

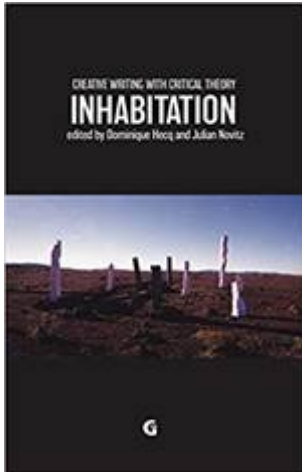
Reviews contents

- Dominique Hecq and Julian Novitz (eds), *Critical Writing with Critical Theory: Inhabitation*
review by Simon-Peter Telford page 2
- Carol Lefevre, *The Happiness Glass*; Marion May Campbell, *The Man on the Mantlepiece: A Memoir*
review by Moya Costello page 7
- Jo Jones, *Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars*
review by Emily Sutherland page 12
- Jane Joritz-Nakagawa (ed), *women: poetry: migration [an anthology]*
review by Dominique Hecq page 15
- Rod Mengham, *Grimspound and Inhabiting Art*
review by Pablo Muslera page 18
- Philip Nielsen, *Wildlife of Berlin*
review by Toni Walsh page 21
- Michele Leggott, *Vanishing Points*
review by Owen Bullock page 25
- Eugen Bacon, *loveSTRUCK*
review by Josephine Carzo page 32
- John Kinsella, *Open Door*; Steve Armstrong, *Broken Ground*; Chris Wallace-Crabbe, *Rondo*
review by Amelia Walker page 36
- Sreedhevi Iyer, *Jungle Without Water*
review by Helen Burns page 42
- Michael Aiken, *Satan Repentant*; James Harpur, *The White Silhouette*
review by Liam Guilar page 46
- Jessica L Wilkinson and Simon Charles, *Marionette: A biography of Miss Marion Davies* (CD)
review by Prithvi Varatharajan page 51

TEXT review

Within and without: The habitus of creativity and writing

review by Simon-Peter Telford



Critical Writing with Critical Theory: Inhabitation

Dominique Hecq and Julian Novitz (eds)

Gylphi Limited, Canterbury UK 2018

ISBN: 9781780240688

Pb 292pp AUD 64.17

Inhabitation dives into writing, exploring the immersion of writers in their craft. Dominique Hecq and Julian Novitz have compiled works from a group of writers who examine their own interactions with language, form, culture and society in the search for an understanding on how writing is constructed. At times *Inhabitation* offers a less formal conversation with writers and the examination of their works, not overly saturated with theory, while still presenting relevant theoretics where appropriate. This leads to a refreshingly honest approach that achieves the enjoyability of almost narrative driven self-reflection on the writing process, while looking at the finished pieces through a new lens. Each chapter presents a unique author, and as a result, differing writer's voices. This allows the ability to offer something new and keep the reader engaged with a fresh perspective and writing style.

The first two chapters both intertwine thoughts of ownership and the 'right' to write. The lingering issue of colonialism hovers between the gaps of letters and lines of Lia Hill's chapter 'Walking No Man's Land':

writing in an Indigenous Australian language also raised ethical questions, as it must. I was using a genre not natural to the Anangu people; bending their language to a European form. What is more, I was walking the disputed line between appropriation and the assuaging non-engagement of political correctness. (18)

Amy Matthews struggles with the perceived appropriation of the holocaust through fictional stories in her chapter 'Writing about the History of the Holocaust':

I find the idea that I am turning other people's suffering and death into something to be consumed as an art object, or as entertainment, deeply distasteful. And yet I am driven to imagine, to write, and to keep writing, continuously circling my attraction and repulsion. (35)

These chapters do not read as a stalwart defense or damnation of any particular practice, however, but more as an honest, intellectual and emotional discussion about such issues and their place in our craft. Matthews explores this with unflinching courage surrounded by respect for the subjects. The way in which our habitus informs the creative work that comes from cultures is also discussed in Gail Pittaway's literary anthropology: 'The Ghost of Sigurd the Volsung in Eketahuna' takes the reader to New Zealand in an attempt to draw out the Norse influence of 19th century migrants within New Zealand literature. Inhabitation is a large word that encompasses much; within Pittaway's chapter it demonstrates how cultural texts and myths move with those who hold them, and how they cross-pollinate with other cultures.

This then brings us to the writer as an individual in a globalised world. Dan Disney takes us on a kaleidoscope journey of diary entries, philosophy quotes and musings in his chapter 'Toward a Poetics of Wandering'. Can we peel back the layers of habitus to reach some core self, is the core any truer than the rest? Does the act of continuous changes to one's habitus allow for the greatest depth of expression? 'What is the wandering poet if not an archivist sensitized to that amalgam of processes in which immersion within exteriorities can generate jolting response?' (130). Eugene Bacon examines how our inhabitation of life creates the voice of our writing, 'the multiplicities I inhabit, neither of which is dominantly static as an identity, accompany each act of writing' (59), discussing how societal influences and identities are undeniable shifting underpinnings of a writer. Graeme Harper questions habitus in the 21st century, and how, as all things seemingly change and evolve, changes in creative writing may take place. Physical and metaphysical in nature, the chapter is anchored with the enjoyable image of drinking with Einstein and other great minds at a bar. Harper concludes with the positive summary of creative writing and writers in this new world: 'creative writers ... are today influenced by and influencing the plexus. What might happen next, what is investigated by creative writers creatively and critically as the twenty-first century progresses, in our new heterogeneous post digital world of laminal, contiguous, synaptic connections, is exciting to imagine' (82).

Harking to similar questions that underpin Harper's chapter on change, Katherine Coles' chapter 'The Ghost (in the) Machine' concerns itself with machine reading of poetry through algorithms, placement of words within the physical writing of poetry as by Emily Dickenson and how one's self is expressed within poetry. These chapters regarding our 21st century lives are interesting in their predictions of possibilities for the future and offer a chance to reflect on our own progress through this changing period of time.

From looking forward to looking back, Simon West returns to the canon, in particular Dante, and evaluates the place of a poet with memory of

themselves and the cultural zeitgeist from which they came. Taking the reader through segments of Dante's work in 'Squaring the Circle', West draws the link between memory and writing: 'we might say that our cultural memory and knowledge needs to be kept alive through actively returning to and interpreting the past' (145), expressing the importance of individual and cultural memory within creation. When Eleanor Hogan went to the Ernestine Hill Collection at the Fryer Library she hoped to come across hidden gems that would expound upon Hill's exploits as an enigmatic journalist in her thirties. Instead Hogan found a complex collection of memories that shed light on the race relations between Indigenous peoples and Hill. Hogan seeks to explore her humanised understanding of Hill, the disturbing and the inspirational, in the context of Hill's time period, and therefore enhance the modern understanding of her work as a whole. Hogan writes

Although Hill's published writing is highly problematic in some respects, the value of rereading it in relations to the Hill's Collection's work-in-progress lies in what the many-voicedness of the archive or hypotext might reveal, not just about the paradoxes and contradictions of the narrative and historical personae of Ernestine Hill, but the shifts within the "idea of Australia" that her life and writing spanned, and beyond. (192)

'Revising "Finished" Poems', the chapter written by Paul Hetherington and Paul Munden, approaches poetry as a worker approaches their craft. That is not to say the authors lack any of the so-called mysticism of creativity but rather that their chapter acknowledges the all-too-often hidden process of refinement and reworking that exists behind many poems. This is juxtaposed with the perceived flaws that can exist within poems that are seen as inherently crucial, in which case, are they truly flaws? More importantly, are the revisions of such flaws in actuality a detriment in the end? The inhabitation of a poet within their poem as they write can never be the same once a poem has finished in the writing according to Hetherington and Munden, and so there must be implications on revising poems from a re-immersed inhabitation.

Collection co-editor Dominique Hecq's own chapter, 'Crypts of Loss, Love, Lack', gives the reader an exposition on writing inhabiting loss, mourning and grief. Discussing examples of writers who concern themselves with recreation of the self and loss, notably Marguerite Duras, peppered with Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis, Hecq turns towards herself near the end of the chapter. Ruminating on the role of woman, of mother, within grief and cultural normality, through her own work, she comes to the conclusion that

the experience of mourning and melancholia is "sexed". I find it astounding that grief returns unbidden at key moments in a woman's life-time, again and again, marking the anniversary of a child's death, for example, as though the body is set to disregard the passing of time. (210)

She adds that the inhabitation of loss and the creative works resulting from that inhabitation, or better said, are that inhabitation, are one and the same with the writer who resides within.

'Bodily Difference in Poetry', Andy Jackson's chapter, challenges the discussion on poetry's relationship with the body, and its perception as

some manifestation of ethereal disembodiment. As stated previously within this review, inhabitation is a term which encompasses several aspects'. Jackson's chapter discusses the 'literal' inhabitation of poetry within the body or mind or somewhere else. Amalgamating philosophy, sex, politics, poetry form, and style through the focus of disability, Jackson debates the conversation in an open-minded yet academic mindset, resolving that 'the innovation and adaption of form that is integral to both poetry and disability, we may find that it is in fact poetry that is the natural home of bodily difference' (230).

Bodies to bodies: in this case focusing on bodies of water and the metaphor of water as empathy, Shari Kocher dissects Dorothy Porter's *Crete* (1996) poems. The chapter, 'Matri-Liminal Bodies', is an extensive cross reference of many scholarly resources regarding the subject, swimming in an aquatic themed syntax. Kocher posits that Porter's critic on the limits of art also 'involves an oceanic impulse which shifts chiasmatically between self-reflective postmodernist questing along Sapphic modes of inscription' (243). The root of empathy, for Kocher, is found in the oxymoron chiasmus within Porter's *Crete* poems which allow for 'Sapphic inscription and self-reflexive questing's beyond the trope of the dissolving non-linear journey' (249).

The epilogue for *Inhabitation* is written by Amelia Walker. Her capstone chapter reminds the reader why it is crucial to read books such as this one, why creative writing research and understanding matters not only for the writer but for academia and society as a whole. Walker's rebuke of the romanticism of creative writing research demonstrates how 'if creative writing research findings seem derived from a self fully distinct from o/Others and its situation, there remains limited scope for arguing that those findings bear importance to anything and anyone beyond the individual writer' (256). Walker also engages with the challenges of originality with which creative writers often grapple. Originality from the unoriginal is explored in her sub-chapter on 'Queering Harold Bloom', in which an understanding of originality born from unoriginality feeds into an anti-romanticist view of creative writing, which leads towards the possibility of writing from the self-subject as an o/Other. These points combine to form a strong argument for the knowledge-making ability of creative writing and a strong end to a meaningful book.

Inhabitation is the inhabitation of the writer within their work, their work within them and the reader within the process of the authors. It is the writer within the world, within a culture, within a language. For a subject such as creative writing, there is not a hierarchy of theory, experience and creativity that must be strictly followed, rather a synthesis of all to create a blend which is arguably the best method to understanding what it is we do. Hecq and Novitz have produced an exploration into creative writing that offers much to think about as a reader, whether a seasoned professional writer, academic or a beginning student, delivered in an enjoyable and refreshing compilation of writers who are respected voices in their field. *Inhabitation* has a welcome spot on the bookshelf of any writer who wishes to delve deeper into how creative writing places itself in and grows from culture, craft, technology, and more.

Simon-Peter Telford is a writer, playwright, poet and recent Honours graduate in Creative Writing through the University of South Australia.

www.simonpetertelford.wordpress.com

m

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Milestones in auto/biography

review by Moya Costello



Carol Lefevre
The Happiness Glass
Spinifex, North Geelong VIC, 2018
9781925581638
Pb 152pp, AUD 24.95



Marion May Campbell
The Man on the Mantlepiece: A Memoir
UWA Publishing, Crawley WA 2018
9781760800031
Pb 232pp, AUD 24.95

Brien and Eades (2018: 3) perceive that contemporary life writing has 'numerous innovative incarnations'. Equally, Cardell, Douglas and Brien (2018: 4) characterise contemporary life narrative as having 'creative approaches' (4) and 'formative hybridity' (4).

The first thing to say about Lefevre's *The Happiness Glass* and Campbell's *The Man on the Mantlepiece*, each a remarkable book, is that their structure is to be noticed. Cardell, Douglas and Brien (2018: 4) state that in writing life narrative, (creative) writers tend to focus 'on the ... challenges of assembly in ... life narration'. Then there's these two books' genres ... and content and style. There's everything, really, to be noted.

A book-length work, in particular, requires thinking about assembly or structure. (Often shorter forms will end themselves.) In relation to creative nonfiction (CNF), Helen Garner (2017) arranges her most recent book, *Everywhere I Look*, under headings of particular pieces, gathering under that title works of similar content. Lefevre's *Happiness Glass* and Campbell's *Man on the Mantlepiece* are sure-fired sources of impressive structuring too.

Lefevre has adeptly reinvented Beverly Farmer's (1990) *Body of Water* strategy ('innovative itself as a hybrid of journal, short stories and poems' [Costello 2013]), linking CNF to fiction. The five sections in *The Happiness Glass* deal with childhood/early-adult life, in vitro fertilisation (IVF), travel, adoption, then post-adoption. As Lefevre explains, 'each section begins with a memoir piece or personal essay followed by one or more short fictions' (151). Of the short stories, she says she knew 'they were part of a longer, unwritten, autobiographical narrative' (151). Then she was blessed with the idea of combining the genres.

Campbell's *The Man on the Mantlepiece* has seven parts, dealing with her own and her sister's childhood; her father's early life, career and death; her mother; and her own life. In her work, Campbell parallels Brian Castro's blend of 'fiction, critique and autobiography' (van den Berg 2010). Castro (1999: 105) writes that:

[a]gainst genre classification, the generic function I've used most of all is a form which is not only unstable ... but which has the potential to transgress the furthest. This is the auto/biographical form.

In a study of Castro's oeuvre, Van den Berg uses Lejeune's notion of an 'autobiographical space' to see that the 'repetitions and gaps of this ... space sketch the life of an "autobiographical persona", a phantasm of the author'. Lejeune's 'autobiographical space' attends 'to the role of the reader in connecting a writer's works across genres and contradictory truth claims' (van den Berg 2010).

Lefevre and Campbell confront what Lefevre calls the 'difficulties of life writing' (151), prime among them being the question of truth. Campbell's 'Prologue' is a mini thesis on these problems of the genre:

There is ... no sure way of sourcing the true thing... No real knowledge to be gained, beyond the tease and betrayal of forensic facts and the back routes that fantasy takes to build its compensations. (1)

Lefevre's linking of fact and fantasy is rich, multiplying the experience to induce various resonances and add depth. For example, in section one, the long CNF, 'Burning with Madame Bovary', analyses, philosophises, theorises, and meditates on Lefevre's early life. But with the three fiction works in this section, it is as if Lefevre puts her memory-camera in close-up mode and works by intimate and small detail to vividly colourise the same material. (Each section does begin with a photograph.) In the Bovary

CNF, there's this: '[O]ur next door neighbours were a ... couple given to violent, alcohol-fuelled ... arguments. The woman sometimes spoke to my mother over the fence, blaming her slurred speech on radiation from the tests at Maralinga' (6). Then there's the same content in the fiction 'The Stars of the Milky Way': 'Dorrie Brickle appeared at the gap in the fence... "It's rr...radiation damage, Missus Brennan... It's wrecked my memory"... Later shouts and crashes erupted next door' (23).

Although Lefevre is a cosmopolitan, having lived for lengthy periods in Europe, she grew up in the tough country of Wilcannia and Broken Hill. 'I started school in Wilcannia, but I have seen Paris. Most days, that is enough' (21). Memorable are her descriptions of early schooldays, with their accompanying mini object or commodity biographies. For example:

the double-decker wooden pencil case ... the most desirable object in the town... Its sliding lid ... its two sections swivelled to reveal the secret lower chamber ... with a small compartment for an eraser and a sharpener. (4)

Both *The Happiness Glass* and *The Man on the Mantlepiece* trade in mystery. In the former, we want to know what's the deal with the violence of the Wilcannia next-door neighbours, the Brickles; if Lefevre/Lily will return from Europe; whether the IVF will be successful; and, last but not least, the reason for the adopted child's leaving without explanation, not to be seen again up to the present moment of the book's ending. In *The Man on the Mantlepiece*, we want to know the cause of Campbell's father's death and about its 'fallout' (to pun here: his plane fell from the sky) or, as Campbell titles her last two sections, its 'Aftermath' and 'Verge'-like nature.

Both writers deal with trauma, reflecting Cardell, Douglas and Brien's (2018: 1) discussions about life writing 'in difficult times' as including the prevalence of trauma. In Campbell and Lefevre's case, the trauma is death, loss and violence: Campbell's father's death, Lefevre's loss of her adopted daughter, Campbell's experience of sexual abuse and her mother's tendency to be homophobic toward Campbell's queer identity, and Lefevre's experience of gender and class oppression ('[W]hat did teenage girls in country towns want with Latin and French and art?' [9]), inability to conceive and her close-hand experience of domestic violence.

In the 2004 innovative writing award in the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature, the judges noted the characteristics of the shortlisted texts as the hybrid crossing of fiction and essay, life writing, memoir, and history (political, social and cultural); as lacking a 'stable authorial centre'; as sensitivity 'to the many, sometimes contradictory, dimensions of perspective'; and the movement through 'a series of voices' (Arts SA 2004). Both Lefevre and Campbell are historically conscious, referring to the Maralinga bomb tests in Lefevre's case for example, and Communism, the CSIRO Radiophysics rain-making trials and the Royal Australian Airforce's air-safety record in Campbell's:

So much damage attends the phantasmagorical projection of old England onto Australia in the aftermath of colonial occupation, including Cloud Physics and rainmaking, called to rescue an ill-conceived agriculture – as life-giving as it might have willed itself then – in this country that for the at least fifty millennia supported the light footprints of nomadism. (Campbell 2018: 216)

Apart from hybridity, the contradictory perspectives and multiple voices are predominant in Campbell's book. In exorbitant performativity, she ventriloquises both her mother's and father's speaking.

Campbell (2014) devoted a chapter to Castro's work in her nonfiction text, *Poetic Revolutionaries*, discussing his intertextuality, hybridity and punning. Only one, mild example of Campbell's parallel procedures is a response to a quote from *The Tempest*: 'Yon ... cloud ... that would shed his liquor'. She mentions her own drinking as 'I took in the liquor; but held it badly like yon cloud' (158). This quote also refers to her father's death in an attempt at cloud-seeding for the liquidity of rain.

Lefevre is equally stylish, particularly in her imagery: a 'Wilcannia afternoon – hot and flat as the bottom of an iron (22); 'I began this essay in the small wilderness of days between Christmas and New Year' (122).

I always want to highlight what I think is a distinct moment in Australian literature – as, for example, van den Berg (2013) identifies *Shanghai Dancing* (Castro 2003) as 'a milestone in the autobiographical space'. And Lefevre and Campbell's books model a brave, exciting and inventive way to proceed. The books come from small, independent Australian presses, Spinifex and University of Western Australian Publishing, who – like Spineless Wonders, Giramondo, Brandl & Schlesinger, Seizure, Vagabond, Rochford Street Press and more – we can confidently rely on to produce the innovative, the ground-breaking, the distinct moment, the milestone.

Works Cited

Arts SA 2004 *SA Festival Awards for Literature*, Arts SA, Adelaide, South Australia
return to text

Brien, D & Q Eades (eds) 2018 *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice*, UWA Publishing, Crawley WA
return to text

Campbell, MM 2014 *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality and Subversion*, Rodopi, Amsterdam
return to text

Cardell, K, K Douglas & DL Brien 2018 'Life Narrative in Troubled Times', in K Douglas, D Brien & K Cardell (eds) *Life Narrative in Troubled Times*, Text Special Issue 50: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue50/Cardell&Douglas&Brien.pdf> (accessed 30 January 2019)
return to text

Castro, B 1999 'Auto/biography', *Looking for Estrellita*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia QLD: 98-123
return to text

Castro, B 2003 *Shanghai Dancing*, Giramondo, Newcastle NSW
return to text

Costello, M 2013 'To See: A Literary Ecological Point of View (Some Australian Examples of Ecocritical Creative Writing, with Particular Emphasis on the Prose Poem)', in M Harrison, D Bird Rose, L Shannon & K Satchell (eds) *Writing Creates Ecology and Ecology Creates Writing*, TEXT Special Issue 20: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue20/Costello.pdf> (accessed 30 January 2019)
return to text

Farmer, B 1990 *A Body of Water: A Year's Notebook*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia QLD
return to text

Garner, H 2017 *Everywhere I Look*, Text, Melbourne
return to text

van den Berg, J 2010 "'Truth is Not the Seduction": Brian Castro's Autobiographical Space', *Australian Humanities Review* Issue 49 November:

<http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2010/11/01/truth-is-not-the-seduction-brian-castros-autobiographical-space/> (accessed 30 January 2019) return to text

Dr Moya Costello is a writer, and an Adjunct/Casual Lecturer, Schools of Arts and Social Sciences and Business and Tourism, Southern Cross University. Her scholarly and creative publications are in a range of journals and anthologies. She has four books of creative writing published: two of short creative prose (Kites in Jakarta and Small Ecstasies) and two novellas (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 1 April 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julienne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

The province of history is a debatable country

review by Emily Sutherland



Jo Jones

Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars

UWA Publishing, Crawley WA 2018

ISBN: 9781742589916

Pb 250pp AUD39.99

The vexed question of what distinguishes historical novels from other genres has yet to be resolved. From the time of Homer, and looking forward to the more complex treatment of history by postmodern and post-postmodern novels, many definitions have been offered. None has completely satisfied. When the history in question is a significant event such as the Holocaust or, in the case of *Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars*, ‘cultural and political significance ... of the period known as the History Wars’ (3), then wider considerations come into force. In tackling this topic Jo Jones raises many questions and refrains from answering all of them. This is an excellent thing in an academic text.

In discussing and critiquing five works relevant to the 1970s and 1980s Jones includes the notion of the political significance of the narrative form. As she explains:

This volume investigates the cultural and political significance of the Australian historical novels written during the period known as the History Wars, in which historians, politicians, writers and commentators entered into an aggressive, at times acrimonious debate about the nature of Australia’s colonial past. (3)

Her introduction examines, in some detail, early colonial history, the development of the Australian nation, and the influence of the Enlightenment. Inherent in this examination is the acceptance of the

Australia's 'own particular enactment of genocide' (16) and how through this acceptance we must seek to come to terms with the brutality, injustice and interracial conflicts in our past.

Of the five writers Jones examines in detail, Kate Grenville is perhaps the one who has stirred up the most controversy in her novel *The Secret River* (2005). Grenville herself has contributed to that controversy in her detailed explanation of the process of choosing to tell the story of her ancestor as fiction. Her claim that this is also an historical account earned her the ire of historians such as Inga Glendinnen and Mark McKenna, who 'were keen to define themselves against such a fiction, repeatedly defending the importance of scholarly rigour and empirical process' (111). Jones expresses reservations: 'This [fresh understanding] concluding reflection expresses a very earnest sense of the learning process undergone, but the impulse to narrative closure remains problematical' (96). The debate between historians who jealously guard their discipline and the writer who creates a narrative after careful research (as opposed to the bodice-ripping version of so much historical fiction) is an ongoing one. In choosing to write a novel rather than a family history Grenville has granted herself greater narrative licence, and this should be acknowledged. Jones suggests that Grenville has presented a traditional, and therefore subjective, approach to early colonial history. Jones writes that: 'when we consider this scene [the massacre] and the alleged allegorical shape of the novel, the implication is that the majority of Australians who took part in genocidal violence did so unwillingly...' (105).

In the literature/history conflict Jones states that, like Grenville, Malouf has 'expressed his belief that fiction can bring the reader "closer" to past events and that the process of imaginatively "fleshing out" history creates a more insightful version of the past' (138).

Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001) is described by Jones as 'a postmodern experimental narrativisation of a colonial past as it is applied to a political critique of the national present' (58). Continuing '... Gould accepts that the notion of "saving" history is ultimately impossible, as, even when every effort is made to construct a "true history" it will continue shift and change' (75). As an experiment in narrativisation *Gould's Book of Fish* is judged to be 'a more suitable form of storytelling to represent the past' (76) than Grenville's book. It may be that Flanagan, concerned as he is with the political debate, has achieved greater condemnation of our early history than has Grenville, whose emphasis is on the telling of the story.

However in *Falling Backwards* Jones has extended the discussion far beyond the simple literature/history question to examine the specific work of five writers within a political and philosophical framework, especially as has been highlighted during the so-called History Wars. The choice of language becomes important in giving the reader deeper insight. Kim Scott's *Benang* (1999) searches to reconnect with his culture through poetic language because 'poetry held a privileged position, similar to the sense of place and authenticity represented by the native vernacular or mother tongue' (174). Rodney Hall's *Yandilli Trilogy* (1994) is described as gothic, a tradition which truly captures some of the horrors of the past. In a discussion that reaches beyond the superficial, Jones deconstructs the concepts of Gothic and the Enlightenment against psychoanalytic theories, ethical and political potential.

How does all this reflect on our understanding of Reconciliation, race identity, recognition of past wrongs and integrity in story telling? These are complex and difficult questions requiring complex and difficult answers. Jo Jones provides a thoughtful and disciplined approach to many of the questions and opens a number of areas which invite further development.

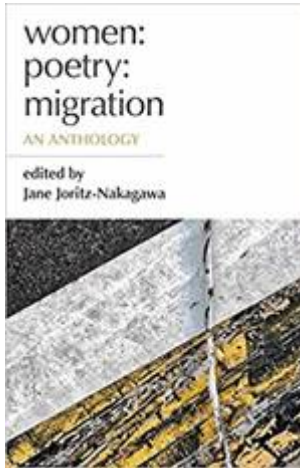
Dr Emily Sutherland is an Honorary Research Fellow, School of Humanities, Flinders University, South Australia. She has also published novels, short stories, poetry and drama.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 1 April 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julienne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Opportune disruptions

review by Dominique Hecq



women: poetry: migration [an anthology]

Jane Joritz-Nakagawa (ed)

theenk Books, Palmyra, New York 2017

ISBN 978-0-9883891-6-852500

Pb 328 pp USD 25.00

Editing a contemporary poetry anthology of women who have experienced migration or displacement is neither an innocent nor uncomplicated venture, especially when the focus is on experimental and innovative practices. You might set out to gather a collection of astounding pieces, but when it comes down to devising a book, all sorts of internal and external parameters come into play and demand attention. The editor's linguistic and geopolitical background, experiences and view of the world, as well as their aesthetic proclivities are bound to influence the scope, focus, and ultimate selection of poems. Geopolitical markers are particularly relevant as these leave traces that have been either firmly inscribed in published texts or erased in the act of revision.

Though not directly addressing these issues, the editor of *women: poetry: migration* [an anthology], Jane Joritz-Nakagawa, born in the US and now living and working in Japan, signals in her introduction that she is aware of the challenging nature of the task at hand. In particular, she invokes how she came to focus the anthology through its multivocal and intercultural concerns. And in that regard, she delivers. Whether it be in realist, impressionistic, symbolist, allegorical, parodic or other yet to be named mode, all texts gathered here approach one issue: in what location a poet's writing exists, and how its surfaces have wider implications beyond selves in the formation and deployment of identities. So, Joritz-Nakagawa ought to be forgiven for selecting the work of writers who predominantly either originate from or live in the US despite her intention to represent 'regional' and 'cross-cultural' diversities (xi).

What is striking and exciting about this volume comprising works by fifty authors is its sheer stylistic diversity. This is compounded by its linguistic versatility. Stylistic diversity is exemplified in the breadth of genres, forms and modes showcased. Linguistic versatility is deployed in bilingual or multilingual texts and occasionally enhanced by the translation skills of fellow poets. Also exciting are the essays appended to each individual offering. As Ivy Alvarez – born in the Philippines, raised in Australia and now living in Auckland, NZ via Scotland, Ireland and Wales – puts it: ‘Discovering new poets to admire is necessary to stave off stultification and stagnation in one’s own work’ (108). Hazel Smith, who will be familiar to readers of *TEXT* – one of the rare Australians (in the anthology) apart from Ania Walwicz and Bella Li – expresses the same sentiment in a different way: ‘For me writing experimentally means continuously exploring new territory, as well as acknowledging literary tradition’ (104).

Through this anthology, I *discovered* plenty of new (to me!) poets to admire. As a reviewer, I am acutely ‘aware of the challenging nature of task at hand’. What to select? Who? This is not a case of Russian roulette, but I’ll be random, starting with Wang Ping, whom I thought I should have known about – you will have to read her bio note – and whose work is polygeneric. It also incorporates visuals and phrases in Chinese. You will have to go to page 231 to find out how she conveys the following short short visually and in her mother tongue, too:

Ten Thousand Waves

On the evening of 5 February 2004 at Morecambe Bay in North West England, 21 Chinese immigrants were drowned by an incoming tide off the Lancashire while picking cockles. The victims were mostly young men and women from Fujian and Shanghai. The youngest was 18. (231)

Wang Ping speaks on displacement in the public and private sphere. So do many texts in the anthology. Playing on equivocations across languages, Jody Pou, from Atlanta, Georgia, now living in France, elevates this artificial dichotomy to the metaphysical level only to bring it back with a crash on the purely corporeal level as the speaking body is experienced by the speaker, unashamedly thwarting the reader’s expectations if he or she does not speak French. Unashamedly punning, too:

When you question. When you being to question. When
you begin to question, quand question, quand on pose,
when posing, when posing, quand on commence à
questionner, on begin, we being, we begin to question
somewhere, on commence à questionner le tout. When we
being to questioner, somewhere, when beginning to
question, on question les corps, les poses, when being,
quand on pose, les corps, somewhere, les choses, les mots,
when begin, when beginning, when we begin begin repeat
and question (141)

If you are wondering what this Anglo-French salad of words mean, you could ask Prof Google. On the other hand, you could read the whole piece. It is titled ‘*En Brume*’ (from *Lilt en Quatre*). Opens with: *Wittgenstein se demande s’il a une main* / ‘Wittgenstein wonders if he’s got a hand’ (139) and extrapolates on the act of questioning with a series of hypothetical variations that blur boundaries of time, place, language and identity.

Anne Tardos turns the salad into a sculpture. Her work integrates interlingual associations, putting forth ideas that deconstruct meaning across several languages through generating puns. Her essay ‘On my multi-, pluri-, poly- or neolingual writing’ says it all in a nutshell.

Now I feel utterly exposed, having conveyed my own aesthetic and ideological inclinations between the lines and knowing I am running out of space. I dog-eared my copy of the anthology in many places, the last offence occurring on page 33. Then I used post-it notes and there are too many to mention – let alone cite from – here. Randomly, one highlights Jane Joritz-Nakagawa’s essay, ‘On becoming radicalized’ (113). Another one, an exilic poem by Jennifer Dick (122-123) and, of course, how could I ignore excerpts from *The Last Poems of Lea Goldberg*, the renowned Hebrew poet (1911-1970) from whom I’ll quote:

On the exiles’ path
the clasp of sand and stone –
the sky near by –
and in the sky
thorned stars (153)

It is tempting to finish this review with Goldberg’s poignant words, but I want to stress that *women: poetry: migration [an anthology]* is an outstanding collection of poems and prose poems and works defying classification that will appeal to anyone interested in exploring and questioning identities in the context of multi-, inter- or pluriculturalism. The collection invites further explorations of this theme by offering a mixture of multiple experimental pieces with strands of narrative levels, imagery, humour, irony and sheer inventiveness that produce an exhilarating sense of ambiguity and uncertainty

Dominique Hecq is a bilingual poet, fiction writer, and scholar partial to experimentation. Hecq’s works include a novel, three collections of stories and eight books of poetry. Her auto-translation of Out of Bounds (2009), Hors Limites, was released last year in France. Crypto (2018) and Kosmogonies (2019) are her most recent bilingual collections. After Cage has just been released in English. She is a recipient of the 2018 International Best Poets Prize.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Stepping through time and space

review by Pablo Muslera



Rod Mengham
Grimspound and Inhabiting Art
Carcanet Press, Manchester UK 2018
ISBN: 9781784105907
Pb 256pp AUD 29.95

Mengham's book is partitioned into two main sections, with an overriding theme of natural and manufactured structures acting as cultural conduits connecting past and present. Through a blend of descriptive writing, essay, poetry and literary analysis, he demonstrates how modern lived spaces access a form of time travel, where their historical origins are recontextualised. The first section, 'Grimspound' (a Dartmoor settlement dating from the late Bronze Age), begins slowly with a detailed description of some of the flora and topographical features of the area. The narrative lifts when it finds some poignancy within the mundane, such as a bucolic view termed 'the ovine sublime' (18), and 'a dead yellow and black striped caterpillar wearing a funereal ruff of rainwater spheres on its furred back' (19), phrases which reflect Mengham's poetic sensibilities. Mengham appears to be feeling his way in the introduction, and the tone switches from observational to personal when he admits that he has grown possessive of the space, and that, 'certain timbres of voice make [him] nervous' (19). This early shift from objective to dramatic register is characteristic of Mengham's voice.

Mengham uses a combination of historical and literary analysis to argue that Grimspound is a place where time is in flux. He names the 'collapsing of timeframes' (33) facilitated by the ancient setting as a crucial element in the plot of Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*. Watson imagines the Bronze Age huts of the area alternately housing 'prehistoric man and the modern convict' (32). The temporal uncertainty of the real-life Grimspound is highlighted by wealthy amateur archeologist Baring-

Gould's 1894 excavations of the site, and his privileging of modern aesthetics over historical accuracy (55). Conan Doyle visited Grimspound's restored huts years before he wrote the story, and Baring-Gould may have inspired the character of Henry Baskerville, whose thirst for untrammelled renovation of his ancestral home awakens an atavistic evil (38).

Mengham caps this literary discussion with a poetic meditation, where ancient setting provides inspiration for modern verse. Grimspound is projected back to its Bronze Age history: 'men pile up charcoal in the pit / and fashion prayers / to peel the shadow from the sun / to free the mist from the moon' (60). He addresses the importance of place in identity: 'there is a saying / that those without land / will be left with nothing but the scabs on their wounds' (65). The poem's conclusion links physical with cultural displacement: '...but I remember / everything that remains behind / now the clan is not even a rumour / now our tongue has shrivelled up... / our words are no more than wax in the ear' (68).

In the second main section, 'Inhabiting Art', Mengham codifies his poetic musings in the concept of *habitus*, 'the everyday activities of a group whose shared ways of perceiving the world are the very ground of ... individual sensibility' (73). He makes the point that *habitus* is often linked with *habitat* (my emphasis): 'familiar territory seen in relation to familiar ways of making it work' (73), and exemplifies this through his description of a Bronze Age knife, which after three millennia of 'dumb neglect' is 'attuned, responsive, prompt to its ancient cue' (74). In his analysis of another Bronze Age site in the UK, Flag Fen, Mengham strengthens his argument on the interdependency of *habitus* and *habitat*, showing how the fen environment shapes the culture of its people, as they in turn influence their natural surrounds, noting the 'soluble culture' which facilitates votive offerings bequeathed to the bog through an underwater 'religious recycling centre' (76).

Mengham returns to 'Grimspound's' theme of restoration as violation when he describes Flag Fen's visitors centre as a 'Bronze Age Housing estate', where 'simulacra of prehistoric sheep' graze, while an ancient Roman road degrades into 'Swiss cheese' (80). The fifty posts and central altar trunk of 'Seahenge', transported to Flag Fen for archaeological study, deteriorate in their new home, and Mengham argues that the price for the historical secrets they have yielded is too high (82). The tension between a site's original purpose, and how that is betrayed through the modern need to know it further, is beautifully articulated here, as well as in Mengham's trek along the Bibbulmun track in Western Australia. His search for an authentic connection with the land, and its custodians the Nyoongar people, ends in him meeting only 'white and urban' (173) tourists like himself (many fellow Brits); Mengham is unable to escape the 'bubble of [his] own language, and its cultural carry-on' (174). He addresses the irony of the oldest surviving continuous culture leaving less impression on him than the more recent prehistory of his home continent, simply because he is unable to read the Nyoongar's ancient signs, whose seamless blending into the landscape is a greater proof of their persistence within it than the Bronze Age artefacts with whom he is more familiar.

This is a stark juxtaposition against 'Inhabiting Art's' final entry, 'The eighth hill of Rome', in which highly visible artefacts take on conflicted meanings. A mountain of ancient oil amphorae pottery shards in the Testaccio district is a sign of modern dissent, a metaphor for EU tensions; pilgrims risk climbing the cordoned mound (formerly used by drug

dealers), while the broader district is the site of violent protests against European free trade. Thus evidence of ancient Roman unity, a monument to its ubiquitous olive oil, has evolved into a symbol of disunity, outlasting the Empire which spawned it (250-254). The remainder of 'Inhabiting Art' describes a series of site visits which continue the theme of the cultural evolution of historical spaces and artefacts. These subsections cover a broad geographical area from the UK, mainland Europe, Australia and the United States, and the accounts span 2003 to 2017. The work is most successful in its longer pieces, which undertake a deeper analysis of the cultural significance of place and materiality. For example, the Victoria and Albert museum's copy of Michelangelo's *David* is apprehended differently to that in Florence's Piazza Signora (the original statue's first location), while the original statue re-homed in the Academia in Florence fulfils a different function again: the first embeds classical art in the age of mechanical reproduction, the second locates *David* square in the centre of daily commerce, while the third places the original statue in a solitary chamber, where its status as (high) Art is emphasised (119). Mengham makes a similar point about the 'evasive symbolism' (222) of the Statue of Liberty, from its French origins as a symbol of anti-slavery (224), to its more modern association with an 'open arms immigration policy' (224), and how that meaning is challenged by artists such as the writer Hart Crane, who imagines that the Statue finds itself 'stayed', its desires 'arrested, in a condition in which freedom can only ever be qualified' (228). Mengham argues that such 'universal' symbols never have a static meaning, relying on the kaleidoscope through which their visitors view them, as much as the statue's physical structure relies on a network of scaffolds and mixed materials to keep it whole.

Overall, Mengham's book is itself a mix of materials: each main section comprises a febrile network of subsections which somehow maintain a loose cohesion with the whole. Poetry is informed by archaeology and literary analysis, and these conspire in a dramatic form of essay which lays bare its individual inspirations.

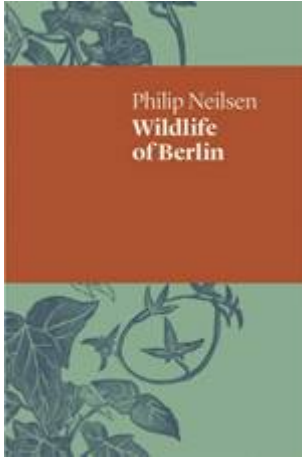
Dr Pablo Muslera teaches Shakespeare studies and professional and creative writing at the University of South Australia. He co-edits the reviews section of TEXT journal, and is interested in the intersection of Shakespeare and popular culture, and intertextuality as a creative and educational tool.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 1 April 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

The entanglement of matter and meaning

review by Toni Walsh



Philip Nielsen
Wildlife of Berlin
UWA Publishing, Crawley WA 2018
ISBN: 9781742589619
Pb 108pp AUD 22.99

Feminist scholar and quantum physicist Karen Barad talks about the entanglement between matter and meaning:

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (Barad 2007: ix)

Little by little, we as humans are becoming re-awakened to our entanglement with the world beyond us, and the implications of this. This re-awakening is apparent in Nielsen's sixth collection of poems, *Wildlife of Berlin*. Each poem in the collection captures a moment in which all that was and all that will be manifests itself, and though at times it feels as though Nielsen presents these moments like specimens for the reader's examination, they are not static – rather, they feel fluid and ephemeral,

which I believe is due to Nielsen's deft handling of Time, which is conveyed as not a linear nor chronological construct, but a nebulous and shifting one; as a landscape rather than a line. In such a space, the poet's gestures towards the Second World War early in the collection, which recall humanity's betrayal of itself, creates an intertextuality that unites some of the darkest days of recent history with the current ecological and social reality of the Anthropocene.

By blurring the perceived boundaries between spaces and times, Nielsen illuminates the interconnected nature of all things, material and otherwise. The discordant juxtapositions and contradictions of the collection's first poem, 'Marienplatz – Munich' (12-13), anticipate the inherently restless character of the poems to follow. Meanwhile, recurring scopic motifs belie a sense of distance between the observer and the observed, reflecting a sense of the poet's own positioning within the landscape, on the borders between things: European and Australian, whatever that may be, a colonial inheritance and a post-colonial perspective.

This awareness of our fraught yet irrevocable interconnectedness forms a pervasive undercurrent which unites the poems, which, despite a wide range of topics, sit contentedly enough together; a taxonomy of ideas suggesting a world-view that is ecologically aware and wryly post-postcolonial.

In Nielsen's poems, things are at once, and oscillate between, Same and Other, a paradox that captures a sense of some illusory and frustrating distance between the poet and nature, one that underlies the collection despite the prominence of both Australian and European flora, fauna and landscapes. Yet despite this inherently restless character, the poet constantly returns to the understanding that, despite the illusion of ruptures and distances, everything is connected, as in a web:

a nervous system spread among the grass roots
 feeds on water, insect, mushroom
 to make a sacrifice more epic and strange
 than any lie of mass suicide (31)

While at the heart of Nielsen's collection is this awareness of humanity's interdependent relationship with the natural world, it is accompanied by an underlying sense of foreboding – for of course, trauma connects us too. Nielsen shows how nature is riddled with omens of our impending demise. The adaptive behaviour of the pied currawong, 'the poster bird for evolution', is presented as a portent:

Now the glass is gone, a flotilla of plastic
 breeds and defecates on the ocean,
 the birds learn new tricks
 having foreseen our absence (35)

In 'Auspices' it seems that the poet begins to embrace the role of observer and witness, while reflecting on humanity's self-imposed ostracisation from nature. He muses:

If only a million wings could filter
 the sun, cool the ocean currents,

soothe the space dome,
that mad cracked cap (32)

Finally, in ‘The Dead Are Bored’, the poet’s voice rings its caution clear, driven home by the force of a rhyming couplet:

Listen, there is no magic in this prophecy:
When the rhino is gone
and clumsy birds mop the plains
you will see there your own remains. (94)

The poems are similarly interconnected, threaded together by recurring motifs and colours as ideas are picked up and played with again and again. Yet it cannot be said that the collection feels repetitive. Rather, experienced in sequence Nielsen’s sixty-eight poems form a wider contemplation on the nature of Nature, and of Time. The design of the contents page, which omits the section breaks between the collection’s five parts, acknowledges the possibility of a chronological approach to reading. The blank spreads that distinguish the five parts from one another then come as moments of stillness, a reprieve, an exhale and inhale, a moment to digest. Each poem, each part, and the collection itself all feel whole in their own right, and yet make up a whole themselves. They are *entangled*.

Nielsen’s poems prompt us to consider the marks we make on the earth, and in time. ‘In the House’ (75), filled with nostalgia and grief, reflects on life’s brevity, and again contrasts the vast with the intimate. We are drawn in to witness a person’s memory being stripped back like layers of wallpaper and paint, the original foundations revealing themselves. Nielsen does not deny the pain of this:

As this speck of a universe
slides into tyrannical dark
and all the planets dance like fleas,
what plausible warmth can come
from talk of scones and tea? (75)

The poems in this collection are surreal configurations of literary figures, ancient and contemporary Western history and mythology, folklore and nature. Wry and ironic, leaning sometimes to the sardonic as in ‘A University Bureaucrat Plans a Garden’ (46) and ‘The University Makes a Poem’ (58); and with sudden lashes of vitriol, as in ‘My Enemy Has Asked to be Friendied on Facebook’ (96) and ‘Testimonial’ (73), the poems simultaneously combine and juxtapose organic and artificial, human and animal, vast and intimate. Internal and external landscapes are overlapped and images shift as familiar literary and historical figures stroll into view to be layered in like swathes of paint on a canvas, the boundaries between things blended, and rendered arbitrary.

At times cynical, at times whimsical, always attentive and deftly wrought, Nielsen’s sixth collection is timely, possessing all the understated sophistication one would expect of a writer with his experience.

Works cited

Barad, K 2007, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham NC return to text

Toni Fay Walsh is a PhD (Communication) candidate at the University of South Australia's School of Creative Industries. Her creative and critical work explores the interconnectedness between matter and meaning, and the role of language and narrative in mediating experiences. With a particular interest in multimodal printed literature, her thesis analyses graphic memoirs about grief and loss in considering how experiences of the ineffable may be expressed through form.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

In another galaxy near you

review by Owen Bullock



Michele Leggott
Vanishing Points
Auckland University Press, Auckland 2017
ISBN 9781869408749
Pb 124 pp NZD \$24.99

Vanishing Points is Michele Leggott's tenth book of poetry. She edited major retrospectives of Robyn Hyde's poetry, and co-edited the influential anthology *Big Smoke: New Zealand Poems 1960-1975* (Auckland University Press, 2000). She was New Zealand Poet Laureate from 2008-2009, awarded the Member of New Zealand Order of Merit for services to poetry in 2009, and received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in 2013. Her long career has included a significant shift in the visual and aural balance of her work due to her loss of sight from the mid-1980s onwards, about which she writes openly.

She is a poet whose work continues to evolve, and she creates here in several new ways: firstly, through the form of prose poetry, which is new to her; secondly, by creating works from historical references, in subtly different ekphrastic responses. The first section of lineated poems is inspired by two flags made by New Zealand poet Leigh Davis, one of which is called *Macoute*, variously personified in Leggott's poetry. *Macoute* might be the tree, or the child caught on the print (of the flag). He is present, too: 'Macoute sits thinking / in a leather chair and above him / a white space' (2).

The use of the name and persona of *Macoute* sometimes echoes the disembodied characters of Samuel Becket's prose. But at other times, it's easy to substitute the author for this character, or for the name to be a kind of midpoint between the creative artefact that brought inspiration to the author, and her experience, especially in relation to sight. *Macoute* also has long ears (like a dog with good hearing) and cannot always see where he is

going. He counts steps between parts of the house (as a blind person might), but is also plucked down from the wall (being a flag). Leggott as subject is suggested by other references to a dog and to street names which conjure Leggott's pathway home from the Devonport Ferry terminal that her guide dog, Olive, knows so well, where the companion animal's eyes are 'doing the work / for both of them' (29), so that dog and owner fuse.

The 32 poems in this section are titled in Latin and English by the names for 32 constellations, beginning with '*carina/ the keel*'. Their invocations of the stars seem especially resonant for sightlessness and for the collection's title. Images of celestial movement in the first poem via reference to the Geminids continues into '*horologium/ the clock*', with 'the parabola of his hands' and a more overt contemplation of the sighting of meteors (3). Later, in '*pictor/ the painter*' (12), stars are portents. Other things, too, are seen in terms of the patterning of movement or time, such as the flight of wood pigeons; and 'his wooden fingers' (3), which references Macoute, or possibly a brother.

The lines often include internal line breaks (gaps signalled by three or four spaces), which are further manipulated and nuanced by enjambment, helping to create additional meanings and sometimes making it seem as though the sense is reversed, since both techniques shift the reader's perception of where an idea or image begins and ends. I commented in my review of Leggott's last collection *Heartland* (Bullock 2015) on the use of internal line breaks to suggest the shifts of thought contained in conversation. Something similar yet slightly different is at work here, a kind of undercutting and complexifying of meaning. The use of internal line breaks is a familiar technique over a long period in Leggott's writing practice, especially from *Mirabile Dictu* (2009) onwards. In this latest collection it is particularly well-handled, evoking the multiplicity with which her work is invariably loaded. In '*columba/ the dove*' (4) a sense of reversal or confoundment is achieved with this technique and, later, in '*octans/ the octant*' (33), there's a strong sense of ideas being staggered or anticipated, which takes the approach even further.

The poem '*vela/ the sails*' introduces a structural variant that punctuates this first section, in the form of short dialogues between 'M' and 'L'. It has the effect of both breaking up the pattern of the other poems and creating another pattern. One wonders if 'M' is Michele or Macoute; if 'L' is Leggott or someone else. These exchanges usually end with a surreal response from 'L'.

Much of the writing is acutely lyrical, for example, the last three lines of '*grus/ the crane*', with its flowing sentence-like structure and emphasis on sound:

she stops short ASTOUNDED
by waves carrying the barking of a dog
from cliffs around the river screened with trees (7)

It's often Leggott's ability to combine words from diverse reference streams that creates the surprising musicality: 'how else GLOSSOLALIA / in the slipstream of a renovated god'. (19) The text celebrates sound elsewhere in repeated reference to and evocations of birdsong and its characteristics, for example, in '*pyxis/ the mariner's compass*', the listing of twelve birds forms, as the last line reiterates, 'a zodiac a zodiac a zodiac' (9). This proclivity for the onomatopoeic call has also surfaced previously in Leggott's work, e.g. in *Mirabile Dictu*. With this birdsong in

mind, the quotations from song lyrics in the next poem seem to harmonise with it: ‘*could have been you could have been you could have been you*’ (10). Such borrowings are a regular component of Leggott’s writing, a process which she has described as ‘reticulation’, where she ‘creates complex networks of reference, interlacing quotations from diverse sources in new contexts’, with the intention of creating ‘an alternative poetic world’ (Newman 2015: 111).

The image of the compass is inextricably linked with time in this poem, a preoccupation which is echoed in the next M/L dialogue, and finds its highpoint in the poem ‘*mensa/ the table*’, where death is perceived as a return or a seeing again. (32)

As well as the ambiguity around the character of Macoute, Leggott plays with other, archaic names for individuals, such as Urania (the muse of astronomy). We have the pleasure in deciphering the fact that this probably references her mother – an artist discussed in the next section of the book. But the reference to ‘her unswerving appetite for difficulty’ evokes Leggott herself, her work on the poet Louis Zukofsky and statements she has made about her own preferences [1].

The use of the character names Macoute and Urania evokes the work of other New Zealand poets who have worked with personas, for example, CK Stead’s *Catullus* and Alistair Paterson’s *Odysseus*. This is rich, imaginative, ekphrastic writing, and its intensity is such that this section alone seems like a book in itself. The poems are deeply layered, sometimes hazy like heat, but they reward re-reading with a renewed sense of clarity and depth; their ambiguity is purposeful.

The remaining seven sections of the book are composed of what I would call prose poetry, with the exception of ‘The Fascicles’ – a group of seven pieces each ending in a short lineated section, in the manner of the haibun. Prose poetry is a new departure for Leggott, though the notes at the end of some previous collections have the tone and expressiveness of the form, for example, those which end *DIA* (1994) and *Heartland* (2014). This shift was also signalled in a 2014 interview [2] where she said: ‘I want to write prose. I want to write prose in sections of no more than 500 words because 500-word prose I can handle.’ Indeed, many of the prose sections here are in 500-word bites.

The prose poetry begins with ‘Self-portrait: Still life. A family story’ and a quote by Jorge Luis Borges: ‘I made a decision. I said to myself: since I have lost the beloved world of appearances, I must create something else.’ The re-creation is perhaps three-fold. As well as moving into fresh territory, formally, with the prose poem, Leggott re-examines two paintings by her mother, exhibited at the exhibition, *A Room of One’s Own: Women in New Zealand Art*, in Wellington, in 1964. The writing also tends to accentuate the other senses in compensation. This particular work was given as a keynote address at a conference called *Professing Creativity*. The factual component tends to mean that it starts off reading more as prose than prose poetry with carefully wrought conventional sentences, though with interestingly self-conscious reference to content: ‘If this is not an elegy, a ruin pulling at the heart, then it is no self-portrait and she is not my mother, making herself a work of art’ (37). The language has flow and concentration; it is relatively simple, yet soon begins to let go of clear referents and allow the reader to make imaginative connections:

The truck on the gravel road is ahead of its own dust cloud. She is driving, he hangs the camera out the window. They are in the picture. They are out of the picture. She walks up the path in a green sundress with white spots. They drive to the farm on Christmas Day. At New Year they pose on the museum hill. "You will find the slipper if you hunt for it," she says'. (39)

The passive constructions are quite suited to the completed actions of photographs. As the work becomes more figurative, it's proportionately more appealing, poetically – I enjoy the metonym of 'The camera goes for a ride in the truck', and the image and implication of 'brown Holland blinds drawn against the damaging light' (41). The poetry of names is celebrated with colour pigments; a haunting verb inversion informs, 'Vermilion she would not chance', and a strong sense of the architecture of design: 'she builds the jewel in her mind's eye' (43). These colours are all lodged in memory and perhaps reflect an effort not to forget them.

In responding to the details of photos, Leggott is comfortable with contingency and imagining, and the frequent use of the word 'perhaps' in the closing poem 'something else' is both modest and, at the same time, highlights the implicit history of what wasn't remembered.

In 'Pisces Standing on a Chair', Leggott adds the details of making the gown that her father poses in as a child, and offers his and other points of view. This piece begins to make greater use of the sentence fragment, really the counterpoint to the line in prose poetry (as well as of plenty of fiction since Joyce). These developments have the effect of making the photographs more intriguing, not less. She meets the challenge of ekphrastic writing not to merely replicate content. It's a form of writing it seems anyone might do – to compose in response to a photograph – but her responses are tremendously sophisticated, and bring to mind examples from the writing of Leslie Scalapino, Lyn Hejinian and Juliana Spahr, and her storytelling traits recall the work of Chinese Australian artist and writer, William Yang, whose entire career has been shaped around telling stories based on biographical photos. The world of the young adult is foregrounded in Leggott's evocations by statements like, 'They danced all night and took turns standing on a chair in the bathroom to get a glimpse of the shy mountain' (55); and of the child in images like 'seaweed pennants to make the sand car fly' (58).

Occasionally, the writing suggests the limitations of visual art and the compensating function of words, as in the section 'Telling Detail', where, 'He cannot draw the hot sweetness of the scones coming out of the oven or how they warm the teatowel they are wrapped in' (62). Again, an appeal to senses other than sight pervade the writing. One of the poems I most admire in this section is 'six voices answer some questions', which forms the most extended experiment with point of view via first-person glimpses into the experience of six women disempowered by men, from Iphigenia (daughter of Agamemnon) to Iris Wilkinson (birth name of New Zealand author Robin Hyde).

'The Fascicles' visualises the Taranaki Wars and is written in the voice of a female ancestor of Leggott's. The poems explore space, hesitancy, a different use of time, and convey the senselessness and barbarity of war: 'redcoats, militia and volunteer rifles are landing to begin the work of construction' (71); 'Cattle, sheep and horses are driven off, cultivations

destroyed' (75); 'a force marched into the valley for the purpose of destroying such native crops as might be found' (79).

In these vignettes, Leggott achieves a delicate balance of appropriately archaic diction with more than enough poetic description to delight the ear of the enthusiast of language in phrases like 'Prune plums bloom blue in the leaves' (72); with a colourful voice: 'She is taken up with a length of baby' (78), and a mastery of the compressed sentence: 'My life had stood, a loaded gun' (76).

The section 'New Moon in the Old Man's Arms' makes further excellent use of that contingent 'perhaps' in biographical narrative, and offers a neat summation of the job of learning to write: 'I was far away, learning how to condense words and expand possibilities' (88). One of my favourite sentence fragments is in the sequence 'Emily and Her Sisters': 'Tribe of hubbub ripped skirts and raspberry mouths' (92). It's at moments like this I get the strongest sense of Leggott extending her already considerable range as a poet, and I admire her forays into different forms, voices, sequencing, and use of fragments.

The last section, 'Figures in the distance' is the second series of 32 pieces in the book. The note at the end of the book tells us: 'Here is the compass rose with its 32 points of the wind' (123), a way of structuring the work that emerged not only in the first section of this collection but previously in the long poem 'so far', from *Milk & Honey* (2005). The fragment, as a trope, is at its most developed and impactful here. Incidentally, it also employs the forward slash as an additional variation in the competing functions of line and sentence, acting, effectively, as a time notation. These are fragments of contemporary life, which sometimes lean towards the surreal tradition in prose poetry and are at their most intense in this sequence in poems 12, 13, 15 and 24. It's worth quoting the first of these to show what Leggott has been learning recently about form:

Shaking hands. She gives me her paw, and when I stroke its smooth surface I feel her toes flex and the nails close over the hand that is holding hers. I do this again and again, to feel her hand close on mine. This is as good as listening to her one-two-three one-two-three lapping at the water bowl, threes and fives, fives and threes, before I remember Gertrude Stein's little dog and what listening to the rhythm of his water drinking taught her about the difference between sentences and paragraphs. That paragraphs are emotional and that sentences are not. The dog wins a soluble fish for her demonstration of emotion in front of the Modern Poetry class. She is more interested in the microphone than the water but we loop her lapping and amplify it for close listening anyway. Yes, paragraphs. No doubt about it. (106-107)

We can see her guide dog again and various preoccupations from the first section recurring. There's an emphasis on the sense of touch. There's also much humour and freedom in the piece, reflective of a practitioner comfortable with both the form and the content that has evolved through these writings. The poems invoke poetic process; sight is associated now with distance, imagining and not seeing from a very particular place and perspective. Contextualising and decontextualizing in the manner of Scalapino, these poems extend Leggott's free verse significantly. In this last sequence, especially, the poems answer each other, like elements of

screen grammar. Full of restrained grief, they work towards a kind of crescendo, much like those 32 pieces in ‘so far’, and easily rivalling that expansive poem in scope and multiplicity.

Leggott is an important poet, an indicator for movements in writing, and a stylist of the highest order. It’s instructive to see what new direction such an accomplished poet takes, and to see that, for whatever reason, they don’t stand still. Leggott has moved onto paragraphs. Yes, paragraphs. And they’re working. No doubt about it.

Notes

[1] Leggott, M & J Webb, Unpublished interview. 27/11/14, Auckland return to text

[2] Leggott, M & J Webb, Unpublished interview. 27/11/14, Auckland return to text

Works Cited

Bullock, O 2015 ‘Review of “Heartland” by Michele Leggott’, *A Fine Line: The Magazine of the New Zealand Poetry Society*, 5 February:
<https://poetrysociety.org.nz/poems-reviews/poetry-reviews/review-leggott-michele-heartland/> (accessed 21 April 2019) return to text

Leggott, M 1994 *DIA*, Auckland University Press, Auckland return to text

Leggott, M 2005, *Milk & Honey*, Auckland University Press, Auckland return to text

Leggott, M 2009 *Mirabile Dictu*, Auckland University Press, Auckland return to text

Leggott, M 2014 *Heartland*, Auckland University Press, Auckland return to text

Newman, J 2015, ‘Listening Harder: Reticulating Poetic Tradition in Michele Leggott’s “Blue Irises”’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 33, 1: 110-127 return to text

Owen Bullock has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Canberra, where he currently teaches. His scholarly writing has appeared in Antipodes, Axon, Journal of New Zealand Literature, Ka Mate Ka Ora, New Writing, Qualitative Inquiry and TEXT, with a book chapter in British Prose Poetry: The Poems Without Lines (Palgrave Macmillan). His creative publications include Work & Play (Recent Work Press, 2017), Semi (Puncher & Wattmann, 2017), River’s Edge (Recent Work Press, 2016) and A Cornish Story (Palores, 2010). He has edited a number of journals and anthologies, including Poetry New Zealand and Kokako. He has a website for his latest research, at www.Poetry-in-Process.com

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Romantic poetry for the non-poetic reader

review by Josephine Carzo



Eugen Bacon
loveSTRUCK
Fiction4All, www.fiction4all.com 2018
ISBN: 9781786951618
Pb 69pp AUD22.99

As Saricks (1999: 244) indicates, romance is often defined by the characteristics that are important to the reader and have been developed from what they have previously read and enjoyed. As an avid reader of the romance genre, I often find myself immersed in the relationship development between heroes and heroines as they face off against contemporary social issues, or paranormal entities, the ton in the regency era or drug cartels. These books use these conflicts to also explore the relationships between the heroes and heroines, and their relationships with families and friends, ex-lovers, enemies and associates. They evoke feelings of excitement, intrigue, fear, and more than the occasional swoon.

Key elements I look for in a romance novel include, a meet-cute, banter, sexual chemistry, the moment where all seems lost between the hero and heroine (commonly called the ‘black’ moment), and the indelible Happily Ever After – all the hallmarks of a modern romance novel (Michaels 2007). However, because I want – and to a certain extent expect – these elements in romance *novels*, I previously assumed poetry would not be able to deliver them. I did not think a book of prose poetry could elicit the same feelings that a three-hundred-page romance can. *loveSTRUCK* by Eugen Bacon has shown me otherwise.

Bacon does not rely solely on the emotional journey of romantic relationships to build her prose. *loveSTRUCK* is broken up into three parts: ‘Eros’, ‘Agape’, and ‘Caritas’. *Eros* and *agape* are Greek terms: *eros* most commonly represents sexual and romantic love (Oord 2010: 46), while *agape* is likened to an unselfish love for others (Lindberg 2008: 160).

Alternatively, *caritas* is Latin and refers to charity and a love for all humankind (Caine 2009: 140). To truly capture the relationship between these ideals and Bacon's poetry would require a much longer discussion as these terms are far more complex than what I have defined here, and are not the focus of my review. If readers are interested though, I highly recommend further reading regarding *eros*, *agape*, and *caritas* prior to reading *loveSTRUCK*. Poetry can be understood by theme, as well as subject (Simecek & Ellis 2017: 101), and Bacon's work is no exception. Two resources that explore these terms in greater depth are Shin Chiba's article 'Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship and Citizenship' and 'The Art of Love: A Roman Catholic Psychology of Love' by Craig Steven Titus and Philip Scrofani.

As a romance reader, I found Bacon's strongest writing is within 'Eros'. These are the poems that speak to my partiality for this genre. The writing is striking, blatant, and weaves images of romance and love, taking these every day words and creating moments for the reader to vividly imagine: 'Last night she was a moon goddess, all aglow and the gravity of her protoplanet pulling at his Earth; stirred up tides that bulged and dropped, lit his world as he came' (21). Bacon's prose is explicit and implicit, erotic and emotional. It is, quite simply, engaging and compelling.

Character development is also carefully delivered throughout *loveSTRUCK*: 'Inside your walk-in: bespoke suits, T.M.Lewins, pastel polos, boot cuts and skinny fits' (15), 'Most of your lovers are eminently dumpable... Don't stand there picking your arse. Give the rude finger, burn the old flame, discard the dogged ghost' (37). These snippets reveal characters that are vividly imagined, if not necessarily dynamic. Ideas that might take pages to develop in a novel are brought forth with a carefully worded sentence.

Interestingly, while I also prefer alpha heroes of the strong-bodied, brooding variety, Bacon offers a very uncharacteristic hero at times. Saricks (1999: 244) highlights that characters must give up their ideals about the opposite sex before they can attain that elusive Happily Ever After. Bacon encourages me to do this, too, as she writes: 'Now he is juggling three oranges in my living room, his face intent like it is life and death, and I am dazzled by a moment of heartswell that pervades my world' (19). Despite illustrating behaviours that may not epitomise a romance novel hero, the protagonist's love for this man is confidently asserted in this passage.

It is also these poems that make me want to sit down at my own computer and build on these ideas, take the scenes captured on the page and develop them into a longer love story. This is not to say that Bacon's poetry is incomplete, but rather it affords readers the opportunity to find inspiration and create intertextual connections within their own work. For example, 'Dis/harmony' ends with: 'I don't remember the colour of your voice, the texture of the first that put mauve the size of a grapefruit around my eye. Ice through my veins. A shard in my soul' (35). This alone stirs several ideas in my creative well.

Alternatively, the poems found within 'Agape' and 'Caritas' focus on sibling and parental relationships, the meeting between strangers, and moments within one's working life. The tone and style remain consistent throughout, and there are certainly lines and phrases Bacon uses in the latter half of the book that remain with the reader long after the book has been closed, such as: '...it happens and blood says thicker. Thinning my

resolve' (39), and 'Oh, clandestine negotiations of reckless body language! I'm distracted by the infinity display smartphone in rough edged hands' (51). Bacon's poetry also has the ability to make light of the tedious affair that is the ethics application process, speaking to me as a romance reader *and* PhD candidate:

Success is ... not enduring a terrible compulsion (for the love of it) to tear a note sticky-tacked to the door of a toilet cubicle with a direct line to fast, free and ethical research in some earnest call for participants (58).

For a non-poetic reader, this book captured my attention from the prose that makes up Bacon's acknowledgements on the first page (I dare you to put this book down after reading lines such as: 'It is a moment by the seaside at St Kilda Beach, luminescent sand between our toes, the poetics of a dawn tide pivotal to our playground, the hush of you and me in the whirligigs of the sea' [8]). I read this at least half a dozen times, going back over the poems that stood out to me even more than that. Overall, *loveSTRUCK* is evocative and clever, and it does not shy away from being blunt and confronting. If you are also a romance reader, avoiding poetry because it seems unlikely to meet your romance reading needs, I have some advice: try this book. It will not be disappointing. And whilst I may not consider myself a reader of poetry now, I am most certainly a reader of Bacon's poetry.

Works Cited

Caine, B 2009 *Friendship: A History*, Routledge, Oxford return to text

Lindberg, C 2008 *Love: A Brief History Through Western Christianity*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA return to text

Michaels, L 2007 *On Writing Romance*, Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati OH return to text

Oord, TJ 2010 *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids MI return to text

Saricks, J 1999 'Rules of the romance genre', *The Booklist* 96, 2: https://search-proquest-com.access.library.unisa.edu.au/docview/235403644?accountid=14649&rft_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprimo (accessed 19 January 2019) return to text

Simecek, K & V Ellis 2017 'The Uses of Poetry: Renewing an Education Understanding of a Language Art', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51, 1: <https://www-jstor-org.access.library.unisa.edu.au/stable/pdf/10.5406/jaesteduc.51.1.0098.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A4a43d54d75d77148a408291d0d56f20a> (accessed 20 January 2019) return to text

Josephine Carzo is a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia where she is currently researching the development and marketing of New Adult contemporary romance. Previously a social worker, she returned to university in 2014 to study Writing & Creative Communication, while also completing a Certificate in Writing Romance from the Australian College

of Journalism. She achieved third place in the 2014 Write Stuff Contest held by the Romance Writers of America (Connecticut).

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

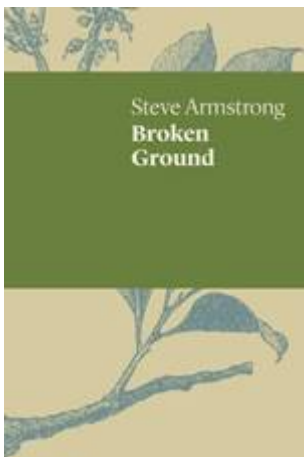
TEXT review

**Broken and open, cycling and re-cycling: poetry of the
Australian rural landscape now**

review by Amelia Walker



John Kinsella
Open Door
UWA Publishing, Crawley WA 2018
ISBN 9781742589954
Pb 256pp AUD22.99



Steve Armstrong
Broken Ground
UWA Publishing, Crawley WA 2018
ISBN 9781742589855
Pb 120pp AUD22.99



Chris Wallace-Crabbe
Rondo
 Carcanet, Manchester UK 2018
 ISBN 9781784106430
 Pb 96pp GBP9.99

Three new collections featuring the Australian rural landscape – *Open Door* (Kinsella 2018), *Broken Ground* (Armstrong 2018) and *Rondo* (Wallace-Crabbe 2018) – together provide a rich portrait of the thematic and aesthetic diversity in Australian rural landscape poetry today. In order to contextualise what these books offer, I would like to first consider the history of post-invasion landscape poetry in Australia, then discuss Kinsella's, Armstrong's and Wallace-Crabbe's new works in turn. The term post-invasion is one I use to acknowledge the extensive, rich and varied traditions of poetry among other creative and literary practices by the many different groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whom I recognise as the rightful owners of the land on which I am privileged to read, write and live.

In 1892, Henry Lawson wrote: 'I am back from up the country – very sorry that I went –' (Lawson 1912: 137), thereby landing the first blow in an eleven year literary spar with fellow poet AB (Banjo) Paterson. Paterson's response poem, 'In Defence of the Bush', scathingly concluded:

For you say you'll stay in townships till the bush is
 civilized.
 Would you make it a tea-garden, and on Sundays have a
 band
 Where the 'blokes' might take their 'donahs', with a
 'public' close at hand?
 You had better stick to Sydney and make merry with the
 'push',
 For the bush will never suit you, and you'll never suit the
 bush. (Paterson 2009: 104)

Although possibly more playful than serious, the public debate significantly established – or at least reinforced – a cultural myth that would bear upon Australian poetics well into the 1900s: that the bush and city were opposite and opposed. This myth entailed assumptions concerning cultural, political and aesthetic qualities supposedly associated with poems of rural versus urban landscapes: bush poetry became considered masculine and urban poetry feminine; poets who wrote of rural landscapes were expected to be relatively conservative both politically and

stylistically, whereas poets writing about built-upon landscapes were deemed more likely to push against socio-political constraints and literary traditions (Kinsella 2013: 43).

This polarised view of urban and rural poetry reductively misrepresented poets and poems in both categories – never mind those who straddled the two or considered other places and themes entirely. Indeed, the myth even misrepresents Paterson and Lawson themselves, who were both more complex and diverse writers than the simplistic binary suggests. Yet the myth was influential. For a time, to degrees, it made itself true, for once established in the collective cultural consciousness, it compelled aspiring Australian poets to knowingly or unknowingly work within its parameters: as late as the early 1970s, *Melbourne or the Bush* still seemed, for some, an essential choice to make (Wallace-Crabbe 1974).

Thank goodness, then, for poets and literary theorists of the late 1960s and onwards who pushed against and beyond the rural / urban split, drastically expanding the possibilities for writing about places in Australia. Anarchist, vegan and pacifist writer, thinker and activist John Kinsella is among those who have contributed to this movement. In particular, Kinsella has for decades now ongoingly developed a ‘radical pastoral’ poetics:

To overturn the inheritance of the pastoral, it is necessary to enter the body of the pastoral itself. Instead of writing from outside the rural space, one needs to write within. Instead of enjoying the fruits of the rural, which feed the pastoral, one should step outside the systems of exploitation that fuel the idyll. The clearing of native vegetation; the abuse of animals; the poisoning of land, water, and air; the fundamentals of controlling nature, of exploiting it for the short-term benefit of humans (which ultimately turns out to be harmful to humans in any case), become textual.
(Kinsella 2007: 11)

For Kinsella, radical pastoral poetry is crucially an ethically-engaged activity: a mode of poetic resistance against the unjust treatment of animals, including human animals, and our world; a means of imagining better ways to be. Experimentation with poetic form is likewise key to the radical pastoral approach: this enacts symbolic resistance against socio-cultural and political constraints, and is also a means of opening up language so as to open up thought about more ethical ways to live and be.

Kinsella’s new collection, *Open Door*, tunes his radical pastoral poetics-as-politics towards ‘a consideration of belonging and unbelonging, of living in the Western Australian wheatbelt while the Australian government closes doors to refugees’ (13). Also prominent throughout the collection is the plight of the Australian ringneck or ‘28’ parrot, the numbers of which are dwindling due to clearing of land for agriculture. The poem “‘28s’ – Possession’ reveals how these majestic ‘birds of the volte’ have been forced to seek survival by imitating other species:

I heard a ‘28’ just now imitating
a single note from the magnificent
song of the Rufous Whistler, a mezzo
plucked from the Whistler’s great range
and repeated over till it drew me out
to locate this ‘new’ bird on the block.

I found it scratching in the undergrowth,
acting like a vanquished ground parrot...

...So many things are out of kilter
this year – old species are reinventing
themselves, changing habits, remaking
a traumatised habitat. There's an
otherworldly haunting – shedding,
realigning and melding
with indelible presences. (55-56)

Notable in the above is Kinsella's evocative use of enjambment to fracture the grammar of sentences in ways that evoke the 'out of kilter', haunted scene he describes. This is a technique Kinsella applies throughout the collection, often together with use of wordless spaces or *lacunae*, for instance in poems such as 'Dispersal' (42), 'The Open Door?' (66), 'Volute' (110-114) and 'I Don't Own Sheep But I Still End Up Rounding Them Up' (142-3). The gaps in these poems seem to signal things unsaid and/or unknown: things that it is perhaps too hard to say or face, or possibly things that have been censored, forgotten, lost or destroyed. These blank-yet-not-empty spaces remind us, the history of Australia since invasion is a history of erasures, of violent denial.

Given Australia's cruel history, it was good to see Kinsella's front-of-book acknowledgement of the Ballardong Noongar people as the owners and custodians of the land on and about which he writes. This should be the standard for all books written and/or published in Australia. Kinsella's recognition of Indigenous sovereignty resonates throughout the collection, in which he frequently acknowledges and grapples with the problems of his own privilege as a non-Indigenous white-skinned Australian – an important example that more of us should follow.

If the radical pastoral can be considered an emerging tradition in Australian poetry, then Steve Armstrong's *Broken Ground* extends this tradition along exciting new trajectories. As in Kinsella's work, environmental issues feature strongly, as do the brutal ongoing consequences of colonial invasion. For instance, in 'Deadman', Armstrong writes:

Desperate for order? Better to pretend
such dis-possession is the province of only a few and try to
forget
murder understood as economy;
muttered under a hat, it's part of a second people's
dreaming. (23)

Also notable in the above excerpt is Armstrong's use of enjambment. Like Kinsella, he makes poems strain against their forms in ways that seem to symbolise the Australian land straining against post-invasion farming, mining and pollution among other unsustainable practices. Yet Armstrong's work also crucially differs from Kinsella's. One way it does this is through the strong sense, in Armstrong's work, of the personal and lyrical. For example, the poem 'In Black and White' begins by offering readers 'A photograph, a fading Kodak of a boy' and proceeds with anecdotes of the photographed figure's early life:

Break out of school, run hard to beat the bus
home, and reappear among the redgums—

my friend's gym boots impatient
 on the other side of a passage under a rock
 the size of a dump-truck. Down here
 creamy sandstone crumbles with the scent
 of a long gone river, and the weight of fallen stone
 long settled at the angle of repose (12).

In 'Growing Up to Reconciliation', Armstrong writes candidly of the day he learned a vital truth of his ancestry:

*My grandfather told me
 his father was the only survivor
 of a massacre on the Broadribb River.
 A small child at the time, he was
 found the next day wandering
 dazed by a white man. This man,
 who took part in the killings,
 gave my great-grandfather
 a home, and his name. (29)*

In many poems of the collection, Armstrong writes of the still-ongoing symbolic, systemic, epistemic, cultural and actual violences committed against human and animal life and land in Australia since invasion. Armstrong's poetic perspective of lived experience that makes this an important book for non-Indigenous Australian residents to read and learn from.

The third book this review considers, Chris Wallace-Crabbe's *Rondo*, differs from the other two in that it was published in the UK and appears primarily aimed towards British readers. While Armstrong and Kinsella, in their different ways, focus strongly on damage done to land and life in Australia, Wallace-Crabbe tends more often to sketch scenes of Australian natural settings where beauty survives despite so many threats. For instance, in 'Near Ferntree Gully' he observes 'some downright glorious colours' and uses an inventive simile to describe a 'crude bush track' cutting 'like a cake knife through cheddar' (25).

Reflecting the sense of the rondo as a musical form in which themes and motifs are cycled, re-cycled and re-made, Wallace-Crabbe includes many references to cultural influences including Thomas Hardy (18), Lewis Carroll (19), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (72), Wallace Stevens (50), Robert Browning (63), John Keats (68), WH Auden (72), Seamus Heaney (74), GM Hopkins (80), and DH Lawrence (87). I must confess, the insertion of these starkly homogenous figures into an Australia already so rampantly colonised rendered me somewhat uneasy. But that is reflective of my personal stance, which, I acknowledge, is not everybody's. Wallace-Crabbe is, after all, one of Australia's most recognised and celebrated living poets, known for the lyrical beauty and accomplishment of his poems. Through lines and stanzas such as this one, from 'Red, Red Rose', it is easy to understand why:

My love is like a brown echidna
 Dancing under the moon.
 My love is like a ukulele
 Jauntily played in tune. (48)

Hence it may be observed, through the new books from Kinsella, Armstrong and Wallace-Crabbe, that poetry of the Australian rural

landscape today is diverse indeed, offering something for readers of far-ranging tastes and persuasions.

Works Cited

Kinsella, J 2007 *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester return to text

Kinsella, J 2013 *Spatial Relations Volume One: Essays, Reviews, Commentaries and Chorography*, Rodopi, Amsterdam return to text

Lawson, H 1912 *In the days when the world was wide, and other verses*, Angus & Robertson, London return to text

Paterson, AB 2009 *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*, Sydney University Press, Sydney return to text

Wallace-Crabbe, C 1974 *Melbourne or the Bush*, Perspectives in Australian Literature series, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne return to text

Amelia Walker is a lecturer at the University of South Australia. She has published four poetry collections. She also publishes poetry-as-research, including a recent inquiry into issues of pedagogy and privilege in the recent TEXTSpecial Issue No 53, Identity, politics and creative writing, edited by Natalie Kon-yu and Enza Gandolfo.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au

TEXT review

Timeless stories for troubled times

review by Helen Burns



Sreedhevi Iyer
Jungle Without Water
Gazebo Books, Sydney NSW 2018
ISBN: 9780987619143
Pb 183pp AUD24.99

The title story 'Jungle Without Water' about a devout young Sikh newly migrated to Australia is perfectly placed at the beginning of this often humorous, but also heart rending, collection. It's a story about navigation. Jogi needs to find a place to pray in Brisbane and is shown a refidex. It seemed 'almost as big as the Holy Granth Sahib. Jogi imagined his mother's surprize at the notion of a book that only existed to tell how to travel around a city' (9).

Iyer takes the reader into the minds and hearts of ordinary people – from Brisbane to Kuala Lumpur, to Penang and Madras – living out their lives and dreams in the midst of cultural constraints and clashes. 'I.C.' is a story about identity, and the Identity Cards issued to Malaysian citizens. In peak hour traffic Kathiresan, a taxi driver, muses about the city girl he has just picked up. 'What's in that accent? Too polished, but just enough edges to tell me she's not from KL proper. Nice English, but not like those in business. A little bit proper, a little bit not' (82).

As a boy Kathiresan aspired to be the best marble player in the world. Iyer plays with this as a metaphor and, in a sense, his dream comes true. Driving taxis in the melting pot of Kuala Lumpur every passenger is examined for colour and flaw – Malay, Chinese, Tamil, some Portugese blood perhaps, Chindian, Peranakan – 'the way they glinted separately in the sun, like jewels' (111). Ever the consummate taxi driver he also has a strategy for those who prefer no conversation:

If no talking I turn to my radio, if I like the look of my customer, I will even change it to a station I think they may like. So for the Chinese I put on One FM, the Malays I put ERA, otherwise if it is *makkal*, one of us, I let it be at THR Raaga. For the tourists, of course, I put on Mix FM, although mainly I cannot stand the stupid noise from it.
(84)

‘The Lovely Village’ is a parable for our shores, requiring no leap of imagination for Australian readers in the context of our current closed border policies. Fenced off from the world the lovely village’s people lead idyllic, virtuous lives. Word spreads and outsiders start gathering at the fence. One of them asks the gatekeeper:

“Why will you not let us into this truly enchanted place, this place that you must so clearly love?”
“Oh yes, how I do love this place,” the gatekeeper replies,
“even if I wanted to, I would lose my job if I did, and in this village nobody lets go of their work.” (34)

The pleas from outside intensify triggering an ongoing debate inside the village. Tara, a spokesperson for the people, and their moral compass, steps up in support of the newcomers asking to be let in. She is shouted down:

“Don’t fault the system,” said Nathan.
“The system functions for the protection of the village at all costs,” said Charles
“Exactly,” the Lord Mayor interjects, “the village needs to be protected. It has been protected all this while, which is how we constructed everything and everyone equal, and we are so proud of it, and that’s the truth.” (38)

At the core of Iyer’s writing style there is a freshness and simplicity, and yet I often paused in my reading to reflect on insights gleaned through her characters. The poignant voice of a child, for example, in ‘Cake and Green M&Ms’, wondering why her father’s best friend did not meet them at Brisbane airport. ‘Whenever anyone from overseas visited Madras, Pa made sure the car was packed with as many family members as possible. Pa says it is basic courtesy’ (165). Or the complexities of a masala wallah’s life in Malaysia in ‘The Man With Two Wives’: “‘You think I am one of those fellers, keeping one on the side quiet-quiet while everybody laughs away?’” (61). And then there is the voice of a coconut in ‘The Last Day of a Divine Coconut’: ‘[S]omehow being a Malaysian coconut seems slightly insignificant compared to being a diasporic Indian coconut of the United States. Coconuts from here that have reached there have been asked if Malaysia is situated in Africa. Sad but true’ (139).

In ‘Circular Feed’ Iyer about-turns from the dilemmas raised in ‘The Lovely Village’ to the plights of those standing on that other side of the fence. A young man climbs onto the roof of a detention centre sending ripples of consternation, confusion, fear and hope through the community of asylum seekers watching from below. Conventional punctuation is abandoned and I often needed to reread sections in an attempt to keep track of the detainees’ ever unfolding dialogues:

Yes that’s him, said Zya to Khalid, he said he was going to do it, and now he is. That’s brave of him, Khalid told Yusuf

later at dinner, but Yusuf only shook his head, brave and stupid are different sides of the same coin, he said, he was going to get himself killed. That's a bad attitude said Kahan, we should be more supportive, and Zya pointed out they were all here because they themselves were not getting any, and it's been eighteen months, said Amir to Yaakub, and all Shelley tells me is to wait, no wonder he is, added Khan, he is doing it for his wife and kids. He's doing it for attention, said Yusuf (according to Khalid), he's only going to make it worse for the rest of us because he doesn't know the value of keeping his mouth shut and listening to the authorities. (117)

This circular feed of quandary drives home the desolation of detainees awaiting processing. I was thrown into their time-warp – days bleeding into weeks months years. The man on the roof is never mentioned by name. Neither are the names of the others who eventually join him. In contrast we learn more about the many detainees watching as events unfold; every man and woman weighing in on the situation. Then there is Shelley, the one staff member who appears to care. This is a confronting story, not least for Qamar's brilliant observation at the end, in her conversation with Jamal, Sara, Aisha and Latif – just a few of the other detainees whose names are all etched into the conscience of readers in this razor-sharp tale.

It was no surprise to learn Iyer is an Indian-Malaysian-Australian. Her astute ear for the colloquial and an exceptional grasp of the many Englishes spoken in South and South East Asia gives authenticity and nuance to her characters. *Jungle Without Water* is also a wise book for the truths it reveals through ordinary lives, and humanity, no matter what language, race, creed or caste.

Perhaps the last word should come from the divine coconut awaiting sacrifice on a temple altar, a ritual ensuring the buyer's ego is liberated from obstacles and ego:

...here I am, waiting for prayers to start, in the full knowledge of other coconuts having been broken before and after me, in places ranging from ten to a thousand miles away. I imagine myself connected to all these other coconuts in some Rushdiesque way, a web of interconnecting lines between me and my siblings trespassing across man-made lines on maps. What if, by some strange circumstance, all the Little India temples of the world each broke a coconut simultaneously? What a collective crack that would be – one global gunshot. (145)

Helen Burns is a poet and writer from Northern NSW and recipient of a Varuna LongLines Residency and the QWC / Hachette Australia Manuscript Development Program. She is currently seeking a publisher for her second book Migrations of Love, a literary cross-cultural novel which includes her interpretive translations of ninth century Tamil songs.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

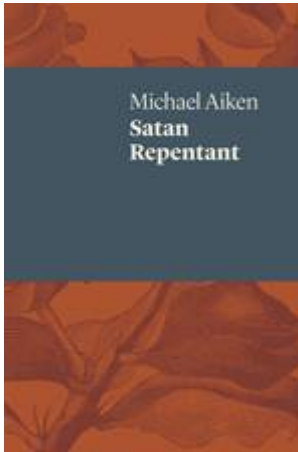
**General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julienne van Loon & Ross
Watkins**

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

Problems of content

review by Liam Guilar



Michael Aiken
Satan Repentant
UWAP, Crawley WA 2018
ISBN 9781742589770
Pb 140pp AUD 22.99



James Harpur
The White Silhouette
Carcenet, Manchester UK 2018
ISBN 9781784105822
Pb 96pp AUD23.25

These books consciously situate themselves in the tradition of Christian poetry in English, although Aiken's posse leading Jesus (128) has nothing in common with the speaker of Mathew 25:31-46 except a name. Both poets write memorable lines and images and both, in different ways, force their readers' attention on to the books' content.

Satan Repentant is divided into five books of short poems and each book is introduced by an 'Argument'. These are prose summaries of the poems. Aiken's control of the narrative across the poems is excellent. The poetry doesn't need the prose, and the prose makes the poetry redundant, but the duplication keeps the story at the centre of the reading process while removing any possibility of narrative tension.

As a prose story the book reads like an entertaining graphic novel. Satan decides to repent. God insists he become human and live a 'good life'. The denizens of hell and the hosts of heaven try to stop him. They test and torment him. There is a confused apocalypse.

At which point this review could stop. Poetry can be praised as entertainment.

However, *Satan Repentant* signals its desire to be taken seriously. It is a narrative poem, in English, about Satan. It begins with an untranslated line ascribed merely to 'Dante Alighieri'. The substance and structure evoke *Paradise Lost*. Aiken rewrites some of Milton's famous lines. There are passing references to *The Book of Job*, and the Model Reader has the biblical knowledge to understand the circumlocution of 'Esau's brother's stair' (80).

The book *has* been taken seriously. On the back cover, David Malouf describes it as 'a tour de force'. Putting Aiken in the company of Milton, Mary Shelley and Blake, he praises the 'great intelligence and wit' with which it takes on 'some of the abiding questions – moral, social, theological – at the centre of our culture'.

I suspect readers will be split between those who enjoy the story, and those who try to take it seriously.

The problem facing the latter is evident in Aiken's treatment of Mother Theresa (58-61). She is not only in hell but ruling a corner of it. He calls her 'the virtuoso of sadism', 'the all-mother / of suffering', 'the nation of suffering' (58), the 'awful God-witch', 'matron / of undue suffering' (60). She feeds on the souls of millions of babies. She is mating with the council of Elvira, 'All nineteen bishops and twenty-seven presbyters' (60).

One could ponder why, of all the councils of the Church, Aiken chose this obscure one. After attempting to visualize the mating, one might pause to consider his judgement of Mother Theresa. Whatever that judgment is, it is neither measured nor rational and is buried under the excess of its expression.

For Satan's observations about life on earth to have any validity, the world he lives in has to be credible. But earth is presented as a place of unrelenting misery where all humans suffer because of religion. The secularization of society since the eighteenth century and the secular atrocities of the twentieth are ignored. The real test of Satan's pride should have been his discovery that with only fifteen per cent of Australians attending church at least once a month, he and God have become an irrelevance. [1]

When Satan arrives at his great revelation, the narrative collapses thousands of years of philosophy and theology into trivia.

religion is intent to make you
weak! ...

This is criminal. You
are here.
You are now. You
must compel yourself to
do what you will,
what is best
before your exit. (103)

After committing murder, Satan has preached a similar message to fellow prisoners (98-9). The claim that doing 'what you will' will put an end to suffering is bizarre, especially when preached to an audience of convicted criminals. Satan's studies in religion and philosophy should have alerted him to the fact that defining 'the best' and reconciling it with 'what you will' might be a problem.

Perhaps the anti-climax is deliberate, but the irony seems lost in the book. Satan repentant's 'Do what you will, you don't need God' is the message Satan unrepentant was making in the first place. It's easier to read *Satan Repentant* as an exuberant parody of poetry that takes itself seriously than it is to take it as a serious contribution to centuries of theology, philosophy and theodicy.

James Harpur's *The White Silhouette* deliberately situates itself in the tradition of Christian lyric poetry. Like so much of that tradition it explores the complexities of personal belief in such a way that a reader with no interest in Christianity can still enjoy the poems. The book is divided into three sections. The first, 'The White Silhouette', contains the title poem and a sequence, 'Graven images', reflecting on broken icons. The title poem is a spiritual autobiography in which the speaker records its failures to encounter God.

Harpur's strength lies in creating images that invite reflection without dictating conclusions: 'I heard staccato prayers, like nails / Banged in, as if to board up windows' (33).

However, there's a didactic strain to the writing that might grate on some readers. The last section of 'Kells', the second part of the book, is a lecture on creativity no less a lecture because it is put in the mouth of the muse speaking to the poet. The move toward the generalized and epigrammatic is not always successful. Statements like 'Imagination is nothing but / the recollection of the holy' (60) are obviously not true.

The sequence 'Kells' is the heart of the book. Each of its four long sections explores ideas suggested by *The Book of Kells*, mixing the voice of the poet who is writing a sequence about *The Book of Kells*, with historical and fictional speakers.

'Gerald of Wales' (56-64) seems to be exploring the role of sacred art and its ability to 'suffuse us/with a sense of the beyond' (57) although it drifts into a consideration of the conflict between worldly and spiritual success.

The majority of the piece (59-64) is a monologue spoken by Gerald of Wales (c1146-c1123). Harpur's practice can be illuminated by five lines:

the only prize I'd coveted
from childhood, when on the shore
I'd build churches out of sand.
To this end: a life of careful tact,
selective showings of humility (62)

The second and third lines are adapted from Gerald's autobiographical writing. The image might be Gerald's, but Harpur has selected, condensed and used it to represent not only the narrative of Gerald's life, but to offer a critique of that life. The story of the illumination of the book (59-60) is also Gerald's, but in retelling it Harpur has turned it into poetry.

However, tact and humility are not words associated with Gerald of Wales. In this poem 'he' speaks lines that are hard to reconcile with his own writing and what is known about his life, nor would he accept the simple distinction between personal spirituality and public success that Harpur uses him to personify.

In another section in 'Kells', Harpur invents words for 'Scribe B', but except for his existence, nothing is known about 'Scribe B' and the unacknowledged but skillful integration of medieval texts gives that poem an appearance of authentic speech.

But Gerald is well known. He is one of the most autobiographical and opinionated of medieval writers. Should a writer pull a name from history and use it to represent beliefs, attitudes and values the historical owner of that name would not recognize or accept as their own? If Aiken's *Satan* is not credible because the world he experiences is not the one we live in, does the value of Harpur's argument hinge on the accuracy of his presentation? I think it does.

It is also possible that Harpur found these phrases somewhere in Gerald's many works. This leads to my major criticism of this book. Adapting and appropriating medieval materials is an acceptable poetic practice. Harpur does it seamlessly and with enviable skill. Whether such poetry should be annotated is an ongoing debate with no clear-cut answer. The editors of *The White Silhouette* thought annotation unnecessary: in this particular case, I disagree.

Gerald of Wales, 1185 is the only reference given for the quotation at the head of 'Gerald of Wales' (56). It could read, '*The History and Typography of Ireland*, book 2, section 71'. The miracle story (59-60) is from section 72. In other sections of 'Kells', Harpur introduces speeches by Plotinus (42 and 46) but whether these are his invention, or Plotinus' words, is a mystery. There are many more examples. Acknowledging his sources would alert readers to what is grounded in history and what is invention because in this case, the balance between the two substantiates or undermines his argument.

For readers who care about the content of the poetry they read, both books raise interesting questions. Both are excellent in different ways, and both are a testimony to how broad the term poetry has become, in that it can include two such different works that still belong to the tradition of Christian poetry in English.

Note

[1] In the last four decades in Australia Church attendance has dropped 48% to 15% of the population. See <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blogarchive/a-demographic-snapshot-of-christianity-and-church-attenders-in-australia/> (accessed 18 November 2018)
return to text

Liam Guilar has a doctorate in creative writing from Deakin University. He is a medievalist with an academic interest in narrative poetry and rewriting the Middle Ages. His most recent collection of poems, A Presentment of Englishry, was published in March 2019 by Shearsman in the UK.

TEXT**Vol 23 No 1 April 2019****<http://www.textjournal.com.au>****General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Julianne van Loon & Ross Watkins****Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker****textreviews@unisa.edu.au**

TEXT review

The performance of biographical erasure

review by Prithvi Varatharajan



Jessica L Wilkinson and Simon Charles
Marionette: A biography of Miss Marion Davies
Sibercha records, Melbourne VIC, 2018
CD, AUD12.00

Marionette: a biography of Miss Marion Davies is an audio adaptation of Jess Wilkinson's biographical collection of poems, *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies*, published by Vagabond in 2012. The adaptation comes in a stylised red CD sleeve (and is also available as a download), with cover art evoking a puzzle – showing parts of the subject's face on squares of film reel. It features music composed by Simon Charles, and is performed by Jenny Barnes, Andrew Butler, Phoebe Green, and Michael McNabby, with spoken word by the poet herself.

Both book and audio reanimate the life of the early 20th century American film actress, producer, and screenwriter Davies, who is (unjustly) known more for her association with her lover, the newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, than for her musical and film work. Hearst was a domineering lover, dictating the kind of film roles suitable for Davies, while simultaneously appearing to support her career (he founded Cosmopolitan Pictures in order to produce and promote her films). These two creative projects attempt to flesh out Davies's life nearly a century later. The critically flawed characterisations of Davies, in film and newspaper, have led Wilkinson – and the artists involved in the audio adaptation of *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies* (Wilkinson 2012) – to attempt their own re-drawings, while pointing back to filmic and print (mis)representations. In the notes to the print edition the poet wonders: 'How do I tell a story when the factual evidence is blighted with lies and punctured with holes? How do I write a biography when the physical, material documents [including archival film] are failing?' (Wilkinson 2012: 97). Wilkinson's print collection treats the page as a space in which to evoke film, using visual/poetic techniques of cutting and splicing that evoke cinematic ones. *Marionette* is also cut with incomplete or damaged documentation of Davies's life, and Wilkinson's poetic responses to such documentation: it is, in this sense, a poetic film journal.

If the print text emulates and plays with filmic form, the audio exists in a more dreamy and free-floating formal state. These differing affects are due largely to the affinity of the page to the screen (both are predominately visual; the earliest films of Davies were wholly visual, being silent); they are also due to the disparity between film (whether silent or talking) and the exclusively aural medium of *Marionette*'s adaptation. In form and style the latter belongs, I would suggest, to the audio genre of the 'feature' – a European tradition of avant-garde radio works that combine factual narration with dramatisation, and often include music, sound effects, and poetry.

It is hard to overstate the labour – creative and technical – that has gone into the production of both projects: they feature elaborate typesetting and visual/text collages, and complex mixing of voice, sound effects and music, respectively. The opening track of the audio adaptation concisely frames the mood and themes of the text. We hear a dark electronic drone arising out of the lines: 'Understanding comes to us in shards of light. We are the puzzle solvers, piecing out the shadow of sky...' which, along with the subsequent lines, 'lock the door / – the wolf is here – / come to cut out all those scenes', suggest both the reconstructive project of the text and the constant, shadowy presences oppressing its subject.

The opening reference to Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), and its status as a canonical film, announces the theme or question of what is deemed important in the cultural industries, what marginalised, and by whom. The main characters in *Citizen Kane* were widely believed to be based on Hearst and Davies, with the latter portrayed as a talentless singer whom the protagonist – a wealthy newspaper publisher – tries to promote. The audio rendition, spoken by Wilkinson, struck me as a personal essay blending research, criticism, and creative narration; we hear her voice stating soberly that *Citizen Kane* was referred to as 'a classic, one of the top films of all time' in her undergraduate studies, but that Marion was upset by its portrayal of her. Through the intimacy and materiality of the recorded voice, the author is more palpably present (than in print) in this retelling of Davies's life, of the reanimation of this 'marionette'.

Music and sound in the adaptation – including the voice of Jenny Barnes as a sound effect, piano/harmonium, light percussion, viola, and drones – serve to both underscore the strained atmosphere of the text – as the strings attached to Marion are tugged in different directions – and to convey the erasures and contradictions in official documentation of Davies's life. Examples of the latter include unfinished, clipped, or stuttered lines (Davies herself suffered from a stutter), and the intrusions of non-verbal sound onto speech, with sound effects and music jostling for the listener's attention. The intermittent overlaying of recorded voices in the adaptation is an effective rendition of the visual juxtapositions of the print text. I wondered, however, about the excision from the audio of the mock trial of Hearst, subtitled in print as 'a practice in phonoautography'. This mock trial occurs in the middle of the print text, as a dramatic interlude. I thought it would have worked very well in audio form – but it does require multiple speaking voices, and for that reason may have been deemed incongruous to the adaptation's aesthetic.

The audio adaptation is more moving to me than the print edition, due perhaps to the intimacy of the recorded voice, and the immediacy of its aural accompaniments and disruptions, pouring straight into your ear. The richness of this project lies in how effectively it conveys the gaps and distortions in accounts of Davies's life, and how viscerally the voice of the

poet, supported by her own cast of performers, intervenes in the telling – as a third (or fourth or fifth) party. The overall impression created by the audio is of innumerable facets to Marion’s personality; to her talents on screen; to her relationship with Hearst; and to the conflicting ways in which others viewed and represented her. As Wilkinson utters in the fifth track of the adaptation: ‘A biography begins at death / cut loose the cords / and polish off the spine / I hold out my hands / and call to the gathering’ (2’51-3’01).

Work Cited

Wilkinson, JL 2012 *marionette: a biography of miss marion davies*, Vagabond Press, Sydney & Tokyo return to text

Prithvi Varatharajan is a writer, cultural radio producer, and commissioning editor at Cordite Poetry Review. He holds a PhD from the University of Queensland on ABC RN’s Poetica (1997-2014). His writing has appeared widely in Australian and overseas journals, and he has a book of poetry and prose forthcoming with Cordite Books.

TEXT

Vol 23 No 1 April 2019

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

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

**Reviews editors: Pablo Muslera & Amelia Walker
textreviews@unisa.edu.au**