term “script” hopefully reorients the reader from approaching the text as ancillary to a stage or screen production to understanding it as a finished creative and research work on its own terms’ (Baker 2013a: 2). Baker usefully contextualises the collection in the preface, situating the pieces ‘as research artefacts that are able to communicate new knowledge in creative ways’ (i). This underpinning gives a methodological coherence to the collection, which is further unified by its world and themes. Baker’s four works are all set in Toowoomba in Southern Queensland, Australia over the years spanning the early 1980s and the mid 1990s and all are ‘informed by poststructural and queer theory relating to subjectivity, identity, gender and sexuality’ (i).

Baker’s collection leads strongly with the titular *Ghosts of Leigh*, a coming-of-age play that pairs the main character, teenager Dandelion, with a mentor – in the form of the ghost of Australian performance artist and fashion designer Leigh Bowery. By exploring effeminacy as ‘a subversive masculinity of considerable discursive potency’ (ii), the piece invites us to consider the complexities of effemiphobia, which transcends gender and sexuality identities. *Ghosts of Leigh* is an accomplished two-hander, where the characters collide and complement each other in ways that draw out the conflict and comedy, which in turn highlight the themes and theories in ways that avoid didacticism. Baker turns his hand to dialogue that is striking and efficient in revealing character, particularly demonstrated by Leigh’s arch witticisms:

DANDELION

I can’t help what my parents called me.

LEIGH

Of course you can’t, but still, you might’ve tried to dissuade them.

DANDELION

When I was a baby?

LEIGH

Being a baby is no excuse for bad taste. (9-10)

What is impressive about *Ghosts of Leigh* is how the critical theory is enacted not only through content – ‘How nice to have two of me here’ says Leigh (8), referring both to his reflection in the mirror and the performative nature of gender – but also through form. By staging a play within a play – ‘Seriously, you carry the script of your life with you everywhere you go?’ asks Dandelion of Leigh (41) – Baker puts his young protagonist to the work of performing various aspects of his gender identity. As Leigh says towards the end of the play, ‘you’ll spend your whole life in disguise, wearing a uniform dictated by other people’ (54). It is an added pleasure that the book includes illustrations from the original production of *Ghosts of Leigh*, which are cleverly placed where lights fade to black between scenes, affording the reader the same sense of space and time passing (30-36).

Hallwalkers, the second piece in the collection, likewise explores its themes through content and form (in this case, screenplay form), with the use of the protagonist’s direct address to camera. While the ‘conceit of breaking the

fourth wall has long seemed to operate as an extension of the screenwriter's macho authorial voice' (Bastow 2019), it was also used in early feminist filmmaking as one of the narratological focalisation techniques employed to challenge the universal subjectivity of commercial cinema (Smelik 1998). For Baker, the use of direct address functions 'as a subversion of mainstream (masculinist) screen conventions that accentuate the visual (masculine) over the verbal (feminine) and verisimilitude over self-reflexivity' (iii). He is playful with this device, situating the reader (or viewer) firmly in the sights of the young protagonist, Ally:

ALLY (direct address)

Okay, so, on the inside I'm totally freaking out. On the outside I'm playing it like I've done this a thousand times before. Am I convincing?

(beat)

I'm seriously asking, am I? (71)

As a gender non-conforming character, Ally's question of being 'convincing' is multi-layered – and ultimately left unanswered, since the portal created by the broken fourth wall only works one way.

Bath Party follows a similar protagonist to *Hallwalkers*'s Ally through a similar narrative structure, where the central character, Izzie, likewise described as 'pretty but does not believe that she is' (61, 91), also finds a form of acceptance from the object of her desire. Izzie is confronting a different set of conflicts, however, and the first three scenes again demonstrate Baker's ability with rich two-handers in domestic settings; places the reader is invited to consider anew through the eyes of the characters inhabiting them, within which every nuance of their mutual confinement is explored. It feels like *Hallwalkers*'s Ally and *Bath Party*'s Izzie exist in the same transmedia universe – only a year separates their attendance at (albeit, very different) parties in the same small town – and that this could be fodder for future research and creative exploration.

Rounding off the collection is *I'm Going to Set You to Boiling, Baby*. In this screenplay, also exploring coming of age themes, it is clear that Baker is relishing the opportunity to move beyond the confines of the stage set and into the wider world of Toowoomba, delivering economical and evocative 'big print' (action and description) demonstrating one of the important mainstays of screenwriting craft:

A fading "Paddle Pop" sign has pride of place on the shop façade, directly above the awning. (140)

The screenplay 're-imagines a moment in the author's youth when he first acknowledged his sexuality and gender difference' and evolved out of 'an interdisciplinary approach including factual research ... and fiction techniques' (v). An accomplished and produced playwright, Baker sometimes misses opportunities to fully exploit the full range of screenwriting devices, such as montage, instead bringing to this (and *Hallwalkers*) more theatrical conventions such as long, complete scenes and soliloquy. With that said, over the course of this script, Baker has increasing fun with superimposed titles (a specific affordance of screen storytelling) that supply definitions of words used by characters, ranging from the playful:

Paddle Pop: a milk-based frozen dairy snack popular in Australia and New Zealand (147)

to the witty and knowing:

Carnation (ka: 'neɪfən) – noun: *A flowering species of Dianthus popular in the 1980s and long favoured by homosexuals and Irish playwrights* (168)

to the sobering:

Poofster ('pɒftə) – noun: *1. A man who is considered effeminate or homosexual. 2. A contemptible person* (142).

As Baker notes in the premise, the piece 'extends the application of memoir as mere retelling to one of *refiguring* of memory' (vi, emphasis in original). This has the effect of sharpening the point-of-view, where the world and its supporting characters are vividly drawn from the perspective of the protagonist. It is perhaps unnecessary, then, that a final narrative voice-over announces that 'This is how I remember things. My memories are my own, and I will make them what I will' (176). By contrast, Izzie in *Bath Party* (this piece evolved out of a similarly hybrid methodology, as noted in the preface) reflects 'How very eighties of me' (95) offering a layer of retrospection that temporarily, and cleverly, gives voice to the authorial process.

Ghosts of Leigh and other plays is a strong collection of scripts that can be enjoyed as lively and nuanced pieces of creative writing as well as theoretically rich research artefacts. Baker is particularly adept with his casts, whereby the 'characters become fictional agents of research themes and concerns, and can bring academic ideas into a broader, more mainstream world' (Batty, Sawtell & Taylor 2016: 155). Though not explicitly identified as one of Baker's theoretical frameworks, it occurs that his is an enquiry informed by the tenets of critical autoethnography, which 'theorizes the dynamic relationship between the personal and the cultural' (Adams & Holman-Jones 2018: 153). With this collection, Baker shares his unique view of 1980s-1990s Southern Queensland, while deftly employing critical theory, which not only strengthens the themes of gender and sexuality, but also offers a solid research contribution across a number of scholarly fields.

Works cited

Adams, TE & S Holman-Jones 2018 'The Art of Autoethnography', in P Leavy (ed) *Handbook of Arts- Based Research*, The Guildford Press, New York: 141-164 return to text

Baker, DJ 2012 'Bath Party', *Polari Journal* 5 (April): 1-38

Baker, DJ & D Beattie 2013 (eds), *TEXT Special Issue 19: Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue19/content.htm>

Baker, DJ 2013a 'Scriptwriting as creative writing research: a preface', *TEXT Special Issue 19: Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research*: http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue19/Baker_preface.pdf return to text

Baker, Dallas John 2013b 'I'm Going to Set You to Boiling, Baby', *TEXT Special Issue 19: Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research*:

<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue19/Baker.pdf>

Baker, DJ 2016 'The Screenplay as Text: Academic Scriptwriting as Creative Research', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 13, 1: 1-14

Baker, DJ 2017 'Ghosts of Leigh: Scripting the Monstrous Effeminate', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 14, 3: 327-347

Baker, DJ 2018a 'Play Scripts as Knowledge Objects', Playwriting as Research, special section, *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 15, 2: 1-5

Baker, DJ 2018b 'Hallwalkers: Queering Gender and Attraction through/in Scriptwriting', *TEXT Special Issue 48: Screenplays as Research Artefacts*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue48/Baker.pdf>

Baker, DJ, C Batty, D Beattie & S Davis (eds) 2015 *TEXT Special Issue 29: Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research II*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue29/content.htm> return to text

Bastow, C 2019 'Fleabag's feminist rethinking of tired screenwriting tools', *The Conversation* (1 August). <https://theconversation.com/fleabags-feminist-rethinking-of-tired-screenwriting-tools-121104> (accessed 14 August 2019) return to text

Batty, C, S Lee, L Sawtell, S Sculley & S Taylor 2015 'Rewriting, Remaking and Rediscovering Screenwriting Practice: When the Screenwriter Becomes Practitioner-Researcher', *Writing the Ghost Train – Refereed Proceedings of the 20th Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs*: <http://www.aawp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Batty-et-al-2.pdf>

Batty, C, L Sawtell & S Taylor 2016 'Thinking Through the Screenplay: The Academy as a Site for Research-Based Script Development', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 8, 1: 149-62 return to text

Batty, C & DJ Baker (eds) 2018 *TEXT Special Issue 48: Screenplays as research artefacts*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue48/content.htm>

Batty, C & S Taylor 2018 'Comedy as Method: using humour to do research', *New Writing: the international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing* 16, 3: 374-392 return to text

Beattie, D 2013 'Critical Introduction' *TEXT Special Issue 19: Scriptwriting as creative writing research I*: http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue19/Beattie_intro.pdf return to text

Kerrigan, S & C Batty 2016, 'Re-conceptualising screenwriting for the academy: the social, cultural and creative practice of developing a screenplay', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 13, 1: 130-43

Kimber, S 2014 'Horror Screenwriting: Blending Theory with Practice', in C Batty (ed) *Screenwriters and Screenwriting: Putting Practice into Context*: Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke: 46-65

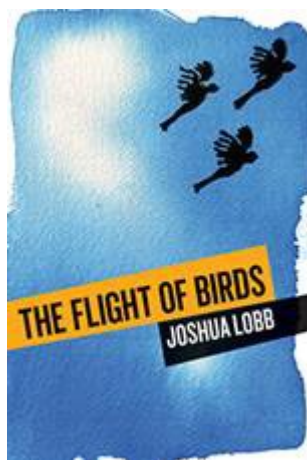
Lee, S-J S, A-M Lomdahl, L Sawtell, S Sculley & S Taylor 2016 'Screenwriting and the Higher Degree by Research: Writing a Screenplay for a Creative Practice PhD', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 13, 1: 85-97

Smelik, A 1998 *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, St Martin's Press, Houndmills/New York return to text

Stayci Taylor is a Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University. She is also a screenwriter, whose credits include nine seasons of an award-winning bi-lingual soap and a prime-time sitcom. She is currently co-editing two edited collections on the topic of script development.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Experimental and exegetical: Joshua Lobb's flock of stories*review by Lynette Washington*

Joshua Lobb
The Flight of Birds
 Sydney University Press, Sydney NSW 2019
 ISBN 9781743325834
 Pb 340pp AUD 35.00

The Flight of Birds by Joshua Lobb, a novel in twelve stories, is accompanied by an exegetical work. As the title indicates, the stories feature birds and their interactions with people. The reader is asked, at least initially, to consider the stories purely as fictional enterprises, isolated from the 'Field Notes' which follow at the end of the novel component. Rightly so, as first and foremost the role of a story is to engage the reader; it needs to function as a story before any other purpose, such as exegetical insight, can be attained.

Theories on what constitutes a short story are as varied as the form itself, and Lobb's work challenges these ideas on several fronts by: publishing the stories in tandem with the theoretical component and thereby asking them to serve an additional, academic, purpose; asking the stories to be more than individual entities by sculpting them into a novel form; and experimenting with form and structure.

Wendy Martin cuts to the chase in *The Art of the Short Story* when she says that '...successful fiction takes a variety of paths to reach the same goal: entertaining the reader' (Martin 2006: 2). I would argue that in order to be entertained, you first must be engaged. To be engaged, you must be taken out of the world you are in when you first open the book, and you must feel

something. You need to forget the chill in the air, the dishes in the sink, the tightness in your shoulders because you are instead absorbed into the narrative, empathetic and experiencing as the characters experience. Entering the character's world with empathy is, after all, a primary purpose of fiction.

This was my desire when I opened *The Flight of Birds*: to forget the tightness in my shoulders, to be transported spatially and temporally. However, there were immediate barriers to achieving that goal. The physical construction of a book is important and plays a role in this transportation. As we know from the experience of ebooks, holding a book in our hands has inherent value. The value is in the feel of the pages, the weight and texture of the cover, the reminder of the scent of ink, among many other things. *The Flight of Birds* is printed on bright, white paper which detracts from this sensory and aesthetic pleasure. Much like the tiny cognitive dissonance caused by the blinding whiteness of the page, the first stories in the collection sport their theoretical origins and impetuses like white coats. It is impossible not to notice the artifice, the construction, the *work*. They hold a sense that it wasn't the *story* that came first, but the *theory* and this awareness made me think about the dishes in the sink: it took me out of the story world.

Joshua Lobb describes the impetus for the stories thus:

Four thoughts intertwined with each other: a desire to understand birds on their own terms; a questioning of my own position in relation to birds; a sense that the particular can't be separated from the planetary; and a hope that telling stories about another species might draw attention to the planetary, overcome anthropocentrism *and* give agency to birds. (219-220)

It is clear from the exegetical pages at the end of the book that the theoretical ideas behind the stories were front of mind for Lobb. It is interesting that the storytelling element of his foundational ideas come last in the list, preceded by other desires and questions. This isn't necessarily a bad thing: we write to understand, to unravel, to make sense of. But then, we consider our reader and we rewrite with them in mind.

Lobb's approach is informed by fictocriticism, an idea he explores through various standpoints before recognising that, 'Unfortunately, the explicit mode of fictocriticism does not always have the desired effect' (230). The desired effect is to 'engage the reader with a political position in an intimate way through fictional tropes' (228). He does this by employing 'creative strategies alongside critical ones' (227) explicitly in 'Six Stories About Birds' and 'Do You Speak My Language?' and implicitly in all the other stories. The danger in this approach, as Lobb himself recognises, is that the theory dominates the story.

Lobb explains his approach towards writing the stories in *The Flight of Birds*:

Each of the twelve stories that comprise my novel takes as its starting point a question or concern raised by critics in animal studies (or related fields) and tries to present a different facet of the idea *through* fiction. (233)

Lobb begins several of the stories with a reference point – a television show, a documentary, a song, a quote from a book – and it is these moments (combined with Lobb's often detached writing style, that contains remnants of academic writing), that pinpoint the writer's process a little too precisely. At times the research appears obtrusive. These stories, for example 'Do You Speak My Language' and 'Six Stories About Birds, with Seven Questions', seem to be caught between arguing a point and telling a story and it feels as though the research has guided the narrative in an obstructive, overly obvious way. 'Six Stories' has a delightful structure, but the tone is a little cold, academic, until brief flashes of reprise when Lobb surprises the reader with poetic moments such as 'We scrutinise the air, but all I see is the loneliness of the night and all we hear is our own breathing' (15). These are the lovely transportive moments of fiction that Lobb sprinkles sparsely throughout the stories.

In addition to approaching storytelling through the mode of fictocriticism, Lobb experiments with structure in several interesting ways. In 'Call and Response' he mimics the call and response of birds within the structure of the story. The structure flows effortlessly on the page as the story reads like the sounds of birds calling out to each other and responding. In 'Flocking' he uses collective nouns – which are always charming! – as subheadings ('A Company of Parrots', 'A Weight of Albatrosses', 'A Solitude of Space'). In 'And No Birds Sing' he uses a right-hand column to list extinct species of bird in a haunting call to arms for species protection, and cleverly juxtaposes this with the central character's emotional unravelling. These formal experiments add texture and life to the stories and are in some ways reminiscent of the formal experiments in Ryan O'Neill's brilliant *The Weight of a Human Heart* (2012).

Where Lobb excels is in the exquisitely delicate threads between the stories. Lobb calls this a novel, and while the semantics of what constitutes a novel are well outside the bounds of this review, I would argue that the structure more closely resembles connected short stories, or a short story cycle, much like Rebekah Clarkson's *Barking Dogs* (2017) or my own *Plane Tree Drive* (2017). In these collections the narrative consists of standalone stories that, when placed together, create an enhanced whole. Certainly, that is the case for *The Flight of Birds*, in which narrative threads, for example, the father-son relationship and the development from boyhood into manhood of the central character, are borne out over several stories. These threads, silk-like in their subtlety, are a joy to the reader, who is asked to seek them out and piece them together. This reader-work creates opportunities for deep engagement and allows the reader to feel more enmeshed in the lives of the characters. It is perhaps the singular pleasure of the story cycle that allows this, and Lobb achieves this beautifully.

The Flight of Birds is a complex read that is at once delightfully subtle and irritatingly obvious. Lobb hits the mark many times, but, at times pushes too far into the mode of fictocriticism for some of the stories to be wholly successful. If the role of academic writing is to ask the reader to *think*, and the role of fictional writing is to ask the reader to *feel*, placing these two tasks together, as fictocriticism does, creates inevitable tension that requires exceptionally careful balancing that Lobb himself recognises is difficult to achieve. Ultimately my decision on the success of this balance came down to whether my shoulders relaxed, and I forgot the dishes in the sink and the chill

in the air. Of course, this task was also rendered artificial by the other task at hand – writing this review. Regardless of the individual reader's decision on this matter, the work, including the exegetical component, is undoubtedly a rare treat, and a valuable pedagogical resource.

Works cited

Clarkson, R 2017 *Barking Dogs*, Affirm Press, South Melbourne VIC return to text

Martin, W 2006 *The Art of the Short Story*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston return to text

O'Neill, R 2012 *The Weight of a Human Heart*, Black Inc, Melbourne VIC return to text

Washington, L 2017 *Plane Tree Drive*, MidnightSun Publishing, Adelaide SA return to text

Lynette Washington is an author, editor, mentor, teacher and publisher. Her debut, Plane Tree Drive, was Highly Commended in the Victorian Premier's Literary Award and Shortlisted for the MUBA. Her stories have been published widely and performed at events such as Spineless Wonders Presents and Quart Short Literary Readings. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Adelaide. Her publishing house, Glimmer Press, launched in 2019 with the publication of To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme?, a collection of illustrated children's poetry by Kristin Martin and Joanne Knott.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

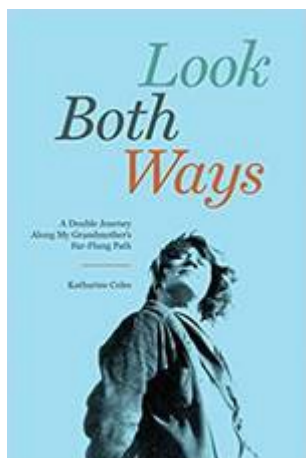
<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Voyages and voyaging

review by Jen Webb

Katharine Coles

Look Both Ways: A double journey along my grandmother's far-flung path

Turtle Point Press, New York 2018

ISBN 978 1 885983 58 9

Pb xiii+299pp AUD20.92

The writing of a book review is at once a privilege and a daunting task. The privilege is the opportunity to present one's own response to and evaluation of a new work. The problem is to treat book, author and reading public with respect; and to help build bridges between book/author and reader. There are few guides to the task beyond the exemplars already in the literature. Though literature reviews are at the heart of research, research has paid little attention to the writing of literary reviews. A four-page chapter that addresses how to review a medical book for a medical journal comfortingly points out that, 'Once you have accepted the invitation to do the review, it is a simple matter of reading the book and then writing your review' (Davies & Jardine 2013: np). Perhaps more usefully, many critics have castigated review writers for the strings of clichés on which we rely. Reading through their lists (e.g. Harris 2008; Flood 2010), and reflecting on the reviews I have written, I find to my shame that I reach "book review bingo" all too quickly.

With that *mea culpa*, I begin this review; albeit with some anxiety because *Look Both Ways* deserves all the encomiums listed in Book Review Bingo, and deserves a response that at least attempts to be writerly, and sensitive to Katharine Coles' supple, graceful prose. She writes: 'Voyager: from voir, to see, through my eyes and theirs' (68), and it is with this in mind that I approach this book.

Viewed as family history, the book initially propels me toward Tolstoy's dictum: 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way' (2006 [1877]: 1). Certainly, an unhappy family has stronger narrative potential than a happy one, if only because it exploits the (almost) three Cs: Conflict, Change and unCertainty, which are both present and attenuated in *Look Both Ways*. Coles' grandmother, Miriam (16 years old when the book opens, in 1923) is a creature of conflict, always battering against the constraints placed on her – by virtue, primarily, of her gender – and hence always in a state of change and uncertainty. She is at the same time a comparatively privileged individual: a US citizen who lived as part of that empire's economic and scientific mission; who has sharp intelligence; and who interrogates and rejects social mores.

That is on the credit side of her ledger. On the debit side is having been born decades too early to have legal rights or access to an intellectually satisfying career; her wandering eye, in a period where dalliances and divorce, at least for women, were not easily incorporated into social life; and her mother Mandy and geologist husband Walter who seem to conspire to keep her *cabined, cribbed, confined* (Shakespeare c1623). Their representations of Miriam have a slightly sinister edge, casting her as 'little girl', 'little girl-wife', and though the years move on with the story, they seem unable to recognise her as adult.

Initially Miriam complies with this narrative; she marries Walter, and becomes a 'Standard Oil wife' (79), which allows her to travel widely, live in enchanted and enchanting spaces, and experience the world beyond Wisconsin. But it also ties her to a husband without glamour (23), in a relationship without sexual pleasure – '*he leaves me absolutely cold, physically. And I can't let him know*' (108). Walter has won his prize; she is left with empty hands – '*I have nothing and no one, not even sewing*' (126). It's a bleak vision for those who hold to *happily ever after*. For Miriam, it's: '*when you get married it's all over*' (69).

It is Miriam's story, she who is 'so vivid in person, so hard to turn away from' (41). In a different version, Walter would be the hero: cosmopolitan, brilliant, physically attractive, physically courageous, '*absolutely a man!*' (19). He lives an extraordinary life, ploughing through dangerous territories, discovering the heretofore undiscovered. He is often away from home, in the company of other men, finding sexual release with other women, keeping Miriam on a string, waiting. 'He gets to do anything. She gets to feel his eyes linger on her face, move down her neck' (123). Miriam tries to convince herself: '*If only we could live together permanently, I could submerge all my interests and abilities and live entirely his way and so I shall sometime*' (109). But, the narrative observes, 'Desire was her condition. No matter where she was or what she had, she saw what was missing' (126). So, inevitably, she finds alternatives: produces children, falls in and out of love, discovers she can make her own income, starts to build an independent life, to start over.

Set out like this, it sounds like the tale of a Tolstoy unhappy marriage, but it is much more than this. It is a feminist tract, a philosophic treatise, a personal memoir – the latter because, threaded through the story of Miriam (and Walter) is the story of Katharine (and Chris), whose marriage most encouragingly avoids most of the disasters of the earlier generation. In the

contrast between the two, the real sadness emerges: Miriam and Walter stand as synecdoches for all the mismatched people in the world. Coles asks:

Why not imagine a different fate for them? Why can't I write
a love story, two people bound even by difference, bound
across time and space by words that might be burning, here,
on my page, if they hadn't burnt out already? (109-10)

I can't help reading my own early marriage through the mirror of Miriam and Walter; can't help experiencing my own regrets at wasted years, my relief at the second chance. And I doubt I am alone in this.

Threaded through these human tales is the world itself, and the book is veined with exquisite writing about the natural environment. In these I see lines of connection with the writings of other women – Rachel Carson, Margaret Atwood, Amy Stewart, Barbara Kingsolver, Helen MacDonald – and it occurs to me that how a scientist sees the world is not so unlike the artist's view [1]. We are all, perhaps, 'voyagers' (from *voir*, to see). The seeing flickers from the vast stage of the globe to the narrow confines of personal life, in prose that is sometime wry, sometimes sharp, but always tender, illuminating the logic of 20th-century ways of living – in intimate relationships, in international relations, and in connection with the natural world.

Note

[1] Yes, this is a very 'white' list of names. It is not easy to identify CALD women authors in this category in Australia or in the UK. Indeed, in his interview with Forestry Commission writer-in-residence Zakiya McKenzie, Patrick Barkham describes 'the extremely white worlds of both conservation and British nature-writing' (2019). [return to text](#)

Works cited

Barkham, P 2019 'Enchanted forests: The women shaking up nature writing', *The Guardian* (11 March): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/11/women-nature-writing-forestry-commission-writers-in-residence> (accessed 12 April 2019) [return to text](#)

Davies, M & L Jardine 2013 'How to write a book review', in GM Hall (ed) *How to Write a Paper* (5th ed), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell [return to text](#)

Flood, A 2010 'Eyes down for the cliches: it's time to play Book Review Bingo', *The Guardian* (17 March): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/mar/17/book-review-bingo> (accessed 12 September 2011) [return to text](#)

Harris, B 2008 'Seven deadly words of book reviewing', *ArtsBeat*: <https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/25/seven-deadly-words-of-book-reviewing/?hp> (accessed 7 March 2009) [return to text](#)

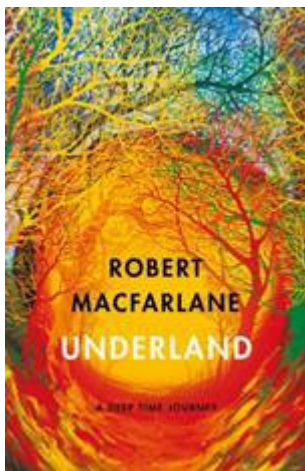
Tolstoy, L 2006 [1877] *Anna Karenina*, Bantam/Random House, New York [return to text](#)

Shakespeare, W c1623 *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (many editions) [return to text](#)

Jen Webb is Dean of Graduate Research at the University of Canberra. Her most recent collection of poetry is Moving Targets, published by Recent Work Press, 2018. Her research focuses on representation, and the field of creative production. She is Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery project 'So what do you do? Graduates in the Creative and Cultural Industries' (DP160101440).

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Hands across the darkness*review by Kevan Manwaring*

Robert Macfarlane

Underland: A Deep Time Journey

Hamish Hamilton London 2019

ISBN: 978-0-241-14380-3

Hb 496pp

This remarkable book, which Macfarlane has been working on for around a decade has now irrupted, like an underground river, into broad daylight – astonishing us with its force and volume of news from the underworld. *Underland: a deep time journey* is a speleological journey into some of the world's most astonishing underground spaces and systems. It charts a katabasis through its triadic structure (First Chamber; Second Chamber; Third Chamber) – a mythically resonant dramatic arc of descent, testing, and return. A guide of impressive interdisciplinary erudition, insight, and humanity, Macfarlane undertakes a kind of hero's journey – in Britain, Europe and the North – while clearly emphasising the knowledge, skill, daring, and down-to-earthness of *his* guides. Most of the chapters recount meetings with remarkable people in remarkable places, and thus deconstruct the notion of the sole, male explorer, striking Caspar David Friedrich type hero poses on lonely crags, or above fathomless abysses. This is a book about relationships, complex systems, interdependence, and consequences. Nothing is [in] isolation. Everything is interconnected – a mycorrhiza network of mutuality. The human is always present in nature and vice versa. Macfarlane parses the anthropocentric engagement with the underworld into three categories of usage – to shelter, yield, dispose:

The same three tasks recur across cultures and epochs: to shelter what is precious, to yield what is valuable, and to

dispose of what is harmful. (8)

The author explores iterations of these usages in some familiar and obscure places – from the Mendip Hills in Somerset, to the catacombs of Paris, the war-torn karst landscape of the Adriatic coastline, to the glacial fields of Greenland and the nuclear storage facilities of Finland. These vertiginous dives are framed by a fictionalised opening which serves as our own access point – a kind of fictive portal – into the subterranean. Macfarlane exercises intertextuality as a sharp-eyed and cool observer while the literary and mythical haunt the scientific, geographical, and historical layers Macfarlane. Not that his prose is cold, technical, or sterile. He brings alive each experience in a gripping, visceral way. Some sections are overwhelmingly intense and claustrophobic (notably the account of the misadventure of Oxford philosophy student, Neil Moss, who met his tragic end in Peak Cavern, Derbyshire; ‘Invisible Cities’, a breathtaking account of labyrinthine Parisian Urb-Ex; and a visit to the high-level nuclear waste storage facility in Onkalo, Finland, in ‘The Hiding Place’). This travel/nature-writing/memoir/cultural history is as riveting as any well-written thriller. At times it evokes the Sublime of the Romantics, John Martin’s apocalyptic vistas, and Tolkien’s Mines of Moria; at other times it conveys a chilling science-fictional aesthetic, one that would not feel out of place in a novel by J.G. Ballard. The book is uncompromising in its clear-eyed assessment of the Anthropocene, of humankind’s unquestionable impact upon the planetary ecosystem and geological record. This is a book every climate change denialist should read. Yet it goes beyond a kind of literary activism to appeal to the most humanistic of instincts – caring for one’s children, grandchildren and future generations; being deeply aware of the legacies we leave behind. It is a sobering time-capsule, a message in a bottle from the future – like the teleological warning on the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in New Mexico, designed to communicate the extreme biohazard of the nuclear waste stored there in a 100,000 years time:

We are going to tell you what lies underground, why you
should not disturb this place, and what may happen if you do.
(398)

This could be the premise of the book, and yet it is more than just a series of cautionary tales. It is imbued with profound wonder, appreciation, and praise-singing for the natural world, for human courage, and ingenuity. Macfarlane returns into the light with tales to set your hairs on end, but also with a sense of hope – a hand held out in friendship, in aid, in love across generations, across time.

What is there to critique in all this? The prose is immaculate, the research impeccable, and the ethos admirable. Unless one chose the essentialist route and attacked Macfarlane for being a ‘white, privileged male’ (which, if one happens to be born so, can hardly be changed), for being self-valorising (he undertakes some pretty hairy descents, ascents, and traverses – but most of these are with the indispensable help of local guides), or for being, what, a bleating liberal banging on about climate change (which any sane person must do), then it’s hard to find a fault-line. Some may prefer their narrators or guides more flawed, less ‘know-it-all’, less remarkable ... but that probably says more about them than anything. Throughout, Macfarlane is generous in his hard-won knowledge, praise, and gratitude. He does not shirk in

acknowledgement of others, his own limitations, or in revealing the most vulnerable of experiences. His decency and humility shines through.

Ultimately, this is unequivocally Macfarlane's most environmentally conscious and heartfelt book. Taking the long view, as well the deep – a vast spatio-temporal perspective – it offers 'deep time as a radical perspective, provoking us not to action not apathy'. Offering a chthonic manifesto, he continues:

For to think in deep time can be a means not of escaping our troubled present, but rather of re-imagining it; countermanding its quick greeds and furies with older, slower stories of making and unmaking. At its best, a deep time awareness might help us see ourselves as part of a web of gift, inheritance and legacy stretching over millions of years past and millions of years to come, bringing us to consider what we are leaving behind for the epochs and beings that will follow us. (15)

Few nature writers, indeed writers of any stripe, dare to think so big, or have the skill to articulate it so well (Macfarlane is unquestionably a writer's writer – many envy him for his scintillating prose style, which darkly glitters on the page like mica: forged with precision, never flowery, his lexical field feels almost geological in its heft and ring). Macfarlane should be admired for not only the scope and empathy of his vision, but for also being such a reliable and engaging guide into the dark and back into the light.

Dr Kevan Manwaring is a Lecturer in Creative Writing, University of Winchester, England, and the psychogeography editor for Panorama: the journal of intelligent travel. A Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Hawthornden, and the Eccles Centre (British Library), he is the author of Desiring Dragons: creativity, imagination, and the writer's quest (Compass Books), Lost Islands: inventing Avalon, destroying Eden (Heart of Albion Press), and others. He blogs and tweets as the Bardic Academic.

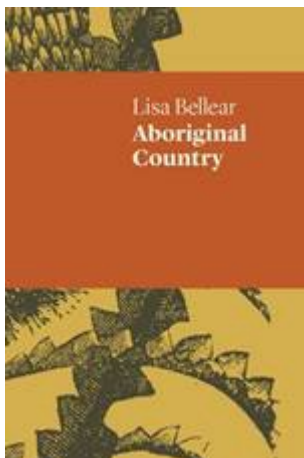
TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review**Something unforgettable***review by Ali Cobby Eckermann*

Lisa Bellel
Aboriginal Country
UWAP, Perth WA 2018
ISBN 9781742589756
Pb 96pp AUD22.99

Tall. Loud. Strong! You always knew when Lisa Bellel entered a room, she carried a powerful presence with her.

These are the words of friends when they learnt I was reviewing *Aboriginal Country*, a recent collection of Lisa Bellel's poetry, some published, some performed, some on the printed page for the first time, released by UWA Press in 2018. Whatever their status, all these poems reveal Lisa's talent for discourse, her matter-of-fact truth, the rhythmic lilt of hope that hides inside the lines, and her unapologetic language of politicking. Sadly Lisa died in her sleep at the age of 45. It has now been 13 years since her Spirit went to rest. *Aboriginal Country* was edited by Jen Jewel Brown and is a wonderful sentiment to the legacy of Lisa's presence and poetry voice.

Lisa Bellel was a Stolen Generations baby who, at the age of 25, set out to trace her family. In her own words, Lisa states:

meeting her Grandmother Sadie Bellel, who had long yearned to trace her missing grandchild, was the start of an empowering journey. An adoptee's journey to discover who they are is often painful, always brave. For Lisa Bellel, it was also revelatory. (19-21)

Her exhaustive list of achievements reveal Lisa was widely involved in Sorry Day activities on the campuses where she worked and the cities where she lived, and she also worked on the National Day of Healing. Sorry Day was launched on 26 May 1998 during a pivotal time in Australia striving for a stronger Reconciliation process, to remember and commemorate the mistreatment of Australia's First Nations people since colonisation. I remember first-hand, as another Stolen Generations adopted child, the overwhelming promise of hope that these annual National Sorry Day and Journey of Healing events offered to those of us who were reconnecting with our families, and learning the stories of our removal. The Apology delivered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd occurred after Lisa's death, and resulted in little change for Aboriginal Australians. Lisa was a proud black woman in a time when the prospect of reconciliation was vowed, and then obviated. Her poems stand as journalistic statements from the frontline, an essential emotive epitaph.

Come December 31, midnight 2000,
the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, will cease to exist.
(68)

Reconciliation spins my head
picked up the gun and now
you're dead. (69)

Most people in the world live a life of normality within society defined by their cultural beliefs, practices and protocols. They remain steady and sure-footed on the path of their people. Some people leave a bigger footprint on the earth than others. Individual achievements are simmered by belief in societal change, a keen witness and in self-trust. The commanding words in this collection hold such a voice. In 'A Bridge to Reconcile', Lisa writes:

I walked across
the bridge once
and kept walking. (72)

Indeed she kept right on walking over rough pathways to become a lighthouse, her beacon shining brightly in many directions. Lisa did not diminish herself to literature. She remains respected for her award winning shows on community radio, and a dedicated photographer of her community. She was a truly faceted witness for Aboriginal Rights in Australia, as is evident in the following excerpts from 'Poor Pretty Polly' and 'Ruby Was Never Seen Again':

Broken again like a bad bad feeling
that keeps repeating and when you
finally relax BANG it's there again
SMACK wallop in your face, swirling
around in your day time night dreams (30).

Weep for this wounded desperate soul that never
seems to heal. (29)

Always a forthright and honest plea for justice exists on these pages. As I read and reread these poems I hear her questions pounding through the verses, her core constantly demanding answers, refuting the denial of Aboriginal

Australian sovereignty and survival, candid in her struggle and love of land. The poems 'Warriors Without Treaties' and 'Beautiful Yuroke Red River Gum' elegantly demonstrate how wherever Lisa placed her feet she also placed her heart:

We are Warriors, Warriors, Warriors
Warriors without treaties (85).

the Yarra Yarra tribe's blood becomes
the rivers rich red clay. (37)

'There was something unforgettable at work in Lisa Bellel' are the words of the editor Jen Jewel Brown (17-18), who dedicated several years to resurrect life to these precious works. In my humble view, *Aboriginal Country* is a memorable portrait of Lisa Bellel. These poems gave me an insight into her journey to find her reality, to find the intensity of who she was born to be. It was a journey furnaceed with an unrepentant citation for truth and justice. These poems are proof of her promise, both in her self-growth and that which she offers to others. This is evident, for instance, in 'Tears Of Hope':

breathe deeply for tomorrow
inhale to the mother earth's
soul (79)

and likewise, 'A Significant Life':

for the future I release
this silenced voice
for the future I will go beyond
my hidden pain. (76)

Postscript:

Through the desert in the desert where I lived I often heard snippets through the grapevine of this much-loved poet and her camera. Regrettably I did not have the privilege to ever meet Lisa. As a Stolen Generation poet Lisa Bellel remains a guiding light to myself, and many other brothers and sisters who share her journey.

Ali Cobby Eckermann is an Australian poet of Indigenous Australian ancestry. She is a Yankunytjatjara/Kokatha woman born on Kurna land in South Australia. Eckermann has written poetry collections, verse novels and a memoir, and has been shortlisted for or won several literary awards. In 2017, she won the international Windham-Campbell Literary Prize for Poetry. She has travelled extensively, performing her poetry.

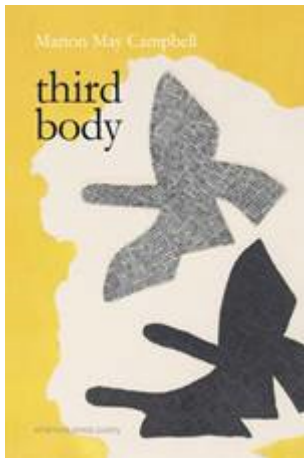
TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

**General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross
Watkins**

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews
editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review**Mercurial metamorphoses***review by Dominique Hecq*

Marion May Campbell

Third body

Whitmore press poetry, North Melbourne, 2018

ISBN 978-0-6484336-0-6

Pb 103pp AUD20.00



Jane Joritz-Nakagawa

Poems: New & Selected

Isobar Press, Tokyo & London, 2018

ISBN 978-4-907359-25-6

Pb 190pp USD25.00

...the words became your hands. Your fingers. We can say any word. Come
 – Hélène Cixous

Marion May Campbell and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa have more in common than one might think. Both are poet-thinkers who blur the lines between private and public spheres, explore thought as much as feeling, engage with ecosystems, evoke a third body of words through citation or address, and produce an exhilarating sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in their poetry. Both Campbell's *Third body* and Joritz-Nakagawa's *Poems: New & Selected* display stylistic range, plurivocality and shape-shifting personae. Both books are highly attuned to the alternating presences and absences within intimate relationships and to the machinations of local and global politics – sometimes the two realms overlap:

I know the subtle cartographies
 of silence & fatal
 shoreline deletions
 but I know too
 that the orange lifeboat
 is involved
 in what I know (Campbell 17)

Marion May Campbell and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa are concerned with the existential, ontological and ethical dynamics of being in the Anthropocene. At a more personal level, they also speak about illness. How it operates, disturbs, shakes. As a result, a heightened sense of mortality affects the body of the work. Striking, though, is a marked dissimilarity in tone, mood, and intonation: where Campbell's writing is suffused with *joie de vivre*, irreverence and ironic restraint, Joritz-Nakagawa's brims with regret and melancholy.

On the position and experience of the subject, consider the accidental convergence:

trajectories of desire
 never quite intersecting
 ...
 wounds & exalted jouissance
 complex affirmation
 what kind of history
 & what kind of witness
 is possible

 when *I* never coincides with *me*? (Campbell 4-5)

to turn from object to subject. the *i* of the
 formula, rigid intake control. a lack which

creates desire summons nothing to
 itself. consciousness never

confers meaning. a certain revelation of being
 may be no revelation. (Joritz-Nakagawa 124)

Campbell and Joritz-Nakagawa are obviously well versed in (post)structuralist theories of language and subjectivity yet revel in disrupting near axiomatic formulae, especially those of Lacan, preferring a feminist riposte whereby they choose to pass, paste or hang:

I do not pass at all as
poet man or woman
but laugh
myself to bits
as I pass into this last
paste-up (Campbell 9)

another tunnel turn left swallowing and passing out someone
is staring through the windshield immolation core safety belt
it never stops the whiplash hang out the window shoes off
everybody loves the way you left me (Joritz-Nakagawa 70)

Through an understanding of the ever-shifting nature of representation, Campbell and Joritz-Nakagawa engage the practice of self-representation with a daring act of self-creation to form their own uniquely innovative mode of writing. They opt for open forms of poetics. With Campbell, openness is densely layered, whereas with Joritz-Nakagawa, it is dispersed. Campbell's poems are incrustated with intratextual and intertextual references whereas Joritz-Nakagawa's texts are almost self-consciously divested from these – nowhere is this more apparent than in her relinquishing of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E influences that characterise her early work.

Out of both volumes grows a third body that metamorphoses into visual and kinetic forms which tear away from the dominant culture. In Campbell's words, this 'third body breaks / in a million mercurial / mutations' (Campbell 89) which reconfigure other / wise.

While conceptual pleasure flourishes in both volumes, *third body*'s protean forms shimmer with kinaesthetic sensuousness and reverberate with sensual pleasure. Take the poem 'whipbird and pigface', for instance, where the aural jouissance of the 'frantic sonic fidget' gives way to 'the blinking neon of miscarried thoughts' (Campbell 72) and transcription of the bird's call:

no nostalgia here no ecstatic fall from grace
no memory short or long but this repeated

whip
whip
whip

is all we need now – the whipbird
& the soothing balm of this
dune-runner old salt survivor
this *Carpobrotus rossii*
we call pigface (Campbell 72-73)

I am, inevitably, reminded of Roland Barthes who invokes the grain of the voice as the 'sung writing of language' (Barthes 1977: 185). And I am distracted and amused by the common name of *Carpobrotus rossii* – 'pigface'

to the anglophone who look at the flower that ‘blooms daisily’; ‘*doigts de sorcières*’ / ‘witch fingers’ to the phobic francophone...

Stylistically, typographically and methodologically, Joritz-Nakagawa is more versatile, even in the excerpt from *PLAN B AUDIO*, the new work which opens the collection. Tone and mood, though, are strangely uniform in this selection, and I wonder whether this is an editorial decision, given the sheer volume of Joritz-Nakagawa’s output. I think it is. The tone is cool. The mood dispassionate, evenly (self)composed, almost devoid of affect in contrast to earlier works such as *FLUX*. The dominant colours are white, grey, blue, enhancing a sense of transient impermanence, detachment:

courtship of empty space
 process garden of past medals
 wall of being and faded photographs
 featuring thin trails of violent intentions
 masquerading as frenzied farms
 blue books of frozen procedures
 nothingness in small porcelain bowls
 i dismount saying thank you
 i dismantle saying i’m sorry
 i’m speechless when the wind slaps my face (Joritz-Nakagawa
 17)

Joritz-Nakagawa’s multi-situational stance encountered in earlier works, including as editor of *women: poetry: migration* (2017) takes the guise of a stylized, frozen posture partly *en-gendered* in response to patriarchal discourses deployed in both private and public spheres.

While Marion May Campbell retrieves and deconstructs one of the most enduring literary icons in western literature, Antigone, in an act of defiance against social injustice (Campbell 21-23) – as she does, too, in *Fragments of a Paper Witch* (2008), Joritz-Nakagawa coolly denounces the narcissism and implacability of the male ego.

The affective and intellectual resonances of these two books suggest that the predicament facing contemporary women poets remains stark. Not dark. There is no running away from entrenched androcentric prejudice. Yet here the entwined third body of poet-thinker and text creates its own mercurial metamorphoses in a complex symbolic web.

Works cited

Barthes, R 1977 ‘The grain of the voice’, in *Image, Music, Text*, Stephen Heath (trans), Fontana, London return to text

Campbell, MM 2008 *Fragments of a Paper Witch*, Salt, Cromer, Norfolk return to text

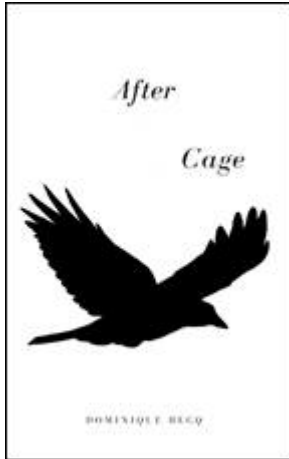
Cixous, H 2009 *The Third Body*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston return to text

Joritz-Nakagawa, J 2017 *women: poetry: migration [an anthology]*, theenk Books, Palmyra, New York return to text

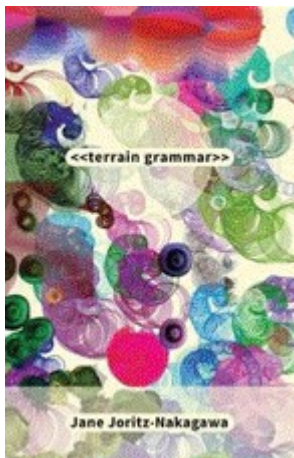
Dominique Hecq is a poet, fiction writer, and scholar partial to experimentation. Her works include a novel, three collections of stories and eight books of poetry. Crypto (2018) and Kosmogonies (2019) are her most recent bilingual collections. After Cage (2019) has just been launched as a choreographed dance / word event. Kaosmos and Off Track: Journeys without Maps are slated for publication in 2020. Hecq is a recipient of the 2018 International Best Poets Prize.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Wound and wor(l)d: Violence and optimism in poetry*review by Sarah Pearce*

Dominique Hecq
After Cage
 Girls on Key, Melbourne VIC 2019
 ISBN 5800133510880
 Pb 69pp AUD20.00



Jane Joritz-Nakagawa
 <<terrain grammar>>
 theenk Books, New York 2018
 ISBN 9780988389199
 Pb 94pp AUD20.00

Dominique Hecq's *After Cage* is a moving, looping meditation on the possibilities of both language and time. Inspired by her experiences of dance and composition, particularly Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, language mirrors

physical and musical movement in a series of repeated yet constantly varied threads and whorls. The pages are numberless, challenging our conceptions of what a book should be and encouraging more fluid forms of reading. Refrains such as the below echo throughout, constantly shifting and changing in form and presentation, translated again and again:

I want to write a poem away from death

This is absurd

All writing is birthed by death Tends towards death
Tends the dead with curlicues of ink

The spun, composed elegance of these metaphors contrasts with jarring observations of modern life: political abstractions, laptops, the Red Hot Chili Peppers stuffed into ears and frighteningly anonymous experiences of hospital procedures. Through the dance of language, Hecq constantly grapples with the essence of life, of death and illness; amidst the noise and chaos of political threat and intrusive technology, she is ‘hankering after poetry/ that has the quality of *mutedness*’.

In her conjoining and contrasting of different languages and parts of language, Hecq evokes Paul Celan. She sutures words to form ungraspable yet assuredly intelligible compound nouns: Spacetime and Memorysoul. ‘Breathing daybreak like poetry/summoning itself’ is an explicit nod to ‘Todesfuge’ (1948). Like Celan, Hecq occupies a liminal space, between languages and cultures; the tension between her languages dovetails with the tension between soaring, ‘riffing’ metaphor and bleak observation, possibility and limitation.

These poems meditate on the nature of time, personifying her as ‘an unsatiated mother/intent on devouring her/progeny’. This devouring mother is treated with breathless, thrumming reverence on the following page:

She’s goddess mother lover cunt
getting high in Manhattan
...

She is blood breast womb speed
light colour love absence greed

If her lips could speak they’d say
touch feel hear come breathe

This personification is intensified via repetition and fragmentation; the reader is made viscerally aware of the processes of time: erosion, decay, evolution, rebirth and death.

Music and musicality permeate this collection – poems dance, visually, across the page, literally cascading and falling; repetition softens and ripples the flow of words, allowing Hecq to linger in moments of movement. Repetition also creates a surging sense of urgency; the insistent ‘lap-lapping’ of memory and smoke induces a sense of precarity – she does not permit the reader to be lulled into a false sense of security. By the final page of *After Cage*, the melodies begin to disintegrate – full capitalisation, block text and

recognisable yet splintered refrains point to a final breaking down, or in: 'Broken/Time Dust Us'.

Jane Joritz-Nakagawa's <<terrain grammar>> is a startlingly inconsistent collection – she plays with and substitutes structure, form and style in a dizzying, nauseating fashion from page to page. From a reductive, boorish alphabet of brutal humanity to the frustratingly un-aesthetic peeling back of language mechanics, grammar and translation, Joritz-Nakagawa refuses to placate or ease her reader. She does, however, offer occasional moments of softness; <<demifugue>>, though startling in its existential exploration of the relationship between words, memory and language, provides a welcome sense of spacious gentle lyricism.

Like Hecq, she presents a meditation on language – poems themselves are characters and take up residence in these poems:

a grander silence creates a gullible apocalypse in
the form of a poem pressing
itself into my forehead (11)

Poetry is insistent, is threat and 'tomb' (20); it is both lifeless and searing, simulating anatomy and stimulating memory. In the absence of titles on the page, poems bleed into one another. This conscious blurring of boundaries adds to the sense of disorientation created by swiftly shifting styles and rhythms.

The reader is saturated in metaphor, assaulted by incessant combinations of images and ideas. <<methane dress>> presents a rapid, pulsing series of binary relationships; these provide a sharp contrast to the final, almost banal declaration of the following suite of poems: 'the old complaints/are the best complaints'. These poems are often aggressive. The scattered rhythm and blunt trochaic swagger of <<gilded ether>> reminds the reader, forcibly, of Joritz-Nakagawa's mastery. This is a mastery of which she is very much aware. The closing lines of one of the <<love poems>> declare both the poet's power and the captive nature of her audience:

i hope you captive,
salty pirate,
wherever the ship sails (10)

<<wait to be seated>> demonstrates Joritz-Nakagawa's absolute command of tone, rhythm and, above all, restraint. Her heart-stopping, breath-stopping use of periods forces the reader to stumble with her as she reveals

the swallowing. a filthy bed. a panic. (25)

Each of these experimental, visceral works may be read as eulogy for a dying, or already dead world – indeed, for dying or already dead wor(l)ds. Each poet questions the possibility or ultimate futility of poetry in the face of such ugly self-destruction, while remaining utterly obsessed with and mired in the mud of language.

For Hecq, musing on the role of the poet in our current global landscape forms a tense mix of optimism and hubris, she flies 'to the sun white/feathers

ruffled and ruffling the sky eyes on the spark/that will redeem human folly'. For Joritz-Nakagawa, language is both inadequate and domineering; the 'person in pain exceeds language', yet 'each word [is] its own planet/haunting the body' (45).

Finally, though, poetry is posited as the only possible response to disaster, to apocalypse. Each text makes us unforgivably aware of the impotence of the author, standing on the rim of a ruined, paradoxical world. We are privy to:

a view from nowhere of an impending
disaster in a world preceding language

Perhaps, even:

the final gazing
out of a birdcage (15)

The poem becomes a 'Saturation of time', an attempt to fix, to record, perhaps because our world is dying. The poem offers 'vivid reconstructions of wor(l)ds' (11); language is tied to the ephemeral scraps of landscape and experience. The poem is both wound and word – it is where these formidable poets find heartbeat and memory, amidst the disorienting pulse and pull of time. The final discovery is that the 'words go where they want'.

Sarah Pearce is a poet, performer and academic from Adelaide, Australia. She holds a PhD in English Literature and her work appears in Aeternum, Outskirts, Meniscus, Writing from Below and TEXT. She has held residencies at Adelaide City Library and FELTspace gallery and performed at Blenheim Festival and Adelaide Fringe Festival. Her writing concerns the body, the self and points of connection.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 2 October 2019

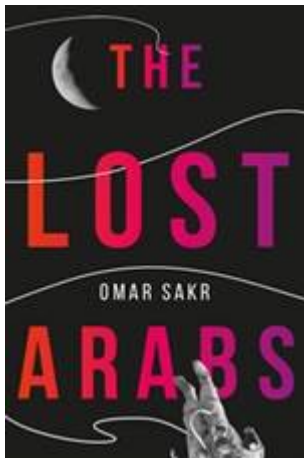
<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review**Re-making memories: the poetry of identity**

review by Simon-Peter Telford



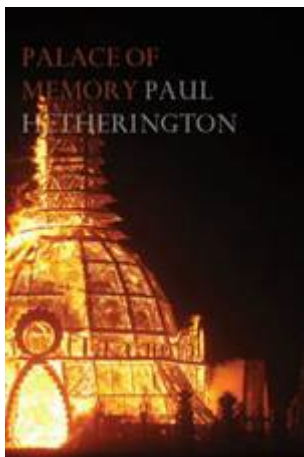
Omar Sakr

The Lost Arabs

University of Queensland Press, St Lucia QLD 2019

ISBN: 9780702260360

Pb 96pp AUD24.95



Paul Hetherington

Palace of Memory

Recent Work Press, Canberra 2019

ISBN: 9780648404255

Pb 71pp AUD12.95

How are our identities, our sense of self, constructed? Is it the projection of others that paints who we are, or is it a construction of our own? Is it the labels we assign ourselves, or impose on others? Does it all boil down to memories? Poets Omar Sakr and Paul Hetherington attempt to explore their

own memories, thoughts, labels, and identities in their latest individual releases.

Sakr reaches deep into his ancestry, into the aches of old bones to tease memories of ancestors, giving himself perspective on today's Australia. His poetry, from the very beginning, lives up to the title *The Lost Arabs* as he reflects his own circumstances onto many of those within the Arab community:

Once, my ancestors would have been united – in name if
nothing else – united by the conqueror's blade as Ottoman.
Not Lebanese, not Turkish. I cannot imagine the ease of being
only one thing. I am sure this too is a fantasy. In Beirut, a
memorial is taking over a house where every bullet hole has
been given a name, a shrine to the violence that (r)ejected my
family... (5)

Sakr's life experiences relating to his bisexuality breathes strenuous breaths in particular poems, revelling in pure eroticism of the moments of intimacy. The reader feels the conflicting pressures of culture and identity in his words, the clash of these pressures is carried on exquisite imagery:

The wild silence after, mouths heavy with musk, is complete
& even the birds are mute with love in their nests. There is no
song except our huffed breaths, the shuffle of grass bending
beneath us, tickling the skin, the whole world an animal gone
quiet. I asked my aunty about the supernatural hush I felt &
she said the animals stand still in holy awe, they know the Day
of Judgement will fall on a Friday. (11)

The Lost Arabs presents some of the most important and representative Australian poetry right now. It reflects the Australian experience that so many live through each day. The complexity of cultural identity, displacement, sexuality, and masculinity is all played out over the backdrop of a country that is in flux of shifting ideologies and national identity itself. Omar Sakr's poetry bounces from prose stylings, straight forward confessions and retellings of memories, to extreme imagery, philosophical musings of religion, life and death:

When I am bleeding out sure
As a body cratered by a blast
I often think of God as explosive
& that having faith tears holes
In your chest to make room
For itself. It will kill
Whatever it finds there, even
Kindness. Faith is an old bear
In the chamber of your heart. It is
Best left sleeping, a warm pile of
Itself, a furry back to rest on
In winter. Awake, it is hungry
& needs something to die
That it might live. (80)

Paul Hetherington's *Palace of Memory* is a surrealist poetic journey, bring flavours of *The Divine Comedy* and *Gormenghast* to the mind as the reader explores Hetherington's dream-memories as he does. Peppered with extracts, from thematically similar works by other authors and poets, *Palace of Memory* is an artistic critique of identity development through family and the mysticism of memory. As with memory, Hetherington's work fuses and melds what may be truth and what is imaginary:

People are burning the past. Documents fly and fall, so that I begin to read the lawn. Accounts and memos declare who's obliged – but the grass and fire don't know this. We tread on passages as the fire flares; words fall as ash. We read ourselves in the marks – misconstrued, wanting a slave. Why don't we destroy what we burn? (8)

Hetherington's journey takes the reader through differing geographies, all tinged with a sense of the gothic. Life and death become less static states through the pages, though consistently appearing through the pages. Visits from those long dead, time distortion, these devices add to the surrealist elements of *Palace of Memory* and offer a different platform on which to view the experience of living:

He walked across the yard, clanging the gate. The old moon weighed like a boulder. As much as he tried, he couldn't catch her; he was unable to decipher her words. He saw himself talking to her, pointing the way, arm in arm, as the brown and roiling river danced with ideas of the future. He saw her climb away on a thin beam of light. (31)

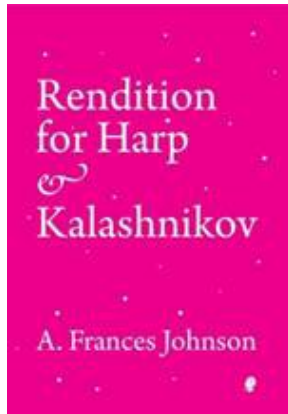
Palace of Memory is held with an infrastructure of cultural buildings, practices and imagery; churches, cricket, banquet halls, iron-wrought gates. These constructs hold the memories of individuals, of cultures and societies, myths and ideas of what is, but often not what actually was. The reader is guided along this gallery of painted mirrors, as Hetherington's poetry is ambiguous enough to allow them to see their own experience within these snap shots of his recollections:

I was image and wild idea, barely human. I pushed at my stomach, feeling where they'd opened and stitched my skin. The ache was morality. A woman in water was a slivered glimpse, stopping time. Generations back, my mother's father's mother. He was failing to revive her again. (61)

The Lost Arabs reads as an explosion of the self, of Sakr's angst, questions, doubts and fears. It is an intimate and yet expansive collection of poetry that is an exhale of a man's construction of his identity. *Palace of Memory* is a deliberate, explorative and philosophical collection of work that queries how our memories build an identity, and how reliable they are in reality; if reality is reliable, that is. Both collections are stepped in cultural vessels, vastly different, and yet similar, as they both tell of Australian identities. Identities that are complex, changing, growing and being explored through works such as these.

Simon-Peter Telford is a writer, poet and playwright. He is an editor of reviews for TEXT and a recent Honours graduate in Creative Writing from the University of South Australia. For more works visit:
www.simonpetertelford.wordpress.com

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford**
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review**Explosions in quiet rooms***review by Mags Webster*

A Frances Johnson
Rendition for Harp & Kalashnikov
 Puncher & Wattmann 2018
 ISBN 9781922186966
 Pb 86pp AUD25

In her latest, and strikingly titled book of poems, award-winning poet A Frances Johnson presents ‘anti-pastoral, anti-war poems’, and produces a body of work which ‘puns on the idea of a song lyric, translation, surrender and also torture’ (Melbourne Prize for Literature 2018).

Rarely has a collection’s title seemed so apt. This book, a finalist in the 2018 Melbourne Prize for Literature, is a grenade wrapped in velvet, lobbed towards the reader with perfect pitch. *Rendition*, as a term used in the spying world, carries connotations of anonymous airstrips, undocumented flights, black-hooded figures bundled into and wrenched from the bellies of aircraft; final reckonings. Yet *rendition* also means performance, translation, and expression, hence the instruments of war and Aeolian idyll: Kalashnikov and harp. With Johnson as its accomplished composer and conductor, this poetic duet performs a score of discord and harmony, expressing humankind’s paradoxical capacity for cruelty and deep tenderness, played out in theatres of war, society, family and belief. Johnson wields her poetic material as weapon and as propitiation: in each poem can be detected the redemptive glissando of the harp, and the bitter retort of the machine gun.

The book is separated into thirds. Part I, ‘Soar’, begins in the battlefield, with some poems negotiating the politics of razor wire in ‘Fuse’ (14) and ‘Free Quote’ (21) and others exploring the physics and theory of military drone construction. The drones owe their design (and some their name) to creatures that often symbolise harmony with nature in Romantic art forms: dragonflies, bees, and hummingbirds. Johnson skewers this dissonance, this collision of natural and manmade, of the pastoral and the apocalyptic, exposing the insidious fascination of weaponised bio-mimicry: ‘It began

with structural analysis / of a dragonfly wing' (11). Here, 'in the insectless heat of high summer' (11), 'the bird' understands flight and air in terms of

...sky segmentation, target and discharge;
guided movements, shadows,
shapes that cannot be caged or catalogued (19)

In this perverted guise, a 'hummingbird' wreaks destruction on marketplaces and fields, children and families; civilians such as Momina Bibi, killed in front of her two grandchildren while out gathering okra. Those the drones do not kill, they nonetheless damage irrevocably. Witness the war photographer who tries to avoid 'dining out / on his award-winning photograph' (15) and yet 'next night ... books a restaurant, a good one' (15).

And what of poetry in these killing fields? What place has the lyric – 'less reliable in open space, but more flexible than fixed-wing models' (18) – asks Johnson in 'Unmanned aerial vehicle versus poem' (18). She notes in 'Hummingbird' (12) that:

Target accuracy of poems
As with fixed-wing UAVs
varies wildly.
Only the remote operator
reads intention like a book.
This is his bastard ghazal (12)

The ancient Middle Eastern ghazal, comprising hypnotic rhythms of repeated sounds owing to its mono-rhyme structure, is usually a love poem. This, however, is the 21st century version: bastardised, a missive of death, capable only of one line ending.

'Soar' ends with another looming apocalypse: this time environmental. Instead of eulogising the excess of nature, contemporary Romanticism means eyeing 'implanted hills / meadows of plastic, / rhymed ocean spills' (30). In 'Ultima Thule: Swimming lessons' (27), situated as the prophecy – Anthropocene rather than Biblical – of inundation is fulfilled, and all low-lying land submerged, the speaker laments 'No-one thought on how to build a boat. / What to do when the water came' (28). Noah had some form of warning too; but at least Noah knew what to do. Sexism 'High-altitude archaeologist' (33); patronising and shallow understandings of First Nation people 'Australian Awe' (35), and a bleak yet banal eventual decimation of the human race 'Call Centre' (38) round off this powerful first section.

Part II, 'Sore', moves into more intimate territory, beginning with a sequence of five 'anti-elegies' written for a deceased father. These poems are lit with humour that almost conceals the pain: in 'Anti-elegy 2: You are here' (44) a life re-plotted (literally) to a cemetery map reference: '44 E 19. Row Seven' (44). In 'Anti-Elegy 3: First Xmas' (45), the poem's speaker invokes Marley's Ghost: 'If you must do the clanking chain / and sheet...' (45), while 'Anti-Elegy 4: Spade' (46) begins:

We thought about burying you with your old spade
But you'd have hated that, considered it waste (46)

Yet positioning this sequence as anti-elegy, anti-sentiment throws into stark relief the pain and the denial that comes with grieving: 'Anti-Elegy 4: Spade' ends with the speaker hearing the father's posthumous voice:

...Take it. Go on. *Take it.*
It's yours. Hose it off after use, rub olive oil
into the handle. Don't forget. I'm resting now.
Good work. Dig deep. (46)

Kalashnikov and harp are fully audible in poems like 'The Gearing' (51), an exquisitely heartbreaking biography of, one surmises, the father of the earlier poems. And they are also present in eight extraordinary poems that conclude 'Sore': poems that address the untimely illness and death of a beloved sister-in-law; the impotence, actual or perceived, of being unable to do anything other than help select wigs; the unpreparedness of bereavement, even when expected; the inadequacy of substitution:

I am fretting, feeding your children indiscriminately, excessively.
I know nothing of Grace's allergies (61)

Part III, 'Saw', is the shortest: nine poems, examining the 'wrenched vocabularies' (74) of the histories and culture belonging to and awkwardly shared between settlers, refugees, colonialists, and religious ideologies. Each poem deserves more examination than space allows, however, a brief look at 'Pilgrims' illustrates the juxtaposition of harp music gunfire. We see 'the rouged glass mouth / of a window rose' luring pilgrims to the Vatican. A violent change of gear: 'Jesus, the smell of cheap hotels!' and the speciousness of 'a beringed hand high above... / pockets full of secreted condoms' (82).

Johnson conjures images – the moon emitting a 'bruised, satin light' from 'Icarus at the all-night supply' (36), oil spills making 'wounded rainbows' from 'Tow' (13) – with a sure touch in form, whether prose poem, or stanzaic. These poems are indeed 'explosions in small rooms' (12), bringing to mind some lines from Rumi – a poet with whose work Johnson is clearly very familiar – in which the Sufi suggests the best way of learning is through the wound:

...Keep looking
at the bandaged place. That's where
the light enters you.

And don't believe for a moment
that you're healing
yourself

(Rumi 2004: 142)

Poets have always known that the best meta-lens through which to contemplate, interrogate, and expose all the contradictions of the human condition is a poetic one. As Johnson shows, poetry can refract any topic from wartime atrocities, death and disease to a cultural and collective dis-ease. And poetry can magnify grace. Tilt the lens and the poem is a Kalashnikov. Tilt it again, the poem's a harp.

Works cited

Melbourne Prize for Literature 2018 'A. Frances Johnson', *Melbourne Prize for Literature Twenty Eighteen*. Available at http://www.melbourneprize.org/mp2018/wpcontent/uploads/MP2018_Finalists_A_Frances_Johnson.pdf return to text

Rumi 2004 'Childhood Friends', *The Essential Rumi: New Expanded Edition*, Harper Collins, New York return to text

Mags Webster is completing a PhD at Murdoch University. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing (City University of Hong Kong), a BA in English and Creative Writing (Murdoch University), and BA (Hons) in English and Drama (University of

Kent). Her first poetry collection The Weather of Tongues (Sunline Press) won Australia's Anne Elder Award. Her next collection, Nothing to Declare, is published by Puncher & Wattman.

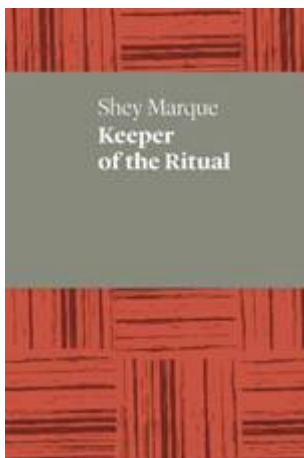
TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor:****Simon Telford****textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review**Committed to memory**

review by Cassandra Atherton



Tricia Dearborn
Autobiochemistry
UWA publishing, Crawley WA 2019
TNR 12 plain text: ISBN 9781760800222
TNR 12 plain text: Pb pp103 AUD22.99



Shey Marque
Keeper of the Ritual
UWA publishing, Crawley WA 2019
TNR 12 plain text: ISBN 9781760800239
TNR 12 plain text: Pb pp116 AUD22.99

Tricia Dearborn's *Autobiochemistry* is a coruscating collection of poems exploring the searing ways memory is inscribed on the body. Her poems probe the transience of experience for its momentary indelibility, to question:

‘How is memory laid down?/How is it fixed?’ (28). In its reference to the chemical means by which photographic exposures were once captured on paper, Dearborn identifies ways the body, similarly, stores and revisits memories. Indeed, Dearborn’s dismembering and subsequent stitching back together of personal history is a powerful response to the fragmentation and connectedness of both identity and nostalgia in her poetry.

Metaphorically, Dearborn uses an appeal to the periodic table in one of the major sequences in the book, to consider what is ‘elemental’ in our body’s chemistry. By placing the elements in a box above each poem at the left margin, Dearborn conjures a block torn or separated from the periodic table and given autonomy:

47
Ag
Silver

I tape to the doorframe
a black and white photo

developed and printed
with silver salts.

How is memory laid down?
How is it fixed?

Weeks later, I think
you look familiar ... The clock

ticks twice
before I recognise myself.

I return the ten-year-old’s
captive gaze. Remember

looking into the lens,
deciding not to smile,

not to pretend. (28)

In this beautifully compressed poem, the narrator re-imagines the recording of a memory when she was ten-years old. Here, Dearborn invokes the theory of the gaze in the narrator’s prolonged looking at the photograph and her positioning as ‘Other’ to her younger self. It is a clever and uncanny moment, supported by the poem’s composition of largely unrhyming couplets – they are the same, but different.

Dearborn also explores the significance of the matrilineal line in her poetry. In another rendering of chemistry – this time romantic chemistry – Dearborn foregrounds a strong line of women in ‘Phlegm: a love poem’. Here, mother, girlfriend, poet Maggie Nelson and the narrator’s younger self form an important dynamic of women who are presented as having forged important and complex bonds in one another’s lives. Dearborn’s use of the abject in this

poem in her evocation of the sick bed and remnants of the flu is witty. It adds endurance and strength to the expression of vulnerability and fragility in love:

I'm reading Maggie Nelson
occasionally stopping to cough up phlegm
in some indeterminate post-fever stage of the flu

[...]

I learnt this

My mother, not big on emotion or touch,
excelled at sickbed ritual

earlier tonight I was telling my girlfriend
(scavenger of sleep, getting what she can between my bouts)
how it calmed me as a child, calms me now. (40)

Perhaps the most fascinating and indelible of all sections is 'Virginia Woolf's memoirs', which poetically remembers Woolf's life and myth in brilliant pared back lines. The final poem in this sequence is only six lines and imagines the moments before Woolf's suicide. Dearborn writes starkly and confidently about the titular 'autobiochemistry' in this brilliant writer's life and death:

At fifty-nine, you –
who had written *I can't help looking* –

unable to close your ears
o the voices

stopped looking.
You walked to the river. (59)

Autobiochemistry is fearless and poignant, deeply personal and political. Dearborn's poems in this collection capture the ephemeral and fugacious in brief, bursts of language.

Shey Marque's *Keeper of the Ritual* interrogates memory in thrillingly complex detail. Rich with words, some of the poems have been reproduced in smaller font than others to accommodate their very long lines, as in the titular poem, which begins:

In a rhythmic hand on page twenty-eight of her *journal intime*,
third *arrière*
grandmère records a violin lesson and this photo lures her to
me; a state of hiraeth.
Music lessons remind me of her. I could almost be her. Maybe
I *am* her... (76)

In these extended lines, Marque both revels in, and interrogates language, masterfully exploring the border between prose and poetry. The journal and photograph are two significant ways of recording experience and Marque invests these with a sense of the uncanny as the narrator superimposes herself over the unfolding narrative in a powerful ghosting.

In 'Changing Skin of Drowning', Marque interrogates memory in a fragmented and Prufrockian narrative poem:

Today the sirens are quiet. Paul doesn't hear them coming
for him. veiled in salt cloud
he and a buddy collect Western Rockies from their pot, its
rope
a scribble winds a knot of the Gordian kind
around his ankle. Undone shouting bubbles
fists snatching water a knife falls. (27)

The sense of foreboding coupled with the use of gaps and spaces which split open the lines, provides a visual, figurative suggestiveness that the poem's truncated narrative leaves open.

Where Dearborn re-imagines vignettes from Virginia Woolf's life, Marque uses a photo of Katharine Susannah Prichard in an arresting ekphrastic poem, 'Out Seeking Mimetomorphs' with the epigraph, '*Photo: Writer Katharine Susannah Prichard visits a gold mine as research for a novel Photographer and year unknown*':

The photograph is black and white. I imagine delivered by box brownie sometime late art deco. despite the fading, the contrast is still there. Looking at the scene I half expect to hear a bush ballad in the background or, from behind scribbly gums, a gust of horse laughter and song. (96)

The narrator superimposes her reimaginings of the scene over the fading photograph to provide a doubling of women writers, forging a connection.

Marque's ekphrastic poems are magisterial in their diversity and control of language. The poem 'Plume' which has the epigraph – '*Femme qui Tire son Bas* by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 1894, oil on cardboard, 58 X 46 cm, Musee d'Orsay, Paris', is a wonderful pantoum turning on the repetition of sensuous lines so that the poem, like the artwork, slides like a sigh down the page:

Flesh shimmers in the powder white
turquoise pours over the shoulder lakes
black silk slides where sighs begin
mirage in the night of Toulouse-Lautrec. (71)

Furthermore, as an extension of the ekphrastic impulse, Marque's rich evocations of looking and what it means to be looked at, are never more poignant than in the poem 'You Over There' which opens with:

Just tell me what you did today
If only to keep a tiny piece of you in my day
And a bit of me in yours... (41)

and opines the absent lover who knew ‘what the back of my hair really looks like’ (41).

Marque's *Keeper of the Ritual* is absorbing in its obsessive and multifarious recordings of experience and identity. The poems are strong and graceful, evoking still life and the bustling but brief nature of existence.

Cassandra Atherton is an award-winning prose poet and scholar. Her most recent books of prose poetry are Pre-Raphaelite (2018) and Leftovers (forthcoming). She was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard and a Visiting Fellow at Sophia University, Tokyo. Cassandra is a commissioning editor for Westerly magazine.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 2 October 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker. Assistant reviews editor: Simon Telford
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**