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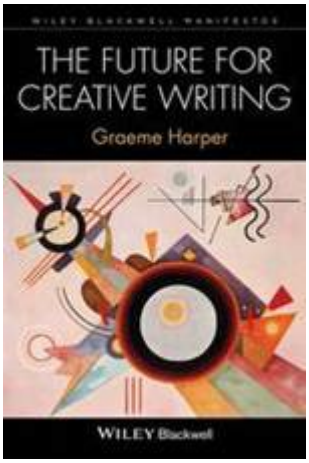
Reviews contents

TEXT review

Creative writing in a post-book world

review by Julian Novitz



Graeme Harper
The Future for Creative Writing
Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, UK 2014
ISBN 9780470654927 hb
Hb 160pp AUD136.95

While creative writing can take many forms and is circulated through a host of formats, the outcome most immediately and tangibly associated with the term is still the print book. Whether prose fiction, creative non-fiction or poetry, a published, book-length manuscript is generally seen as the ideal result of creative writing practice. This attitude is still very much in evidence in university creative writing courses, no matter how innovative the curriculum or the teaching philosophy. Creative publications are generally what qualifies an instructor to teach creative writing, and are usually the ultimate measure of a student's success within the creative writing field.

Regardless of how and why creative writing might be taught within an institution, creative writing programs are generally judged and ranked by how many of their alumni go on to have their creative works commercially published. This has, of course, been a pretty good way of assessing the quality of creative writing instruction: the best teachers will be those who are able to help or inspire students to complete and publish their manuscripts. However this approach is premised on a number of conditions that are indisputably eroding (rapidly or gradually, depending on who you speak to): chiefly the long-term commercial viability of literary (or, more realistically, any) fiction, and the readership for book-length creative manuscripts of any kind. One can certainly argue that the book is not done yet, regardless of the state of commercial publishing, with the easy production and circulation of e-books making self-publishing a more profitable and less stigmatised option for many writers. But whether it is in print or an electronic format, will the book-length creative manuscript still hold its place of importance for future audiences

of digital natives, whose primary modes of narrative engagement may have been with videogame choices and cut-scenes or storified social media accounts?

Graeme Harper's *The Future for Creative Writing* takes the innovative step of questioning what the role of creative writing (both as a practice and as an educational discipline) might be in a post-book world, or at least a world where the book is no longer so closely and clearly associated with creative writing as its defining output. Harper notes that even as creative writing programs expand and become more popular with students (and more profitable for institutions), the cultural primacy of the book has started to wane. If creative writing instructors are not training students to produce books then what skills are they really imparting? If fewer books will be published and read then what will constitute the practice of creative writing? As creative writing expands as a teachable discipline and more students graduate with degrees in the field than can ever, realistically, succeed in publishing conventional books, these become increasingly pertinent questions to ask.

Harper does not set out to offer definitive answers, but his inquiry serves as a useful starting point for speculations that may ultimately help to shift or reorient aspects of creative writing practice and pedagogy. His exploration covers a broad range of ideas and approaches across seven chapters: 'The Age of Creative Writing' attempts to define the environment within which creative writing is currently situated; 'Dynamism and the Creative Writer' examines the experience the activity; 'Creative Writing Educating' discusses issues that arise from teaching and learning; 'Developing Creative Exposition' explores the contested territory of what constitutes creative writing research; 'Selling and Buying Creative Writing' discusses the role of material, saleable outputs; 'Speaking in Creative Writing' examines language and how its continuing evolution both impacts upon and is affected by our understandings of creative writing; and finally, 'Living and Working as a Creative Writer', which questions what might constitute professional and personal writerly identity in a post-book age.

The topics that are surveyed in all of these sections are interesting though their treatment can be uneven. Harper's otherwise intriguing examination of the cultural and media landscape within which creative writing is currently situated is hindered by a distracting attempt to parallel the contemporary spread of creative writing with the explosion of zombie media and narratives in the 21st century. While Harper explores how both zombie media and creative writing benefit from the enhanced interconnectedness of digital environments, he overlooks how this comparison could be cast in a negative light, with creative writing taking over and infecting spaces within academia in a zombie-like manner.

Harper's analysis becomes more engaging in the later chapters, where he more explicitly distinguishes between creative writing as an activity and mindset and the material outputs that it is most frequently associated with. Harper makes the useful point that while habits, activities and professions have been associated with what we now refer to as creative writing throughout almost all of human history, the outcome that we now most frequently use to define success within the field, the widespread publication, circulation and sale of books, has only been possible for a few hundred years. Harper effectively argues that this has been contingent on particular economic and technological conditions that are now rapidly changing, and so understandings of what creative writing entails must

change as well, both in terms of the form and purpose of the work that is produced and the process of observation, research, thought and personal reflection that is involved in its creation.

While the case for the inevitability of these changes is convincingly made, Harper resists the temptation to speculate too wildly on precisely what new forms and approaches the post-book age may give rise to, which is possibly quite wise given the speed with which media technology and its attendant literacies are developing (witness the rise of hypertext literature predicted by many theorists in the 1990s that never actually happened). That said, it would have been interesting to have had some more concrete thoughts on how the institutional training of creative writers might develop in the future, given that the workshop model of teaching still has a very strong focus on publication as its desired outcome, to the extent that its principal method of instruction for novice writers is a small scale replication of a publication process within a controlled environment.

These small reservations aside, Graeme Harper's *The Future for Creative Writing* takes a bold and much needed look at emerging issues and conditions within the field that many practitioners and educators still tend to overlook.

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TEXT review

What in the www is happening to writing?

review by Ross Watkins

The Future of Writing
John Potts (ed)
Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK 2014
ISBN 9781137440419 EPUB
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EPUB 162pp AUD65.00

References to futurism typically present technology as a source of threat and/or reform, and in *The Future of Writing*, editor John Potts has assembled a wide range of contributors and perspectives to discuss such threat and/or reform to writing as we know it. *The Future of Writing* considers the impact of online technologies on the structures and models of knowledge production (and the business of it) – where 'disruption' is a 'favoured descriptive word' (3) – as well as the impact that written content may exert on our future writing and reading practices.

The book is divided into three parts, each addressing the current determined impacts and posited possibilities of the digitisation of writing and reading. 'Writing and Publishing' provides commentary on the curation of online information, and the shifting role of the writer across the evolution of desktop publishing – effectively, a canvassing of issues relating to the storage and sharing of writing *as* data and influenced *by* data and its processing. Richard Nash discusses the function of database algorithms in influencing our reading and writing in the online environment. Kate Eltham proposes the removal of the print and electronic containers presently binding our books – in a post-digital age where storytelling becomes a networked process (both physical and online). Eltham argues that the traditional structures that underpin publishing will 'melt and shift in a networked world' (31):

> In the unbounded networked reality of books, the most valuable service a publisher can provide is not to make whole books available to the world, but to create new and interesting relationships between things on the network: between words and other words, between books and other books, and between readers. (31)

Sherman Young reviews the shifting access to and appreciation for self-publishing, from the development of print-on-demand to Amazon and the fully-digitised experience of narrative; part of this change is the realisation of electronic self-publishing as the 'new slush-pile' of traditional publishers, where the market selects the next mainstream crossover title. Young's appraisal celebrates the usurpation of publishing power and authority, and the paper ends with the contention that, if 'credibility is all that publishers can contribute, could traditional publishing companies now be considered the new vanity press?' (43).

John Potts's 'Book Doomsday: The March of Progress and the Fate of the Book' provides a powerful foil to Young's complicity in the doctrine for disruptive technology – which Potts equates with modernity's 'doctrine of progress' (49):

> Progress is now measured in terms of faster, smaller, and more flexible. The post-industrial world of information is depicted as clean and free of industrialism's sins: e books save trees… Each new generation computer or smartphone renders its predecessor out of date; at the same time, each new model is a step towards the utopian future: wireless, energy efficient, sustainable, and increasingly immaterial. (51)

Potts points out that the 'trouble with the logic of progress is that it's not really logical' (51), and goes on to track the resistance of object media to their predicted obliteration, citing the multi-sensory objecthood of books as the key factor which will ensure that '[t]he book is not going to disappear because of a few digital doomsday predictions. Its future is not yet all used up' (55).

In 'Part II Creative Writing', Nigel Krauth opens with an exploration of the 'multigraph' (cf. *mono*graph) within the hypermedia context. Krauth points out that, '[i]t cannot be said that the new technologies have snuck up on creative writing and ambushed it' (60), and he traces multimodal precursors from Herbert and Sterne through to the contemporary avant-garde generating narrative works on/for hypermedia platforms. The chapter presents an expansive range of remarkable and rousing works to elicit four main views of new technologies and creative writing, including print-based multimodality, digital/app crossovers, and app/web natives – 'works of fiction or poetry [which] include nonfiction, history, and the exegetical; they are richly illustrated with photography, graphics, and digital cleverness; they incorporate performances by the authors and music soundtracks' (63). Krauth's fourth view is founded on Gunther Kress' theory of 'reading paths' and the increased reliance on imagination to negotiate meaning within multimodal works. For Krauth, these prospects clearly mean a 'richer experience for readers and greater possibilities for writers' (72).

Chris Rodley and Andrew Burrell's 'On the Art of Writing with Data' returns focus to the relationship between writing and 'Big Data', forming a

neat link back to Nash's chapter on algorithms and the truly 'networked' literary artefact – 'data-driven literature' (Rodley and Burrell, 80). A telling example to those new to such works is Howe and Karpinska's *No Time Machine*, which 'crawls the web for variations of the phrase "I don't have time for" and combines them algorithmically with other found text to construct a "poetic conversation" about time' (81). Rodley and Burrell's stated agenda is to 'engage in a dialogue that helps define this emerging practice' (86). Next, and finally for this section, is a chapter by Kathryn Millard and Alex Munt, who make twenty-nine observations of hybrid or multimodal forms, their approach founded in the fact that '[t]he word text derives from the Latin word *textus*, to weave' (91). The form and structure of the chapter itself, while not a multimedia composition, perhaps goes some way in exemplifying the layering of informational spaces that new writing can forge.

The third part of *The Future of Writing* is 'Journalism: Estate 4.0'. As the four chapters here address the shifting nature of journalism and new technologies – a comparatively far more volatile paradigm shift – they are of less immediate concern for creative writing practitioners and researchers, and thereby a lesser concern for this review. Still, the transformation of storytelling is of value to creative writers, and it is this base principle which would find some appeal and benefit to readers of *TEXT*.

Overall, Potts has drawn together a fairly diverse representation of views on the future of writing amid the technologically-driven challenges and prospects on our foreseeable horizon. And although these debates may date as quickly as technology itself, the collection forms an important waypoint for authors and researchers interested in not only predictive manoeuvres, but also gaining further understanding of present transformations in the way we orient ourselves to the market and its making. For creative writing, it appears 'the multimodal is here to stay; its virus has spread from the screen back onto the printed page, in spite of the fact that the idea of co-existence and cross fertilisation between paper and digital is still not on the old guard's agenda' (Krauth 68).

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TEXT review

Writer, know thyself – poetics and psychoanalysis

review by Jeri Kroll

Dominique Hecq
Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing
Multilingual Matters, Bristol, UK 2015
ISBN 139781783093229 (hdk)
ISBN 139781783093212 (pbk)
Pb 246 pp USD169.95

Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing, by Dominique Hecq, dedicated to her 'postgraduate students, past and present', is a meticulously researched monograph that explains a range of literary and psychoanalytical theories that can ground the critical essay or exegesis of creative theses. In fact, while reading I emailed a new doctoral candidate to recommend the opening chapters. Hecq explains in the book's 'Afterword' that the inspiration came paradoxically from dissatisfaction. After writing her chapter 'Creative Writing and Theory' for my edited collection, *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Kroll & Harper 2013), she realised there was more she needed to say to help reluctant postgraduates to overcome their aversion to theory. *Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing* succeeds admirably in this objective by tackling the questions of why and how theory can help students to understand their research.

The opening chapters are persuasive. Hecq provides readers with an explanation of 'poetics' as a concept, taking account of its extensive history beginning with Aristotle's seminal work, *The Poetics,* which was the first foray into a theory of literature, and demonstrates how they might apply the principles of poetics to their own projects by grasping what the term means today. Poetics, she believes, can complement self-reflexivity, since together they ground creative writing research, which is 'first and foremost an "experiential knowing" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 19), whereby affects and emotions interact with rational processes' (23). In addition, Hecq unpacks what critics mean by theory and Theory with a

capital T. These sections are useful for doctoral candidates as well as sound refreshers for supervisors.

It is worth clarifying that a large part of the book is devoted to psychoanalytical theory in addition to poetics, but Hecq explains the reason for this focus: 'The word "subject" [creative writing] refers here to what is being studied in the discipline of creative writing as well as who is involved in the act of writing … taking into account the importance of the subjectivity of the writer' (1). Hecq employs Lacanian theory in both teaching and research, concerned as she is with how its tenets facilitate a comprehension of the writing process and 'the self' that writes. She admits that this focus seems at odds with the objectivity demanded of conventional research and results in epistemological challenges, in particular for candidates who face developing a workable creative writing theory to fit doctoral projects.

Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing functions as Hecq's answers to this dilemma. She acknowledges the power of the unconscious in creativity, and maintains 'that the subjectivity of the researcher is a strength' (2), underpinning as it does the ways in which practitioners read texts and manipulate language. Hecq summarises the development of concepts of the 'I,' the self that writes and 'performs' as a cultural being, which explains her preference for psychoanalytic theory allied with postcolonial and cultural theory, since they develop postmodernism's concept of 'the other' and accept its belief that the self 'lives in a mode of discontinuity and instability' (3).

Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing is roughly divided into two parts, the first devoted to the subject of creative writing and possible theoretical approaches and the second unpacking Hecq's methodology in case studies, where she can 'gradually apply and perform some of the ideas and concepts…' (7). A varied internal and external chapter structure in both sections reflects the practice-led research loop. Hecq analyses prevailing critical terminology, which, due to its debt to other creative arts disciplines, does not always accord with the way arts practitioners perform. She prefers 'creative writing research' to 'practice-led research' (27).

Postgraduates will find key definitions useful in articulating their practice, including 'the other', 'exposition', 'paratext', 'metaphor' (as generator of new knowledge), and a range of psychoanalytical concepts. An important section elaborates on the familiar idea of theory as a 'toolbox', which also should help reluctant postgraduates to accept the impossibility of writing without a theory. Related subjects include the 'false dichotomy between theory and practice' (9); the difference between theory and literary criticism; the writer as reader and reader response theories; the benefits of 'integrating cross-disciplinary knowledges' (30), rather than restricting a project to one; the notion of a canon; the relationship between craft and knowledge; and a history of psychoanalytic theory, including definitions of the unconscious (85). Her comments about the unconscious are instructive and point to why it might provide methodologies amenable to creative writing research, since both construct 'knowledge in a dynamic way through … a continuous process' (69). For the creative writing researcher, 'thoughts are organised more consciously according to what I have called a methodology of "active consciousness" (Hecq 2013a: 175), whereby new knowledge emerges in three steps: inductive, deductive and retroactive' (69).

The second half of *Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing* allows readers to observe theory in action. Hecq explains:

> I would like to select postcolonial theory, a theory drawn from linguistics, psychoanalysis, Marxism and feminism, characterised by resistance, activism and future thinking (Ashcroft 2001), as a case study: firstly because of its historical and ideological affinities with psychoanalysis that is, as a counter-discourse; secondly because its conceptual tools can be adapted to other social contexts and methodological frameworks; and thirdly because in postcolonial countries theory can have a practical – and political – impact. (74)

After noting how this theory has influenced work in Australian universities, in particular by allowing postgraduates to articulate the problematic relationship of a dominant culture to 'the other' (including Aboriginals and migrants), she offers case studies, choosing two Seamus Heaney poems, 'Alphabet' and 'Out of the Bag,' for 'dialectical reading' (90). She then turns to her own poetry and prose, mapping a 'personal journey', while also exploring Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the main Hecq's discussions focus on style, which she argues is conditioned by Lacan's 'dynamic unconscious' (85). The intention is to help doctoral candidates to recognise what factors, internal and external, inform their own style.

One of the book's drawbacks is that it does not sufficiently acknowledge that some creative writing researchers pursue alternative fruitful pathways, in particular those dictated by conventional methods, such as historical research, without feeling constrained by them. Hecq conceptualises creative writing research as primarily an exploratory endeavour, driven by a method akin to what cognitive psychologists and writing theorists call 'process writing' (as opposed to program writing). This '"problem finding style" (Lamott 1994: 22)' suggests that a project begins 'with only a question mark, an image, a phrase or even a mere rhythm rather than a plan, and the work emerges from the improvisational act of writing and revising – or not' (73). As genetic critics and cognitive psychologists have noted, this approach applies more to poets than novelists and, in fact, most writers employ both process and program writing, as Hecq concedes.

Another drawback is that the extended discussions of psychoanalytical theory, while justified in terms of the book's overall plan, might cause problems for some. Hecq in fact admits that she could lose readers (86), while also lamenting that she privileges male theorists at the expense of influential female thinkers, in particular Hélène Cixous, whose concept of écriture féminine points out the male-female dichotomies in Western civilisation that transcend the notion of gender (111). A section called 'Cherchez la Femme: Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray' (108) is not, she believes, sufficient, thus another project might be in the pipeline. Towards the book's end a question she poses (and she knows she is not the first to ask it) reinforces this need, and speaks as well to Hecq's current novel-in-progress about the loss of a child: 'Is it possible for women writers – particularly poets – to embrace a female subject matter in their writing and still be taken seriously as writers within the "masculine universal" sphere of literature?' (198). To contextualise this observation she 'trace[s] a brief history of metaphors of autogenesis as pertaining not only to the act of creating but also … to how poetry is critically received and canonised' (199). This survey underlines the idea of the female muse facilitating male

creators giving birth to themselves, but where does this leave women writers? Aware of this conundrum, Hecq suggests that the writing of this book itself has taught her what still needs to be done.

In sum, postgraduate researchers (and their supervisors) whose orientation is towards exploring process will find much to appreciate in *Towards a Poetics of Creative Writing*. In fact, Hecq's contention early in the book that 'creative writing is an experiential form of practice involving an intertextuality which is first and foremost intratextual, that is, played out from within' (15), distills her critical orientation and explains the dominance of psychoanalysis. Readers do not need to accept every argument put forth in this skilfully written book in order to benefit from the issues each chapter raises about the conscious and unconscious dynamics that influence what and how they write.

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Professor Jeri Kroll is Dean of Graduate Research at Flinders University. The author of six poetry collections, young adult novels and children's books, her most recent publications are Research Methods in Creative Writing *(Kroll & Harper 2013),* Workshopping the Heart: New and Selected Poems *(2013) and the verse novel* Vanishing Point *(2015).*

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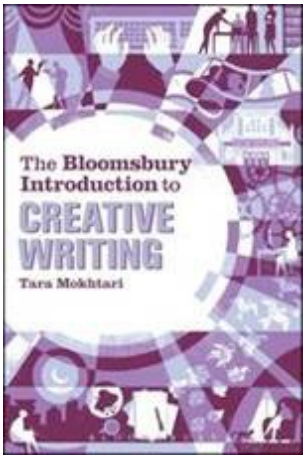
TEXT review

Taking writing as knowledge

review by Shane Strange



Tara Mokhtari
The Bloomsbury Introduction to Creative Writing
Bloomsbury Academic, London 2015
ISBN 9781472578433
Pb 257pp AUD29.95

The question as to whether creative writing can be taught – indeed, whether it can be taught *at university* – has been persistent: there continues to be a scepticism that writing can be more than simply a craft, more than a solitary pursuit; that one can learn writing like other forms of 'real' knowledge.

Of course, creative writing can, should be, and *is* taught – and very successfully. But there is an ongoing tension as to how creative writing orients itself *as a form of knowledge*. That is, when we teach creative writing, are we teaching it as a craft, with learnable and apparent skills and techniques? Or, as it resides in the academy, does it have the capacity to generate research and knowledge, and if so, what form of knowledge, what form of research?

While these important concerns continue to generate discussion, most introductory books on the subject of creative writing have erred on the craft side of this equation, with the discussions of character, structure and plot, the exhortation to reading, the desultory nod to newer forms of writing, and the (let's be honest) hit-or-miss writing exercises. On this score, Tara Mokhtari's *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Creative Writing* doesn't seem to veer too greatly from the formula: there is a section on narrative structure; a chapter on digital writing; a nod to writing for performance. The writing exercises are neatly boxed at the end of each section; with further discussion ideas listed under the title of 'Workshop'.

From this perspective, one might make the mistake of thinking that, like so many other books of this sort, this book is aimed at beginning writers. But

this volume is aimed at the beginning *student* of writing, and as such aligns its content with the expectations and requirements of students undertaking writing as an academic discipline.

Hence the book begins by framing writing *as a form of knowledge:*

> New knowledge begins to materialize through the ways you bend your memories and imagine new possibilities in worlds separate from the one you live in. Simultaneously, the discovery of the process of turning existing knowledge into new knowledge through the written word bears more knowledge still. (5-6)

Clearly, this isn't a book about craft with a knowledge emphasis awkwardly amended to it. The introduction and the first chapter of the book (called 'Writing and Knowledge' no less) cycles through a more complex story about what creative writing is and what it can do in the context of the limits of, and contributions to knowledge. This is something that craft-oriented creative writing books, with their well-worn statements about 'writing what you know' and 'being creative', do not deliver. Mokhtari's approach offers a breath of fresh air: in a straightforward and supportive fashion, she presents many of the ideas that need to be introduced to those beginning a writing degree, while deflating preconceived notions about creative writing.

Next, Mokhtari provides a reasonably thorough but fairly standard exposure to many of the terms and ideas behind creative writing in its varying forms. Although *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Creative Writing* is clearly meant to embody a kind of 'learning through doing' ethos, one of my key critiques of the book is that it relies far too heavily on exercises, at times shying away from introducing a potentially more nuanced discussion of the forms it tackles, and therefore risks appearing at times a little superficial.

This criticism is partially overcome by the final chapter 'Critique and Exegesis'. Mokhtari reminds us that the critical/exegetical requirements of writing degrees can be a 'bubble-burster' for writing students, then proceeds to outline precisely what a critical piece of writing requires, and how it can be achieved in practical terms: by structuring an essay, doing research, identifying discursive writing techniques – essentially all the skills we want our students to be able to use to support and enhance their developing writing practices, while reinforcing writing as a knowledge discipline. The section on the exegesis, however, is too narrowly defined and, in my view, far too conservative. Creative writing studies have moved on from wanting an exegesis to be just a literary analysis of the work they've just produced. In fact, I would argue that nothing energising comes from the 'novel plus exegesis' type of thesis. I'm reminded though, that this book is for beginning students, and to have the exegesis introduced at all, even in this basic way, is a big step.

I think that one of the benefits of the academic growth of creative writing (in the Australian academy particularly) has been the push towards seeing writing as a form of interdisciplinary research rather than an institutionalised production house for practitioners. Books like Mokhtari's take this engagement seriously and fundamentally, working outwards from the space that the discipline of creative writing has carved within the academy. That it does so in good faith and without scepticism is a boon.

The Bloomsbury Introduction to Creative Writing does much to situate creative writing as a knowledge form, and thus validates to students that what they are doing *is* research. Though the Introduction is not perfect, it is satisfying to see this perspective taken seriously in an introductory text.

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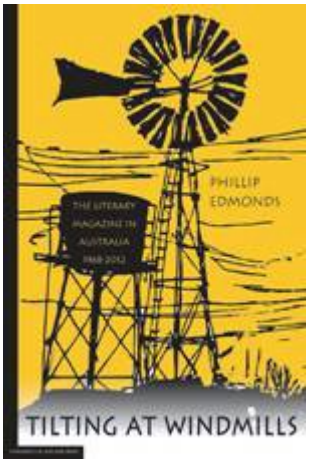
TEXT review

Magazines into the limelight

review by Jeremy Fisher



Phillip Edmonds
Tilting at Windmills: The literary magazine in Australia 1968-2012
University of Adelaide Press, Adelaide 2015
ISBN 9781925261042 Pb
ISBN 9781925261059 EPDF
ISBN 9781925261066 EPUB
ISBN 7981925261073 Kindle
Pb 302 pp AUD44.00

It is pleasing to see a publication from the University of Adelaide Press, a relatively new publishing venture and one designed primarily for the digital environment. The Press' titles are available for free download from the Press website. The edition reviewed here, however, was print-on-demand. It was attractively designed, but lacked a barcode and ISBN on the rear cover, thus limiting bookshop sales. Given that it was reviewed favourably in *The Australian* [1], this is quite an omission and I would encourage the Press to change editorial practice in this regard. A few more sales at a bookshop-discounted price would help underwrite future publications, and perhaps offer Phillip Edmonds some royalties.

A study of literary magazines in Australia is long overdue. In the past there has been the odd story of an individual journal and some analysis by The Australia Council for The Arts, the latter more to justify its funding practices than to offer insight into what still remains a fascinating cottage industry. Fascinating, that is, if, like me, you have an interest in the fringes of Australian publishing. And this book certainly lingers at the fringe.

Phillip Edmonds teaches writing at the University of Adelaide and has been editor of the literary magazines *Contempa* and *Wet Ink*, so he has skin in the game. Edmonds' principal thesis is that literary magazines have played a valuable role in the promotion, perhaps even the creation, of Australian literature. I was puzzled to see the date 1968 included in the title, since literary magazines existed well before that date, but Edmonds

explains that he has chosen to bookend his study with the advent of offset printing and the development of online publication. These are sensible endpoints for his discussion.

Edmonds defines what he means as a literary magazine in chapter three. He leaves literature undefined, which niggles me, because almost all of the continuing literary magazines he mentions publish literature of a 'type' that does not include, for instance, genre fiction or bush poetry; in other words, 'popular' literature. Until relatively recently, too, many of them have been stinting in publication of Indigenous and LGBTI [2] works, and works from writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Even the proliferation of small magazines in the 1970s, propelled by the ease of off-set production, and a reduction in censorship, did not substantially change the heteronormative, white, anglo and predominantly male nature and editorship of Australian literary magazines, both left-wing and right-wing.

There is a reflection of this in the book where a few paragraphs seem to have been inserted to address the problem. In one chapter there is brief mention of the feminist journals *Hecate*, *Refractory Girl* and *Luna* which emerged to challenge male editorship. Another chapter concludes with a short discussion of initiatives such as the gay and lesbian *Cargo*, which published Dorothy Porter, Christos Tsiolkas, Graeme Aitken and Sasha Soldatow, amongst many others, and Sybylla Press in Melbourne. Of *Cargo*, Edmonds notes that it was 'acting out its traditional role of foregrounding the work of the marginal, the unknown and the non-commercial' (118), which I would like to think defines the role of any small literary magazine.

That point aside, Edmonds' book is thorough. He offers his recount decade by decade. He delves into the history, nature, politics and short lives of the plethora of 1970s journals and offers a brisk analysis of publications and personnel. *Tabloid story* receives special mention, as does the role of the Australia Council over the years, the continuing problem of distribution and the cost of postage. He notes the survival of the big four, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Overland* and *Quadrant* (should I make it five and add *Westerly* to span the continent?) in the eighties and beyond, and their consolidation of government funding.

The book has an ambivalent conclusion. Edmonds hedges his bets on the survival of literary magazines in the digital age. Since the writing of his book was completed, the Australian government has diverted funds from the Australia Council to a special fund to be dispensed at the discretion of the Minister for the Arts. Funding for literary activities at the time this review was written is under the control of a man who likes to read bush poetry during quiet times in the Senate. It might surprise some readers of *TEXT*, but bush poetry remains very popular in certain social strata. The reading of literary magazines is less appreciated.

Online publishing, too, is a problem. How do you recoup your costs? For a print edition, it is possible to sell subscriptions, few may they be. Erecting a paywall around your online content may work when readers seek what you have locked inside, but not when they have no interest in it. Edmonds wrestles with these issues and with the homogeneity of the readership of literary magazines, to question their relevance to writers and readers accustomed to a digital world. He considers many other matters too, but at the end he is left guessing.

As am I, and all of us concerned about the fate of literary magazines. I hope they will survive since, as Edmonds' book shows, they have made a substantial contribution to Australian literature. Above all, I honour, respect and pay homage to their many voluntary and underpaid editors, Edmonds amongst them, who have laboured long and hard to produce these literary gems. Yet, I have an uneasy feeling it is all now history.

Unhappily, the book lacks an index, absolutely essential for a reference work of this nature. I wanted to check my facts against the wealth of information provided in this book, but that was impossible without an index. Should I have erred on some point, that is why.

Notes

[1] Geordie Williamson, 'Australian literature: magazines that shaped our culture', *The Australian*, August 15, 2015 return to text
[2] Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Intersex return to text

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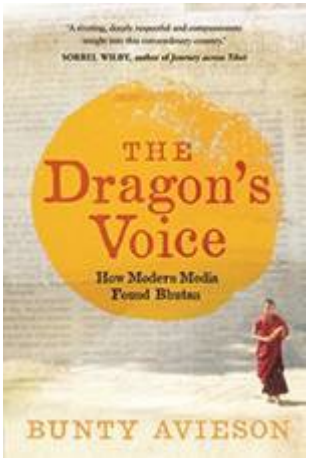
TEXT review

Twitter by butter lamp: experiencing media change in Bhutan

review by Carolyn Beasley



Bunty Avieson
The Dragon's Voice: How Modern Media Found Bhutan
University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld 2015
ISBN 978070225357 7
C-format 240pp AUD32.95

When journalist Bunty Avieson's six-year-old daughter asked her the meaning of a Sydney billboard that read 'Want longer lasting sex?', Avieson and her husband decided their life had to take a dramatic turn. Ruminations over an offer of residential work as a consultant on new community-focused Bhutanese newspaper called the *Bhutan Observer* ended, and Avieson's family relocated to the tiny and devotedly Buddhist nation of Bhutan. *The Dragon's Voice: How Modern Media Found Bhutan* captures both the experience of a year in the newspaper's newsroom and the tensions encountered by the state's newly independent media.

Avieson's work could easily have slipped into the genre of the culture-shock memoir as she participates in and comes to understand the country's highly traditional cultural practices and ways of living. However, Avieson's sympathetic eye for the marginalised citizen during a time of dramatic change, transports her story into a historical record of the impact of technology-led change in a closed media landscape. It also reminds us of the complexities of ethical reporting in developing nations and the need for media organisations to understand the culture they are trying to report on and within.

Structurally, the work has two main story arcs. Firstly, we are drawn through the narrative by following the journey of the newspaper and its role in a newly-independent privatised media. Avieson joins the *Bhutan Observer* eighteen months after its birth during an exciting time of cultural and political change. The Fourth King has handed the control of the small, isolated nation to its first democratically-elected Parliament in an act that

sends ripples of worry through inhabitants. There is much praying by butter lamp for the nation's beloved Royal Family and a sense of uncertainty as to how daily life will change. It is exciting, yet dangerous, ground for storytelling.

Avieson cleverly captures the dilemmas of new democracy by letting them play out through the lens of the newsroom. What role will accountability and exposure play in this new world when politeness, respect and rigid social hierarchy still underpins every aspect of culture? How far can readers be taken beyond their comfort zone when it comes to reporting on bodies, hardships such as the six monthly food shortages that are a way of life for many villagers, and the lack of citizenship rights for those born in the country but whose regional births were not recorded? Is it appropriate to write a story emphasising the happiness of a family who live in two cubicles of a toilet block?

The editors remind Avieson that it is all a matter of timing. As public consciousness grows, so does the expectation for the media to promote change. Where once it was considered inappropriate to report on Christianity, the editors tell her that public sentiment has shifted and careful coverage of religion outside Buddhism will be possible that year and that next year they expect a more positive climate for reporting on refugees from southern Bhutan. There are, of course, still areas that are a no-go for journalists, including negative stories about the King (or indeed, even positive stories of the Royal family's individual acts of kindness!) and Chinese border issues.

Secondly, a narrative arc carries us through the stages of a sophisticated and nuanced type of culture shock that seeks to understand the political, interpersonal and cultural nature of Bhutanese society. Beginning with the key office workers that she intersects with every day, and then broadening out to capture the smaller, more secretive lives that cross Avieson's own, each character brings to the book their own story and acts to capture an essential characteristic of Bhutanese life. For instance, the tendency to support the spiritual above the practicalities of turning up for work and meeting deadlines is illustrated through an editor's extended absence due to supervising forty-nine days of mourning for his recently deceased father-in-law. The problem of gender relations is demonstrated through Dolma, the Bhutan-born 'illegal immigrant' who is hired as the family's domestic help. She is a victim of family violence who, like many Bhutanese women, has been brought up to accept that physical assault is often simply a fact of coupledom. Through integration of characters such as these, Avieson merges anecdotal observation with social commentary and is highly aware of how her own western views shape her interpretations and judgements. The result is a compelling and warm storytelling style.

There is much to enjoy in the descriptions of the quaint and quirky in Avieson's work, a delightful 'othering' of this seemingly forgotten world that is heart warming and soul shifting. In the hard slog of our consumer driven lives, it's a gift to know that there are still seemingly Utopian lands where progress is measured not through financial status or Gross National Product, but through Gross National Happiness.

It is not surprising then that Bhutan is often represented as a mystical Shangri-la, a land of misty mountain ranges and peaceful, hardy rural dwellers who tend their land attired in traditional costume. Avieson concurs that these elements are still visible and valued in Bhutan. There is

fond remembrance of age-old courtship rituals ominously referred to as 'night hunting', and belief in stories about villages of women thought to have crooked vaginas. There is even a name for the style of reportage that emphasises these nostalgic elements: Shangri-la journalism. However Avieson is careful to note that in reality these coexist with the technologies and tools of modern media. An ace rural reporter may live on facebook as much as any teenager, but he declines a job in a city newsroom because he does not want to leave his cow. Newspapers have advertising, but they are adverts that praise the royal family rather than engage in a hard sell. The overwhelming message is that the Kingdom of Bhutan, and specifically the infant independent media, has literally enacted the national saying of 'take the best of the West and leave the rest'.

Avieson's work is a rich addition to the current range of texts on the role of the media in times of change. It reminds us that one of the central tenets of a healthy media is an ability to innately understand its audience and to tell a story that makes a positive difference to their world. With so much new writing focusing on the challenges of hidden surveillance and data retention, it's refreshing to remember that other cultures can experience communication technologies in positive and community building ways. It is also predominately a story about people and the common human elements that bind us – our need to create positive change, to improve the lives of others, to find inspiration in hardship, and the joy of finding a way of seeing the world that is distinctly different to our own.

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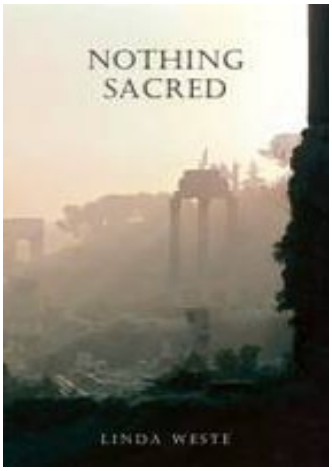
TEXT review

Roman novel in verse

review by Paul Skrebels



Linda Weste
Nothing Sacred
Arcadia, Imprint of Australian Scholarly Publishing
North Melbourne, Victoria 2015
ISBN9781925333220
Pb 182pp AUD24.95

The historical fault line between the collapse of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Imperium during the first century BC has long fascinated writers. It was well documented by classical contemporaries, was a source of inspiration for Shakespeare with *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and still finds expression in a range of works such as Tom Holland's recent historical study *Rubicon* and the HBO television mini-series *Rome*. Into this tradition comes Linda Weste's *Nothing Sacred*, a 'novel in verse' comprising 86 short poems with endnotes and other supportive material.

The poems cover a period of some twenty-five years from the ascendance of Pompey the Great to the assassinations of Caesar and Cicero and the final death throes of the Republic. Each poem is a self-contained vignette which nevertheless contributes to a coherent inner narrative of the lives of various characters involved in a range of circumstances, events and relationships. Linda Weste's work reveals a deep internalising of its subject matter; *Nothing Sacred* embraces the particularity and, to us, frequent bizarre otherness of the world of Republican Rome, and re-presents it as a living thing. The poems strategically employ deft flicks of 'Romanness' – not least in their use of the Latin language itself – to evoke a precise context for the foibles, experiences and anxieties of identifiably real characters: the decadent Clodii, the social-climbing Caelius, the intellectual Cicero, fellow-poet Catullus, and even great Caesar himself.

Weste demonstrates her maturity as a poet in the skill with which she handles her craft to convey insights into the ways different people operate

within very specific social, political and cultural contexts. *Nothing Sacred* is neither presentist – as with so many current television shows where the settings are historical but the characters are obviously modern in their sensibilities – nor is it simply historicist, where the antiquity and otherness are preserved under glass, as it were. The net result is that our engagement with that world and these characters is neither wholly rational nor purely emotional. It is an aesthetic response; one in which we appreciate the quality of the telling – the artefact itself – no matter how harrowing the subject matter or the moral position of its ostensible narrator. We 'feel' the work as we come to understand it.

An effective example of this can be found in the poem 'Gargantuan' (75-77). In *Rubicon*, Tom Holland discusses Cicero's musings on the effect on the populace of Pompey's games, which saw the slaughter of countless wild animals in the name of entertainment. In particular there was an overwhelmingly negative reaction by the spectators to the deaths of twenty elephants, which for Cicero became a gauge of the change in the Roman political climate. Weste's poetic version places us not only in the midst of the arena, dramatising the incident in all its horror and pathos, but pays due tribute to the nobility of the animals themselves. Out of a ghastly topic she has created a beautiful poem, and 'Gargantuan' is by no means the only instance where she manages to achieve this.

Nothing Sacred is therefore no mere versification of previous accounts of this key period in the history of Rome (and indeed of western civilisation itself). Instead, it offers us a fresh way of knowing that world through the very medium of poetry; and as with all worthwhile poetry, it both encourages and rewards repeated and closer reading to enhance that knowledge. This is a remarkable first novel, revealing a degree of virtuosity which suggests it won't be Linda Weste's last.

Note: This review was arranged by *TEXT* editors without the participation of the *TEXT* Reviews Editor in the process

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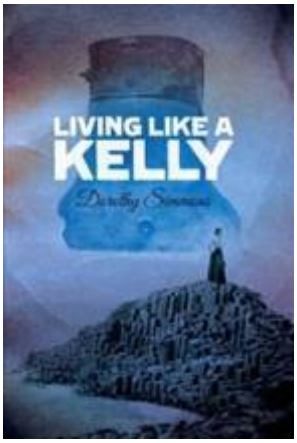
TEXT review

‘If the world was just a sock’

review by Mary Pomfret



Dorothy Simmons
Living Like A Kelly
Australian Scholarly Publishing 2015
ISBN 9781925333138
Pb 196pp AUD24.95

As I started to read *Living Like A Kelly,* I had to wonder what else could possibly be written or debated about Ned Kelly, ‘a widow’s son outlawed’ (39), and the Kelly gang. *Living Like A Kelly* is, however, a woman’s story which privileges the female point of view and gives value to women’s work and honours female suffering.

The novel begins with a coincidence. Journalist Brian Cookson’s brief is to investigate and write about the possibility of members of the Kelly gang, namely Dan Kelly and his friend Steve Hart, being alive and living in Africa. A thunderstorm forces him to seek shelter in a cottage. And who should this cottage belong to? None other than the Kelly matriarch, the now elderly, Ellen Kelly. Cookson’s taking refuge from the elements bears some similarity to the beginning scenes in Charlotte Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, where Lockwood becomes finds himself trapped in a haunted room after finding refuge from a blizzard. However the fictionalised Brian Cookson is not part of a literary framing device as is the character Lockwood. Cookson’s story appears at intervals through the main plot trajectory and is secondary to the powerful heart of the novel: the dark internal, angst-filled and haunted world of Ellen Kelly and her memories, dreams and trauma.

When Cookson crosses the threshold of Ned Kelly’s mother’s cottage, he surmises that here is a ‘cicada shell: brittle. Used Up’ (13). Ellen Kelly spends much of her time sitting by the fire, ‘Mending and minding, mending and minding’ (26), trying to make sense of her life and her loss. Dorothy Simmons portrays Ellen Kelly’s internal landscape as ‘a place where it’s wild and windy and dark, a banshee hollow with voices calling and re-calling down through the years, across all the empty spaces’ (24).

Simmons leads us into Ellen Kelly's world through the metaphor of women's work – done inside the home – stitching patchwork quilts, darning socks. But as Ellen knows, 'the world's no sock, and no amount of minding, no amount of thinking what if you hadn't said this, what if you had said that, what if you'd bitten your tongue instead of letting fly … was ever going to mend it' (18). Nevertheless, Ellen knows the value of work. It was work that helped her survive her three year jail sentence resulting from her attack on Constable Alexander Fitzpatrick who attempted to assault her daughter Kate Kelly. While she was in jail, after they took her baby Alice away from her, Ellen survived her captivity through work, 'soaping and scrubbing and rinsing till her back ached' pretending to herself that the sheets going through the mangle were 'Fitzpatrick or Barry screaming as she squeezed every drop of blood out of them' (70). At night, alone in her cell, 'Her hate fogged the walls; curses clung like cobwebs, sticky and white' (71).

Simmons' hints that Ellen's relationship with her daughter Kate was not a simple one; that Ellen's defence of Kate was not as straightforward as a mother defending her child. In a disagreement, Ellen yells at Kate, 'Wagging your tail like a bitch in heat! You think I can't see what's in front of my own eyes? With a policeman, for chrissake!' (55). I found this conflict between mother and daughter particularly intriguing, despite the fact that the causes are never really fleshed out, only hinted at. The conflict continues after Ned's execution until Kate finally dies in what appears to be misadventure. But Ellen Kelly knows what killed her daughter and 'it wasn't the drink' (81). It was 'The fact of guilt' (81) that killed Kate, as far her mother is concerned. Did Ellen blame her daughter for Ned's death and her own jail sentence? In Simmons' portrayal of the mother daughter relationship, Ellen seems especially disappointed that Kate takes part in 'The Kelly Show' (79), a theatrical performance in which Kate Kelly stars, the purpose of which is to raise money for the 'Revolution' (79). Ellen's angry memory of her daughter's part in this performance is, 'She had rouge on again' (79).

According to historical records, Ellen Kelly was able to read but not write. It is interesting to muse whether Ned Kelly's mother would have produced her own version of *The Jerilderie Letter*, the inspiration for Peter Carey's novel *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, had she been able to write. Simmons surmises that Ellen wanted to release her trauma through the writing of it. 'How much safer, though, how much surer, if you could just write it down' (76) the old woman contemplates. 'Specially the parts when she wasn't there' (76). Trauma haunts Simmon's fictionalised Ellen Kelly as it may well have haunted the historic character. Disassociation is a well-known symptom of trauma, and in one of Ellen's graphic dreamscapes in which she recalls the Fitzpatrick incident with Kate, she stands outside of herself and watches herself: 'I'm standing outside the back window, looking in. I'm looking into the kitchen; that's me in there, peeling the spuds' (94).

Dorothy Simmons' Ellen Kelly has the authentic voice of a woman whose dire circumstances and traumatic memories hold her in captivity. According to Wilson, Ellen Kelly's final words to her son, Ned, were: 'Mind you die like a Kelly, son' (Wilson 2005). Simmons writes with insight and realism. In *Living Like a Kelly*, Simmons appears to channel the thoughts of a historic character whose only way of coping with overwhelming loss is to mine her memories, over and over, as if by doing so, she can resurrect the past. Ellen Kelly's son Jim worries about the way

she seems to lose herself but, ‘She tells him it’s not losing, it’s finding’ (97).

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TEXT review

Dear (not) you: reading Kate Llewellyn's letters

review by Natalie Kon-yu

First Things First: Selected Letters of Kate Llewellyn 1977-2004
Ruth Bacchus and Barbara Hill (eds)
Wakefield Press, Adelaide 2015
ISBN 9781743053645
Pb 320pp AUD29.95

It's a curious thing to read a letter that has not been written to you – it's akin to eavesdropping on a conversation; an uncomfortable sensation of trespass. When those letters have been written by a person who is still alive, about other people who are still alive, then the uneasiness deepens. As I read *First Things First* I couldn't quite shake the discomfort in reading the letters of a still-living person. This selection, edited by Barbara Hill and Ruth Bacchus, is only a small portion of Llewellyn's letters, which are housed at the Australian Defence Force Academy; a collection which contains 'over one hundred folders containing over two thousand letters' (xii), and which dates back to 1957. Kate Llewellyn is a prolific writer; she has published twenty books, primarily poetry collections and memoir or autobiographical novels, and has a huge volume of written correspondence to her name.

First Things First begins with letters written in 1977, a time chosen by the editors as it coincides with Llewellyn's leaving her job to take up writing full time. This first section of letters is interesting; there are all kinds of salacious details of Llewellyn's affairs, as well as the affairs of her friends. The editors have included the full names of both the correspondents and the people to whom Llewellyn refers in her letters, which is, I think, a curious decision. The Australian writing scene is not a large one and many of the people Llewellyn talks about would be well-known in these circles, both professionally and personally. It is not clear whether permission has been granted by the correspondents or subjects of these letters. And thus, the problem in reviewing such a work: there is a slipperiness in writing about the personal letters of a still-living author, in which she discusses people that are known to you. I was embedded uncomfortably within the

work in a way that I would not have been if the collection had been published posthumously.

The accounts of Llewellyn-as-writer sustain the most interest in the book. For those of us engaged in the writing profession, the documentation of Llewellyn's struggles and triumphs – to make ends meet as a full-time writer, and to have her work accepted and well-reviewed – is the most intriguing. In a letter to close friends, Llewellyn states that

> work in structured places, the law, bureaucracy and places like that is really a killer to art in many ways. You must have a daily struggle against it. I think it's perhaps why it looks so self indulgent and eccentric to others sometimes to see artists refusing to take other jobs. But deep in their hearts I think the artists know the work is so vulnerable that it needs to be protected like a newly hatched chicken, and before that, is a hatching egg so easily killed. (224-225)

There are times when Llewellyn's prose soars, and times when the book is riveting. I found the first few sections where there are many letters crammed into a small period of time to be the most satisfying. Here we get the strongest sense of not only Llewellyn, but also of the other characters in this book; her correspondents and the people with whom Llewellyn has strong relationships. As the book goes on the letters change; certain correspondents are dropped and new ones taken up without explanation from the editors or through the letters, which makes the book much more difficult to read. The letters become more spaced out chronologically, which gives us only partial glimpses into Llewellyn's life at this time. There are apologies given to close friends for events that remain a mystery to the reader, but have obviously had an unsettling effect on Llewellyn. Or dramatic situations which are only described in cursory details and never tied up within the book. In a letter to Bob and Mandy, for instance, Llewellyn states

> Scenes of unbelievable intensity took part in the sale of this essay book. Nick Hudson went into a frenzy and with letters, faxes and phone calls daily I got tired of him . . . it was not for me to say anyway . . . it is up to Tim. It ended with Nick threatening to have a publisher come out in public and support him in his grievance case. (225)

The reader receives no indication of what this grievance might be. Another example is a letter to Ian North, in which Llewellyn writes 'But what can one make of it. "She has gone," Bob said on Sunday when I called him. Gulled and gutted . . . that's my darling Robert . . . my heart sank . . .' (244-245). "She" remains nameless, and when Llewellyn describes her as 'behaving in a demented way' (245), the reader has no idea what has transpired. Events which are obvious to the correspondent remain murky to the reader. Because of the personal nature of the letters, and because there are too many dropped threads, hints, innuendo and speculation, I found myself wanting the book to be briefer, and for the letters contained to have a stronger unifying theme – either by a smaller list of correspondents or a condensed time frame.

Bacchus and Hill state that they have 'tried in our selection to concentrate on those letters that bear some relation to Kate's writerly concerns or illuminate her role as one of Australia's prolific writers' (xiii). In this sense the book is bound to resonate most with fans of Llewellyn's writing,

or devotees of letter collections. For the rest of us the impression we get is scattered, containing, to borrow a phrase from the book ‘oddities, eccentricities, failures, luck and queerness that makes a life’ (208).

Dr Natalie Kon-yu is a lecturer at Victoria University and her critical and creative work has been published nationally and internationally. She is a contributor and commissioning editor of both Just between Us: Australian Writers Tell the Truth about Female Friendship (2013) *and* Mothers and Others: Why not all Women are Mothers and not all Mothers are the Same (2015)*. Natalie is currently researching gender bias in the publishing industry.*

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TEXT review

A tiny light in the terrible night

review by Kevin Brophy

Lajos Walder
Become a Message
Agnes Walder (trans with a foreword by Don Paterson)
Upper West Side Philosophers, New York 2015
ISBN 9781935830306
Pb 218pp USD19.00

Lajos Walder (1913-1945) was born in Hungary of a Jewish mother and Jewish father. He had two books of poetry published in his life, under the name of Lajos Vándor (Lajos the Wanderer). Though his father served in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, he was forcibly retired in 1919 without a pension because he was a Jew. He died when Lajos was eleven years old. Lajos was a brilliant student, passing his baccalaureate with straight distinctions, and becoming one of a handful of Jews allowed to study law in Hungary. He supported himself as a law student by writing plays, fairy tales, short stories and poems, by editing a literary monthly, and by working as an announcer on a children's radio program. By the time he obtained his law degree in 1937, no law firm in Budapest would hire a Jew. He worked as a labourer in a stocking factory, and had a business card printed that announced he was a 'Factory-Hand and Lyric Poet'. He married in 1939, and spent the war years as a slave labourer, dying most likely from Typhus after surviving a death march, shortly after his release from the concentration camp at Gunskirchen.

His first book of poetry, *Heads or Tails*, was published when he was twenty, and his second six years later (*Group Portrait*). There were no further publications because after 1938 works by Jews could no longer be published in Hungary.

Walder's poetry is fiercely anti-fascist and anti-communist. This is one reason, perhaps, why his poetry could not be published until after 1989 in Hungary. Lajos Walder's poetry is also anarchical, funny, tough, intimate, theatrical, earthy, and vividly alive with the energy of an irrepressible

young man. This book is his daughter's translation of his published and unpublished poetry.

Why might we want to read these poems from a young poet of the 1930s in Europe? Firstly, we have a chance to hear the voice of a poet apparently too dangerously outspoken to be allowed to be heard in his lifetime. What was it that his country was so afraid of for fifty-six years? But most importantly, Lajos Walder's poetry, modern and urgent, committed to its craft, written against its own times, composed on the run, touched by personal and larger histories, is an example of the white-hot way poetry can emerge from a life. This is an exciting book to read.

The book begins with a series of youthful self-portraits, putting on display a poetry that is remarkably close to what young poets now call 'spoken word'. These are wry, rueful, teasing monologues on what a self might look like as a museum display, how one might become a modern monk, or present one's self as seducer and lover of the sun, the moon, the clouds. Lajos Walder explored two main poetic techniques in this early poetry: the scope of personification, and the possibilities of the extended metaphor. Always, these were at the ruthless mercy of his wit. His early poem that gives a voice of solidarity to the letters of the alphabet, announcing they are going on strike, is a wonderfully provocative example of this:

> We, abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz,
> the twenty-five letters of the alphabet,
> sadly draw our conclusions
> about the current turn of events in Europe
> and are willing, if need be,
> to proclaim a general letter strike
> even on to the forty thousand letters
> of the Chinese alphabet –
> if the European nations do not alter
> the top-secret foreign policy directives
> handed to their ambassadors.
> (from 'We, the twenty-five letters of the alphabet': 24)

His poetry is no stranger to satire and irony, in fact it seems to me this was a fundamental impulse driving him to poetry:

> … when your conscience,
> having risen above sly tax evasions,
> commands you to stop
> for a little chick ambling across the road,
> then you have arrived at your Lord,
> and you may celebrate the Human Being
> in yourself ….
> (from 'Ten commandments': 65)

He sees the venal in us, he sees the herd working its dull way into the individual's psyche, the materialism around us ('You who are a role model for the middle class/and will go to Heaven by car') and he manages to capture lively images of all that disappoints him, enrages him or amuses him. His portrait of a reporter, Miss Mabel Faithful, is pricelessly funny and deeply disturbing. In part, it goes,

> I've done a report on Hitler,
> The Duce gave me an interview;

This morning my chief editor asked me
To write on 'what is love?'
(from 'Report': 87)

Her diligent inquiries on this topic are hilarious and finally land somewhere between a joke and despair.

What Lajos Walder missed, as a poet, was mid career fame and perhaps a late career freedom. In his book on late style, Edward Said commented that it is the prerogative of late style to have the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without revoking the contradictions between them. Stripped of hubris and pomposity, late style can operate unashamed of fallibility or self-assurance. It strikes me that the poetry of the young poet can also enjoy this freedom, unencumbered by a career or a reputation. There is a freedom and a polished carelessness to Walder's poetry that might have soon been lost if Lajos Walder had been recognised for the original, incisive voice that he was. He had nothing to live up to, and everything to say. And he said it. He had, for instance, no trouble identifying himself as a human being against the rising numbers of Nazis in Europe, though still with a mordant wit. At the end of the poem, 'I was About Fifteen Years Old', he writes,

And wherever I go
the old gas lamps look gratefully
up to the sky
and give thanks
that after so many brown shirts –

a human being has finally
walked by. (136)

Many of these poems are the poems of a young man in love, falling in love, wanting to be in love, feeling lustful, and at the same time fearful of venereal disease, pregnancy, abortion, marriage, commitment. Even in one of his most powerful political poems, this fear comes through:

I spit in your eye, my purulent Europe,
and ask the question:

What are you so proud of?

Is it your sanatoriums in the mountains,
crammed full of tuberculotics
or your brothels
in which hundreds of thousands are infected?
Is it your coal mines,
where men suffocate from gas
or your war industry,
which is truly developed, first rate?
(from 'Delicate Question': 91)

There is also a widely empathetic poet who wants to imagine himself into the shoes of a salesman, a clerk, a factory hand, the unemployed, or those soldiers who are lost to history as individuals and only remembered under the heading of a battle or a Division. There are more mysterious poems of love, such as the 'Key Poem', which seems to open on to the possibilities of a love that encompasses suffering and commitment beyond youthfulness. 'Expedition' is another extraordinary love poem worth the price of the book.

There are many encounters with God, who seems to be a Christian God (three of his half-siblings were brought up Catholic). In one poem he manages, as a reporter, to interview God briefly, and in another he reflects upon the ease of God's life, for God is as we know a bachelor. God always brings with 'him' the question of what might be the meaning of life.

This is the kind of poetry that resonates with some of the work of Jacques Prévert, with America's Charles Simic, with some of the early Don Paterson, with the gutsy sonnets of Trastevere's Giuseppe Belli, or with the later Adrienne Rich. There is a Swiftian disgust with humanity in tension with a powerful love for life at work in this poetry.

Lajos Walder's message, finally, is 'Become a message': 'Be a tiny light in the terrible night.' When a young writer in one of his poems bangs away all night on his typewriter in a rented room,

> at such times, the neighbours
> object furiously
> to the nocturnal disturbance of peace
>
> but a girl who
> is in love with him
> says of him
>
> that he is writing poems
> (from 'Typewriter': 94)

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TEXT review

‘Poppy-hunters, poppy-picking’

review by Clare Rhoden

Robyn Rowland
This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915
with Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel
Five Islands Press, Parkville, Vic 2015
ISBN 9780734051004
Pb 120pp AUD25.00

The 1914-1918 war – often symbolised by a poppy – has generated millions of creative responses across the decades, so that very few new works can make fresh inroads into its contested space. During the centenary of the Gallipoli landings, many creative minds have turned to the task of commemoration and mourning, and for those fascinated by the conflict, the pickings are rich. In *This Intimate War*, Robyn Rowland succeeds in bringing some new, personal, and arresting perspectives. This collection of poems offers a striking dual vision.

Creatively, the book is a triumph, and Five Islands Press is to be congratulated on the standard of its production. Like the recent centenary offering ‘Reflections on Gallipoli’ by the Australian Chamber Orchestra, *This Intimate War* offers us a hybrid, stereoscopic view of the conflict. The cover image, a reproduction of the painting ‘Mehmetçik ve Johnny Mehmetçik’ from the Canakkale series of modern Turkish artist, Fehmi Korkut Uluğ, intriguingly blends the shapes, emotions and motives of the two soldiers pictured, so that at first glance it is not clear which is the Turk and which the invader, or who is supporting whom. The decision to face each poem with its Turkish translation, while effectively halving the reading experience for those not competent in both languages, is a sharp and provocative representation of the anomaly of the Gallipoli campaign itself: two armies, previously unknown to each other, facing off in a fight to the death.

Rowland is clearly intrigued by Gallipoli’s associations to legendary Troy, as were many of the allied soldiers who fought there in 1915. In ‘The

Folly of Myth', she makes explicit connections:

> They came with their own Trojan horse,
> the refitted collier River Clyde,
> mouths sliced out of her steel sides to disgorge men. (26)

In this passage, the allied soldiers do not descend from the belly of the Trojan horse but are vomited onto the shore, much in the manner of the malformed offspring of the disgusting Errour in Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'. Rowland deliberately makes repeated interchanges between the 'hero' (Trojan) allusions and the less heroic, 'invader' identity of the Allies. These fluctuating perspectives provide valuable reflections on the nature of war and warfare.

Perspective shifts invade these poems, challenging the reader with unexpected voices and sights, as the point of view, space and even the time frame oscillate throughout. In one line, we may be in the thought-stream of a young Turkish soldier, and in the next, we observe through the consciousness of a twenty-first century parent of sons. This device is used repeatedly in 'Ways of Seeing': in 'Section I, Sketches at Gallipoli', we first watch watercolour artist Major Leslie Hore, then are addressed by the poet, and then enter the consciousness of a Maori Anzac:

> He'd wanted to paint…
> you wonder at the ferocity…
> 'I am well,' wrote Huira Rewha. (98)

While at first disconcerting, this technique underscores the multiplicity of viewpoints, the fragmentation of individual experience, and the pathetic confusion of war. Rowland captures each perspective for a fleeting moment, and then bends that moment into manifold refractions.

This split voice is not the only creative trope Rowland uses to raise our awareness about the insane absurdity of war. She also repeatedly pulls us up short, just as we begin to relax into the rhythm and texture of a poem, by inserting a harsh, immoveable, stolid fact, often in the shape of a confronting number or statistic. For example, in 'The Folly of Myth', Rowland provides a lengthy and detailed exposition of the muddled bases on which the Gallipoli plan rested, demonstrating, as others have before her, the fundamental senselessness of the entire episode:

> For eight months they fought on with no real gain.
> Landed time and again into a blaze of scarlet loss, a
> shredding wind
> of bullets, the young of nations far away broke themselves
> open
> … So much they didn't know. (28)

Here the specificity of phrases such as

> drowned by the weight of their own gear on the shallows –
> 84 pounds full pack; 250 rounds of ammunition; 3 days'
> rations (26)

wrenches us from the emotive intensity that has been building throughout this three-part poem, and insists that we note the reality of the situation. The final lines, too, are prosaically direct:

> You think of waste. And you know –
> there never was a need for another Troy. (28)

If, indeed, there was ever need for an initial Troy.

Impressive as some of the longer pieces are – some, indeed, engage our attention with the holding power of a verse novel – Rowland is, I consider, much more successful when she turns her attention to the individual experience rather than the relation of the historical events. Some passages resonate with extraordinary clarity and economy, glowing from their longer settings like animated jewels. Such lines remain with us indelibly. For example, the last verse of 'Sky Fighting' could stand alone without reducing the impact of the entire poem:

> they seem so free, up high in the blue open sky
> able to fly away from the bloody un-limbed day
> free to un-see, to un-hear, to un-know
> the sharp business of metal resculpting flesh, unaware,
> those flying coffins have a flimsy lifetime in their flight.
> (76)

Similarly, the entirety of the bereaved mother of 'Second skin' is eloquently captured in the spare opening lines:

> Sticky veil, this grief,
> second skin impervious to the touch. (94)

This Intimate War explores consciousness and context well beyond our typical Australian appropriation of Gallipoli to ourselves – that narrow understanding of ours that diminishes the entire Gallipoli peninsula to single, bloodied, narrow beach at Anzac Cove. Rowland presents us with a myriad of those involved. Here we have words from (and for) Allied troops of many backgrounds, from the Turks, from women on the production line at home, from widows, from bereaved mothers, from child soldiers and from those left to care for the disabled. Rowland is so comfortable with the Irish and their problematic, un-reconciled Great War experience that 'The Green Road' may be somewhat mysterious to many Australian readers. I hope they follow up their confusion with more reading about this defining war.

Rowland's treatment of the Great War is, of course, informed by much of the writing that has preceded it, and sometimes leans a little heavily on well-worn tropes. Yet unlike the protest poems of Wilfred Owen, Rowland's work captures more than fleeting, individual cries of hopelessness and despair. *This Intimate War* is a well-informed, twenty-first century interpretation which adds important perspectives to our consideration of this war in particular, and of war in general.

Clare Rhoden's book The Purpose of Futility: Writing WWI, Australian Style*, was published by UWAP Scholarly in 2015. Her latest short fiction, 'Man/Machine/Dog' appeared in* Overland *215 (Winter 2014). Clare completed a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne where she works as Teaching and Academic Resource Coordinator in the Department of Management and Marketing.*

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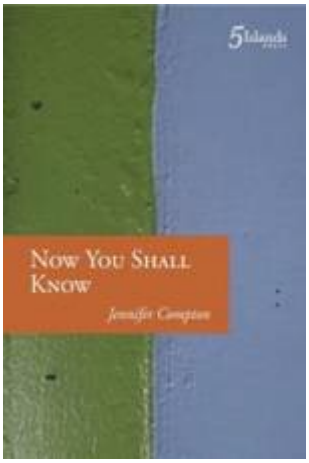
TEXT review

‘close to the grief room’

review by Jo Langdon



Jennifer Compton
Now You Shall Know
Five Islands Press, Parkville, Vic 2015
ISBN 9780734050366
Pb 86pp AUD24.95

As its title intimates, Jennifer Compton’s *Now You Shall Know* is a collection comprised of disclosures – a book that, from the very outset, promises to confess, reveal or impart. Largely narrative-driven, the poems traverse experiences of loss and grief, time and ageing, and love and its complicated legacies. The collection is divided into a sequence of six sections entitled ‘… awaiting our delivery’; ‘… oh’; ‘… a rapt downwards look’; ‘… in the long run’; ‘… wrenched backwards’ and ‘… somehow urgent’. As the ellipses might indicate, these titles are drawn from the lines of the poems they announce, and they are certainly indicative of each section’s mood and focus. Individually and cumulatively, these works negotiate the spaces of memory in often ‘wrenching’ and ‘urgent’ ways, blending dry humour, the colloquial and the direct with lyrical and occasionally figurative moments, often to striking effect.

The initial, eponymous poem opens mid-air: ‘The aeroplane is hung in the sky from a clever hook, so we seem / to inhabit a thrumming stillness, but we believe we are travelling / forward’ (11). Composed in three sections, ‘Now You Shall Know’ shifts from the kinds of ‘transportations’ in-flight modes of entertainment allow – there is the ‘monstrous beauty’ of the opera singer Maria Callas’s ‘high / anguish’ – to the immediate setting of the passenger plane, when the aria’s ‘resolution to come’ is interrupted by the ‘paroxysm’ of another traveller’s cough. The two ensuing sections reveal familial memories – a mother and daughter sharing a bed as adults: ‘Two old women waking to the new day’ (12) – and bring the poem to its ultimate subject at its close:

> I read that poem — she says — *the one* …
> ah yes — that one — the one about … we are in the busy corridor of
>
> the hospital close to the grief room. And I know that she will die soon.
> This is the hospital where I was born. Once again she reaches for all
>
> her strength and pushes me away from her. *I didn't know* — she says.
> And that is enough. *Go* — the voice in my head says — *just go. Now.* (13)

This poem, which won the Newcastle Poetry Prize in 2013, sets the tone and perhaps the overarching preoccupations of the works to follow. *Now You Shall Know* contains a number of elegies and elegiac poems, most of which centre on the death of the poet's (or the speaker of the poems') mother. (The dedication 'For Dorothy Compton 1926-2011' provides a context that does seem to invite an autobiographical reading.) As 'okay the year of first anniversaries' exemplifies, the poems that centre on loss and grief are often ambivalent in their approach:

> — mother's day, my birthday, the day she wouldn't talk to me all the way home in the tram because i hadn't won — all the days she and i celebrated together have had their due allotment — today is the first anniversary of the day of her death — she is truly dead — i got flowers at the supermarket — yellow tulips — i put them into the vase i had bought at an op shop that she had talked me into giving her — because she was so greedy because she was so needy — but now i have it again — and they are very beautiful — the yellow tulips, the fluted smoky rose-pink vase — lie down Mother lie down and die — (19)

There is a patent sense of unresolved, perhaps irrepressible hurt. Not only does this poem illustrate the kinds of milestones and memories that affect our sense of time, place and being, it draws attention to the role of physical artefacts (often suggestively brittle or delicate) in experiences of grief and remembrance. The preceding poem, 'Provenance' similarly recalls the mother's 'glass dog with one leg missing, which could stand if braced / against the side mirror of the dressing table' (18). The poem closes, openly or irresolutely, with: 'Does anyone know that my toast rack shaped like a swan / was a wedding present from great-aunt Nell back in 1971?'

Inheritance figures as something more physical and particular in poems such as 'Your Mother, My Daughter, And You, Her Son'. Compton writes of her grandson, who appears across a number of poems:

> You are more like your mother than anyone else.
>
> For one moment on the 3D pic they took of you in utero
> you were the image of your father, your mother tells me
> babies do that because fathers need to know, they lack
> confidence. (26)

The understated wit here is more overt in poems such as 'The Shock', which twins playful overstatement or redundancy with affecting depictions

of sudden, distressing news and the vivid, visceral recollections such news can evoke:

> The shock arrives shockingly down the wire
> you will always remember
> that pause, before she spoke
> and how the air you breathed
> changed shape. (14)

The poem's next lines feature wordplays – 'The conversation that was afoot / limps on' – and illustrates the connotative charge of language. Something 'monstrous' is 'putrid snot-green'.

'After the Wake' is similarly comic and dark at once, depicting siblings gathering for a photograph, and telling how

> The one who had scanned the family album
> for the funeral slide show had complained
> how there were shocking gaps
> no photo of her with this one or that
> so now whichever of us went first
> there would be a pic of all of us
> together
> holding on to each other's hands. (16)

Stylistically, the centred layout of a number of poems seems a curious choice, and can tend at times to distract from the language and imagery at hand, although this might be a personal preference (or aversion) on my part. Throughout the collection, the language is often charged by a wry tone that works to instil some of the poems' familiar phrases – 'snowball's chance of that' (12); 'I wept buckets' (57); 'the stars in their eyes' (63) – with a sense of self-reflexivity. Some of the strongest pieces, for me, are those that deliver the often startling perspective of children, reminding us of the ways in which a child's vision can see things 'anew': '*That was a rabbit* — I said. // *It can't have been a rabbit. It didn't have any ears*. A child / sometimes knows best' (82).

Carefully layered, cleverly shifting poems such as 'we are farmed out' and 'He Made Promises She Never Forgot' also create avenues for alternate points of view, serving as powerful reminders that there is never a 'single' story. Altogether, these poems distil scenes that shimmer and darken by turns (or at once), inviting their reader not only close to an ambivalent, difficult grief, but to acknowledge and remember various yet interconnected experiences of trauma and pain – and the ways in which humour is often very much part of the texture of such occurrences and their impressions, too.

Jo Langdon's first collection of poetry, Snowline *(2012), was co-winner of the 2011 Whitmore Press Manuscript Prize. Her recent poems, short stories and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in* Cordite Poetry Review*,* Mascara Literary Review*,* Australian Book Review*,* Westerly *and* Overland. *She has a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from Deakin University, where she currently teaches in Literary Studies.*

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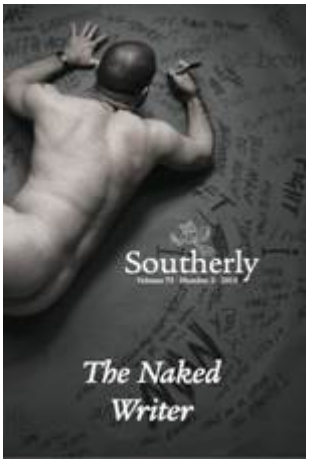
TEXT review

‘You can not hide what is in your bones’

review by Helen Gildfind



Southerly: The Naked Writer
David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon (eds)
Volume 73, Number 3
The Journal of the English Association
Brandl & Schlesinger, Sydney 2013
ISBN 9781921556692
Pb 272pp AUD29.95

In typical *Southerly* style, *The Naked Writer* draws together excellent essays, poetry, reviews and fiction into one dense and sophisticated edition. As David Brooks explains in his editorial, this issue is loosely themed around the ‘nakedness’ of writers, from their moral and metaphoric nakedness, to their literary acts of allusion, exposure, dissection and exhumation (6-7).

Throughout the journal, over a dozen poems break up the analytic density of essayistic discussion with a diverse range of original voices. The editors have allowed room for compelling poetic sequences like Tracy Ryan’s ‘Hoard’ poems, Paul Summers’ ‘the blade & the lamb’, and Jacob Ziguras’ award winning extended poem ‘Vanity Fair’. Roo Stove’s poem ‘*Panel II: Three Steps’* is a particularly striking work, born from the poet’s response to Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Judith Slaying Holofernes* 1611-12. Its bare simplicity evokes a truly empathetic engagement with the blunt physical and psychological traumas associated with this painting and its painter. The poem’s abrupt lines seem to stab angry accusation at all those who, throughout time, have neither cared about, nor comprehended, the life-wounding harm they’ve done to others:

> When I was five I was raped and set alight,
> I did not feel it for years and I felt nothing but it forever.
> Some get away with murder.

> He did.
> I am not the me I began as.
> She is dead.
>
> […]
>
> I am not the me I began as.
> I am the damage. (227)

The haunting universality of Stove's poem immediately made me think of the stories of sadism and injustice that are currently coming out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

This collection's fiction includes Meredith Downes' 'Anatomically Correct', a story which exposes the intimacies of a medical student's misogynistic humiliation by her professional superiors as she learns her trade through dissection:

> They do not give me male cadavers. I am too delicate and my audience, too eager. Driven to distraction, if I say the word scrotum, if I handle a penis. I push back folds of flesh that could have been my own. (114)

Downes' story, from which this review's title derives (114), is as much poem as prose, each word bearing the weight of its careful selection, allowing the narrator to immerse us in her self-dividing struggle to find her way in a world that seems choreographed by and for men:

> I build walls of books. They are my first line of defence. Fact is sharper than any blade. Life can be reduced to parts unseen. Even man can be measured. (114)

Nike Sulway's story, 'The Lost Man', is also located in the impersonal/too personal world of medicine and memory, while Tessa Lunney's 'The Mare' offers a timely, nightmarish and humanising evocation of a nameless refugee's struggle to survive a terrifyingly indifferent, war-wrecked world. John A Scott's extended, closely observed, and masterfully paced experimental text, 'André Breton in Melbourne', really begs for a review of its own.

The essays in this collection are of an extremely high standard. Three writers look at representations of homosexual/homosocial desire and relationships in literature. Ann-Marie Priest sensitively explores Gwen Harwood's poetry about her mentor and friend Vera Cottew. Priest argues that these poems are 'transgressive' (27) for they allowed Harwood to begin a new literary tradition which reified – but refused to classify – female love and friendship. Robert Darby offers a close and sensitive reading of Martin Boyd's *Scandal of Spring,* focussing on themes typically neglected by other critics, whilst Peter Mitchell discusses Gary Dunne's fiction and its determined foregrounding of gay male perspectives on the 'changing historical effects' of HIV/AIDS in Sydney in the 1980s (228).

Other essays include Michael Buhagiar's discussion of AC Swinburne's influence on Christopher Brennan, Alex Miller's anecdotal account of his 'most magically trusting epistolary friendship' (17) with the 'bewilderingly fine' biographer Hazel Rowley (15), and Michelle Borzi's retrospective on the 'imprecise deist' (122) Chris Wallace-Crabbe. One of the best essays I have read in a long time is Scott Esposito's exquisitely crafted and sincerely felt discussion of JM Coetzee's literary wrestlings

with ‘the horrors of existential meaninglessness’ (96). Esposito argues that Coetzee’s work tries to reshape the modernist legacy of doubt into something that speaks to today when the ‘tragedy of a life free from meaning is no longer dreadful – it is just another thing … a complacent familiarity with the unspeakable’ (97-98). The love and respect that drive these essayists’ work models critical reading and writing at its very best. As Esposito states: ‘In literature we live our narratives in someone else’s fictions … authors like Coetzee momentarily let our hands grasp others’ (110). Likewise, great essayists help us find the hands that might help us the most.

The rest of this edition includes thoughtful book reviews on Melissa Lucashenko, John Kinsella and Pam Brown, plus two more thematically tangential essays that have clearly been included for their quality and originality. Ellin Williams offers a historical and mythical history of the Jenolan Caves, and uses personal narrative to evoke the timeless human experience of the cave’s suffocating ‘true dark’ (207). Rowena Lennox explores the mythical, fictional and factual narratives which perpetuate or negate the bloody collisions between canine and human worlds. She effectively shows how the dingo/dogs’ fate is drastically determined by whether we see them as predating pests, or – as indigenous people do – ancestral ‘kin’. Lennox reminds us that the stories we write for, about and against voiceless others are stories that not only determine their fate but define our (in)humanity.

If you are in doubt as to the quality or relevance of *Southerly* check out their free online companion site, *Long Paddock*. Here you can read reviews, essays and poetry that may well convince you to support this journal by buying it, reading it and discussing it so its voices and visions are disseminated into in a world where the topical and shallow reign.

Helen Gildfind lives in Melbourne and has published reviews, essays, short stories and poetry in Australia and overseas. She is currently seeking publication for a collection of short stories she wrote with the aid of an Australia Council Grant. One of these stories, ‘Quarry’, will be published in Griffith Review *Novella Project III.*

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TEXT review

Speaking of dreams

review by Ruby Todd

Southerly: Australian Dreams 1
David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon (eds)
Volume 74, Number 2
The Journal of the English Association
Brandl & Schlesinger, Sydney 2014
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An affirmatory reimagining of the jeremiad – that historical synergy of lamentation and prophetic warning in oration and writing, beloved of preachers, politicians and revolutionaries alike for its rousing potential – runs overtly and covertly throughout Volume 74 (2) of *Southerly*.

The potential of the jeremiad to also be didactic, totalising and blindly ideological in expounding an agenda might explain co-editor David Brooks's ambivalence toward it when, recognising the tone of his editorial in its roll-call of oversights, outrages and losses – humanitarian, political, ecological – of our nation, he states, '[t]he list goes on, and on, but I don't want to deliver a Jeremiad' (2014: 9). As Brooks asserts, our national reality at present is one in which many of the values constituting the dream(s) of Australia are at stake. However, he emphatically resists appealing by way of contrast to some mythical Australian origin, a prelapsarian ideal from which we have fallen. To do so, Brooks notes, would be to negate the long history of violence and destruction – of Indigenous people, and of our natural environment to start with – which have been ongoing since the time of European settlement. Brooks also recognises that a singular "Australian dream" does not exist, and instead emphasises the plurality and subjectivity of Australian *dreams*, a spirit to which the disparate visions collected in this issue of *Southerly* all broadly attest. As Brooks cautions, '[o]ne person's dream is another's poison. The very idea of 'Australia' is a nightmare to some' (2014: 8).

The Australian dreams which the essays, poems and stories of this issue variously trouble, dismantle and lament are wide-ranging. Mobilised by concerns of social, political, economic and environmental justice, they navigate questions of individual and collective responsibility and agency, philosophy and policy, social and political complicity, and how to move forward. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the overwhelming tone is elegiac and searching, preoccupied by ethical conundrums and how to think through them.

In 'Against Progress: Dreams, Nightmares, and the Meaning of Abbott', one of several stand-out essays, Joshua Mostafa examines what he determines to be the ethical vacuity of political leadership, and the fear and complacency that permits and fuels it. In doing so, Mostafa also speaks to what he sees as the dark irony of the Liberal interpretation of "progress", which, he argues, continues to insidiously negate the very concept of hospitality as the ethics of relating to the other. Discussing our present and previous governments' treatment of refugees and distortion of the relevant statistical realities, Mostafa asks, 'how is it that the policies of short-sighted pursuit of personal gain, selfishness and a rabid defence of territory have such currency in the body politic of the 'lucky country'?' (104). To this end, Mostafa examines the problems of 'economic triumphalism' (105) and its reliance on negative ideology rooted in fear, and short term economic self-interest – permitting such decisions as the carbon tax repeal – and a commitment to an 'idea of progress…bound up in imperialist expansion, and the violent displacement [of indigenous people]' (108). Mostafa wonders how 'a revitalised politics of social justice, hospitality, and respect for ecology' (110) might develop without old ideas of progress, and whether the Australian dream is possible without it. In the cautionary lament of his conclusion, Mostafa too strikes an understandably jeremiadic tone:

> The plundering of the earth on which our current way of life depends cannot go on indefinitely… Perhaps the settler society of Australia, that has found it so hard to utter even cheap words of apology, will find it easier to cry for help – if it's not too late. (111)

Hannah Forsyth's penetrating and acerbic analysis of Australian universities in 'Dreaming of Higher Education', explores 'the dreams Australian academics often think they have lost', while also considering 'who *else* the dream is for', and the potential for 'bigger dreams than our institutions currently offer or represent' (120). Forsyth interrogates the narrative of what she calls a '"jeremiad" genre' (120), which she describes as involving scholars lamenting the lost dream of an academe which nurtures scholarly freedom and passion, and its erosion by economic rationalism and bureaucratic hoop-jumping. This, Forsyth contends, 'is a whiney literature that does not recognise the sad truth that unscrupulous, elite professorial boys clubs of the past probably earned the increased scrutiny that made some of this happen' (120). In arguing that academics themselves have been insidiously complicit in perpetuating gender, class, and racial inequities in tertiary education, Forsyth also reminds us that the act of teaching offers means for change, suggesting that any viable dream for the Australian university must be a more inclusive and plural dream, grounded in a 'lived political commitment to our students that turns our classrooms into laboratories for change' (137). Not everyone will agree with Forsyth's weightings of blame, and certainly a more sustained engagement seems necessary with how the effects of casualisation, career insecurity and increasing workloads in our universities might undermine

the agency of so many teaching academics to fully realise such a 'lived political commitment to students'. Regardless, Forsyth's analysis represents an incisive contribution to ongoing discussions concerning the future of universities nationally and globally.

Alongside Mostafa and Forsyth in the chorus of critical inquiry is a moving and incisive call for Aboriginal self-determination by Jim Everett, but there are also voices just as searching, in other registers: a lyric essay by Frank Moorhouse examines personal intersections between encounters with wilderness and the formation of self; a short story by Cecilia Harris navigates the metaphorical richness of snow; and a poem by Judith Rodriguez recalls the 2001 SIEVX refugee boat tragedy whose victims 'have no memorial/ but the love that could not hold them/ and the care that was their due' (117-8).

This is a timely collection of work by a constellation of writers at pains to reckon with the realities of Australian dreams past and present, in order to imagine and actively move toward a future in which social justice, racial equality and respect for ecology are reflected not only in the way we dream, but also in the way we live. As Brooks reminds us, realising such a future demands we each recognise our responsibility for it, and resist 'the assumption that others will do the speaking for us. If *we* leave it to others, then we give tacit permission for others to do so also' (11). In this way, *Australian Dreams 1* speaks to Kate Rigby's call for visionary writing which aims to 'awaken us to another way of thinking and being', and to compel 'just and compassionate action' (Rigby 2009).

Works cited

Rigby, K 2009 'Writing in the Anthropocene: idle chatter or ecoprophetic witness?' *Australian Humanities Review:* http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2009/rigby.html (accessed 15 August 2015) return to text

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