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Editorial Introduction

Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literary and artistic conceptions may seem far removed from the complex, global materialism that characterises contemporary culture, yet many ideas associated with historical Romanticism continue to influence the study and practice of creative writing throughout the world. This is partly because of the power and diversity of the Romantic legacy – so many fine writers are associated with Romanticism – and partly because Romanticism continues to inform the contemporary zeitgeist in a variety of complex ways. J.M. Fitzgerald contends that one of Romanticism's best known works, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* ushered in the idea 'that each individual constructs themselves … and that each individual's story is his or her own unique[ly]' (2002: 101). This fundamental and far-reaching idea of the (more-or-less) separate self remains with us, however much it may have been reinflected by postmodernity.

This Special Issue of *TEXT* explores a variety of ways in which the Romantic legacy is both meaningful and problematic for contemporary writers, particularly those who are studying and working within universities in Australia. Romantic ideas and assumptions were brought to Australia when the British colonised the continent, dispossessing the Indigenous communities who occupied it and sustainably managed its environment. Since colonisation, the Romantic legacy has always been invested in Australia with problematic ideas about culture, the land, and human rights. Such issues are part of Australia's literary heritage, too, and many historical and contemporary literary works are engaged with teasing out Romantic tropes and their Australian implications.

This Romantic legacy remains important whether writers are explicitly engaged with it or take it for granted. In either case, it inflects so many modes of thought and expression that it may be understood as a ghost in postmodernity's machine, and also as the unresolved problematic at the heart of contemporary notions of Australian identity. As this issue of *TEXT* explores ideas connected to this legacy, it ranges widely, examining the making of self and being, how writers use lived experience and embodied emotion in the production of their work, how they interrogate constructions of nature and identity, and how they reflect practically and theoretically on the discipline of writing. All contributors engage with Romantic or post-Romantic cultural and literary ideas and, in a contemporary Australian context, this includes how notions of authorship are inflected with themes of loss and connection or disconnection from place.

It is well known that historical Romanticism began as a European cultural movement in art, music, literature, philosophy and politics operating from the late 1700s to the 1830s,

and flourishing slightly later in north America. Its lasting significance is due to the changes it brought about in how human beings living in these 'Western' cultures thought about themselves and acted in their worlds, and because many Romantic notions took hold in Western cultures and societies in a way that has seen them persist into the present, often as insufficiently examined assumptions about humanity, culture and the relationship of creative artists to their works. Romanticism became so closely tied to ideas of individual liberty that the very notion of Romanticism sometimes seems to carry with it a revolutionary flag of freedom.

Yet, Romanticism was many different things at once – partly an imaginative response to the changes in rural landscapes wrought by industrialisation, and also a literary, social and political response to war, slavery and an evolving economic order. Its exponents addressed the human perspective by exploring the ideas of the self mentioned above, as well as the unity between thought and emotion, and concepts such as the sublime, divine wilderness and human liberty. Among Romanticism's assumptions is the notion that the individual is heroically embattled, struggling to break free of the chains imposed by the social order to create a way of living in creative harmony with nature (McArdle,1977, 250). Such ideas remain potent but, as the world has changed, many Romantic notions need to be challenged or reinflected if they are to be understood in twenty-first century terms.

From its earliest phases, Romanticism entailed a sense of loss. William Blake's eighteenth-century poetic vision of urban apocalypse captures a sense of encroaching destruction. His poem, 'London', published in 1794, speaks of 'chartered' streets and a 'chartered' Thames. In the city's people he sees 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe' and hears in every voice and cry 'mind-forged manacles' (2015: 289). In William Wordsworth's poem 'Old Cumberland Beggar' (1798) the nostalgia for an imagined pastoral tranquility is reflected in the wandering figure whose existence is deeply connected with an uncontained natural world, threatened by the 'din of industry' (2006: 274-77).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge alludes to this same sense of nostalgia when in 1797 he writes of his friend Charles Lamb who 'hunger'd after Nature, many a year,/ In the great City pent' (1997: 138). The idea of creativity itself as a divine prize snatched from suffering is reflected variously in the work, lives and deaths of the Romantic poets, from Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) and John Keats (1795-1821), to Felicia Hemans (1793-1835). This idea of loss would extend beyond European shores, when the impact of colonisation took full force as the nineteenth century progressed.

The history of the European colonisation of Australia and New Zealand is closely linked to eighteenth century European culture and economic developments. Romanticism's inauguration as a cultural movement, customarily connected to the publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 (Corn, 1999), occurred during the period that both French and British expeditions were in active pursuit of *Terra Australis* (Sankey, 2010; Wantrup, 1988). The theme of loss and nostalgia for the past was common to both of these enterprises, despite their vastly different emphases. As Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Hemans, Yearsley and Barbauld wrote of the people and places of rural England during a time when they were facing encroaching enclosure and

exploitation, Britain set out to expand their colonial territories even prior to the American Declaration of Independence.

They embarked on fresh colonial enterprises including, from the 1760s, expeditions to the Pacific. Coleman writes of:

> a persistent utopian and Romantic strand of imagining about the shape of new world colonies in the late eighteenth century … This longing, especially keen in the years following the American revolution, generated numerous fantasies about establishing colonies that might compensate Britain for its losses. (2005: 1)

For the indigenous peoples of the Pacific, including the antipodes, the temporal, spatial and spiritual dimensions of identity and belonging were irrevocably and unceremoniously disrupted (Povinelli, 49).

Since colonisation, then, the influence of Romanticism has been reflected variously in western literature and scholarship. The tenor of many contemporary works is to a significant extent post-Romantic, dwelling on the individual's self-conception and development in ways that Wordsworth would not find completely unfamiliar. Post-Romantic influences are also evident in cultural conceptions of authorship (Barthes, 1977); the role of embodied inquiry in creative writing (Krauth 2010); and even in the development of the prose poem. Cassandra Atherton and Paul Hetherington have recently argued that:

> while the Romantic fragment may initially have developed as a literary mode in response to Romantic ideals and preoccupations, in the last 35 years the fragment has been rejuvenated in the form of prose poetry. (2016: 33-34)

Even the discipline of writing within universities owes a significant part of its inheritance to Romanticism and, indeed, the first use of the term creative writing has been ascribed to the American Romantic Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1837 (Dale, 2011). With Henry Thoreau, Emerson was at the forefront of the Transcendentalist movement in American, which celebrated nature as the locus of spiritual and imaginative life (Buell, 1995, 117) and which sought to articulate a newly constructive idea of humanity and the potential of its social and intellectual life. Along with many of their British predecessors and contemporaries, the ideas of Emerson and Thoreau have persisted in ways that have contributed to the post-colonial Australian response to Romanticism (Bristow, 2012) – in utopian experiments such as progressive education, the creation of intentional communities and the 'back to nature' movements of the mid-twentieth century.

The practice of eco-criticism in Australasia and its relationship with the recent emergence of environmental humanities as a broad disciplinary field also owe something to nineteenth-century Emersonian transcendentalist ideas. As Zeller and Cranston demonstrate, however, Antipodean eco-criticism has adopted a transnational stance, establishing a program of engagement with diverse places and cultures with an emphasis on 'inclusivity and interconnectivity' (2007, 8-10). This is important, they argue, as a way of challenging the limits of the literary canon and its interrogators, opening possibilities for many different kinds of literary engagements, particularly those grounded in a sense of the tangibility and urgency of place.

Creative writers have been engaging with place for centuries, within many different cultural contexts. The Romantic heritage is only one strand in the fabric of the

contemporary cultural representation of place and identity. Its legacy has been important, nonetheless, in shaping the ways that creative writers since the late eighteenth century have explored nature and the city. This includes, but is not limited to, how notions of lived experience and authorship are reflected in writing through connections, or disconnections, from wilderness, rural and industrialised landscapes, the rise of the post-post-colonial city and the discourse of encroaching environmental decay that urbanisation still invokes.

The aim in the Special Issue is partly to set out some terms for a re-consideration of Romanticism's legacy for the field of creative writing, in part with reference to the condition of reflective loss and encroachment. If postmodern arguments about authenticity and representation have been balanced by advancing species extinction and the damage and dire implicatons of climate change, to what extent does the work of the imagination remain important in exploring our understanding of the human connection to other lives and other ways of living? Further, what is the role of the writer in advancing social and cultural understanding? The contributions to this Special Issue explore these and related topics.

With reference to Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan', Kim Wilkins investigates the matrices of writing and temporality in relation to the challenges of creative practice through interviews with three Australian authors. Her article probes connections between the sublime and the mundane, and between the individual and the collective, argung that creative writing takes place neither wholly within nor without the Romantic ideal's experiential boundaries. Romantic ideas of authenticity and individuality in relation to the iterated processes of making a text are explored by Marcelle Freiman, with a particular focus on Wordsworth's poem 'The Waggoner'. She is concerned to articulate the way language-use is bound up in social acts of communication and how this connects to constructions of subjectivity.

Willo Drummond contends that lyric poetry is often conflated with a reductive view of Romanticism and looks to the work of Australian poet Robert Adamson to present the lyric as a performative mode which engages in an ethical discourse via reader answerability. Through comparing the poetry of Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) and Alice Oswald (1966-), and ways in which their works do not conform to the Romantic assumptions they have inherited, Anne Stuart presents a contemporary ecopoetic critique of Romantic notions of nature and the sublime.

Cassandra Atherton and Alyson Miller analyse Japanese hibakusha (atomic bomb survivor) poetry as an example of the nuclear sublime, which they argue best captures the devastation of atomic warfare and conveys a message of hope for the future because of its emphasis on the economy of expression and symbolic transformation. Susan Pyke is also interested in reinflecting the Romantic sublime, reading Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and Charlotte Wood's *The Natural Way of Things* (2015) as a way into reappraising this concept in terms of a sublime metamorphosis. In doing so, she emphasises the way these works inflect human/nonhuman relations and resist ideas of human exceptionality.

The emergence of a new multimodal awareness of space and place in contemporary writing is Catherine Noske's focus, as she critiques the subject/object dichotomy. She

draws from movement (walking) as an integral feature of creative practice in ways that re-envision the Romantic idea of the poet wanderer and argues that it is possible to trace in this writing an act of self-manifestation: a layering of self and space that is akin to and in opposition to the tradition of Romantic thought. The archetype of the 'auto-intoxicated poet', so closely associated with Romanticism, is challenged by Maria Takolander. Her socio-material approach to creativity sees it as a process that must be understood beyond the limited paradigm of the special individual, positioning the creative practitioner in terms of material, social and/or cultural relations.

Harriet Gaffney examines how ideas about race and sovereignty were normalised through the expedient use of writing in colonial Australia, with reference to Joseph Tice Gellibrand. She emphasises the role of the written word in the establishment of authority, property and ownership in colonial Australia and in legitimating the unlawful and concludes that creative writing can help to bring about social change and unsettle notions of white settlement. Linda Hassall shows how contemporary Australian Gothic drama explores the paradoxes of being and perception in relation to notions of *evil* in the Romantic sense through a discussion about her work on the dramatization of human alienation from ecologies of landscape, place and space.

Chantelle Bayes reflects on some of Romanticism's legacies for nature writing and investigates how contemporary writers both draw on and resist the established conventions. Bayes argues that Australian cities provide sites where nature/culture relationships might be re-imagined, complicating notions of place, nature and the urban to arrive at new post-Romantic ways of writing nature. Hasti Abbasi and Stephanie Green investigate creative dislocation and necessity of the writer as exiled self through reflections on the traction and slippages between ideas of place, dislocation and writing with reference to David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*.

The idea for this Special Issue emerged from a workshop held in December 2014 at Griffith University, convened by Paul Hetherington, with Stephanie Green and Stuart Cooke as part of a mentoring project which Green established with a group of early career researchers at Griffith University. Two of the emerging scholars who presented in-progress work at that event appear in this Special Issue, Chantelle Bayes and Hasti Abbasi. Bayes has, in addition, made a significant contribution to this collection of papers as Research Assistant for the publication project and we thank her sincerely. We also warmly thank all contributors and the colleagues who kindly gave time as referees.

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