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‘Rupture and rapture all at once’: Queer Australian fiction 2000-2014

Abstract:

This article provides a critical survey of queer Australian fiction spanning fifteen years from 2000 to 2014. Forty works of fiction in the forms of novels and short story collections are discussed. The survey is organised by a series of modes that I argue are prevalent within queer Australian fiction: contemporary realism, surrealism, historical novels and cosmopolitanism.

Biographical note:

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Introduction

Queer Australian fiction of the twenty-first century is alive, inventive, challenging and nuanced. It can perhaps best be summed up by a phrase from Marion May Campbell's novel *Shadow Thief* (2006): 'Rupture and rapture all at once' (283). This richness persists even without many of the avenues that existed for writers in the 1980s and 1990s. Support once offered by gay magazines such as *Outrage* and *Campaign* and, importantly, Australia's first gay and lesbian publisher Black Wattle Press, has ceased now that these publications no longer exist. Established queer writers such as Christos Tsiolkas, Dorothy Porter and Fiona McGregor may have cemented their literary reputations by the 2000s, but ways for new voices to be heard have been fraught despite the emergence of new e-publishing platforms and the continual (although always conditional) willingness of the local publishing industry to support new works of queer fiction. In many ways, this survey builds on, and is a companion to, Michael Hurley's *A Guide to Gay and Lesbian Writing in Australia* (1996), Damien Barlow and Leigh Dale's chapter 'Gay and Lesbian writing in Australia' (2007) and Hurley's more recent essay 'Gay and Lesbian writing and publishing in Australia, 1961–2001' (2010). Taken together, this scholarship charts the growth of Australian gay and lesbian writing and publishing from the early 1900s to the early 2000s and covers a range of genres from fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, young adult fiction and non-fiction. This survey spans the fifteen years from 2000 to 2014 and is concerned with exploring – sometimes fleetingly and sometimes in more depth – forty 'queer' novels and short story collections that are 'Australian' by virtue of the author's home and/or nationality.

Definitional dilemmas

That stated, however, to link the term 'queer' to 'Australian fiction' raises some key definitional dilemmas. Is 'queer Australian fiction' just a shorthand way of describing the literary productions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities within the geographical space called Australia? More specifically, should the criterion for inclusion be the non-normative sexuality of the author, or is the actual content of the literary work in question more pertinent? If content is taken as the chief criterion over a more dubious and unstable notion of authorship, then is inclusion grounded in representing queer characters and scenarios, or is it the form, genre and politics of the literary text that make it queer? In this critical survey I have no desire to provide definitive answers to these questions. Rather, in the spirit of queerness, I want to keep them in play as open, contested and contingent concerns. Generally, queer epistemologies have been mobilised in the service of non-normative sexualities and desires to denaturalise heterosexuality and its status as pre-given, *a priori* and timeless. As Nikki Sullivan argues, queer theories aim 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them' (2001: vi). Or put more simply by Noreen Giffney and Myra Hird, queer thinking attempts to 'undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries' (2011: 4).

So, in order to avoid a prescriptive, normative account of what queer Australian fiction is, I include authors who identify as queer, but also those who do not. Content is also an important criterion, as are the literary modes employed by authors. That said, this survey is divided into a series of themes and trends that I argue are prevalent in twenty-first century queer Australian fiction: contemporary realism, surrealism, historical fiction and cosmopolitanism. But these categories are not intended as discrete: sometimes a text will traverse one or more and, even in a few cases, all four of these. A prime example of this promiscuousness, and the multifaceted forms queer Australian fiction can take, is astutely demonstrated by Marion May Campbell's fourth novel, *Shadow Thief*, mentioned above. Campbell's work is a richly textured twin *Bildungsroman* (or, coming of age novel) which narrates the lives of two women, Alison and Diane. It is also a historical novel that explores suburban Perth of the 1960s and engages with notions of cosmopolitanism by shifting the narrative to England and Europe. Campbell's writing explores queer moments of desire, of wanting and becoming, by mobilising both realist and anti-realist techniques with French critical theory including Deleuze and Guattari's influential concept of 'becoming'. When the juxtaposed narratives of Alison and Diane finally meet, over two-thirds through the novel, it is in prison. Diane is a rebellious inmate, Alison her somewhat reluctant but intrigued teacher from the outside. Their relationship as student and teacher becomes complicated by other pivotal binaries such as inside/out, private/public, feminine/masculine and homo/heterosexuality. Under the dubious influence of Jean Genet, Diane writes:

> If desire doesn't consume down to a spoonful of ashes the desirer and the desired; if there isn't a pre-taste of that on their tongues, a pre-taste of destruction that puts everything at risk, then it's nothing more than a passing fancy, the flutter of an impulse buy, to suck on briefly, convert to the same old, same old sugary old. What are they trying to cling to, the women who trot out the old myths of sweetness, of tenderness and nurture when it comes to loving other women? ... Forget the snow dome romances. Love is danger. I want change to be irreversible. Collision that impacts each one deep into the other, rupturing and meteoric. I'm not looking for repose. Don't give me this rock-a-bye stuff. Give me love that ruptures the self. Bite suck bleed into the wound of the other. Rupture and rapture all at once (282–83).

As the title indicates, thieves and thieving are a central thematic of this work, with Campbell playing with the notion of stories that are stolen, appropriated and plagiarised, while at the same time questioning the very notion of authorship and ownership. In the end, Campbell presents a queer model of storytelling that is always-already co-authored, a collaborative, erotic experience of becoming something else.

The here and now: contemporary realism

In its various forms, realism has long been a dominant mode within Australian literary history and has been privileged as a masculine, egalitarian and nationalistic form *par excellence*, typified by the canonisation of Henry Lawson's stories. With techniques that aim to represent the verities of the everyday such as the use of vernacular language and concrete rather than abstract references, realist fictions often aim to

provide the reader with a portrait of the here and now. More specifically, contemporary queer Australian realist fiction concurrently builds on and challenges this nationalistic tradition by providing one mode, among many, that encourages the reader to enter queer lives, subjectivities, desires and spaces. And in doing so, these realist fictions pose a powerful critique of heteronormativity within contemporary Australian culture. Traditionally, the realist mode in queer fiction has been arguably dominated by the 'coming out' story. However, while 'coming out' narratives are still being produced, there is a new found confidence in contemporary queer realist fiction that takes central characters' non-normative sexualities as not simply a given but, in many cases, as an identity to be problematised. For example, Colin Batrouney's *Omar and Enzo in the Big Talking Book* (2007) gives the reader access into the complex lives of socially disenfranchised young queers, when Omar, a male prostitute in a loving same-sex relationship with Enzo, violently kills one of his clients and subsequently claims the controversial legal defence of 'homosexual panic'.

By far the most prolific and well-known queer realist writer in Australia is Christos Tsiolkas. If one gauges success by sales, literary awards, critical commentary, mainstream media coverage, film adaptations and a large readership (both domestic and international), then the success of Tsiolkas' *The Slap* (2008) is truly phenomenal. Set in Melbourne and centred on the physical disciplining of a child at a suburban barbeque, the novel astutely pitches its potential readership to a more mainstream and heterosexual reader than Tsiolkas' previous works. However, this broadening of possible readers does not see *The Slap* perform a heterosexual turn in Tsiolkas' fiction, but rather as Mandy Treagus argues, 'he "queers" the mainstream by bringing his outsider characters and characteristics into the centre of Australian life' (2012: 8). The mainstream reader is not given a comfortable and self-affirming narrative, as *The Slap* is a polyvocal text that moves across genders, races, ethnicities, classes, religions, ages and sexualities, challenging normative assumptions about contemporary Australian society. Moving from the suburban barbeque, Tsiolkas' follow up novel, *Barracuda* (2013), tackles another sacred Australian nationalistic trope: the swimming champion. Through the novel's working-class, ethnic and gay protagonist, Danny Kelly, Tsiolkas dissects Australia's long held obsession with sporting success. Tsiolkas' short story collection, *Merciless Gods* (2014), demonstrates his ability to shock his readers while at the same time portraying pathos, sincerity and emotional intensity. In the story 'Genetic Material', as an example, we witness the intimate moment of a son washing the body of his dying hospital-bound father. When the father becomes aroused, the son-narrator masturbates him and afterwards licks his father's semen from his fingers.

Contemporary queer Australian realist fiction is also concerned with reinscribing spaces, especially public spaces and more broadly whole cities, with queer desires, identities, commodities and pleasures. In Fiona McGregor's *Chemical Palace* (2002) and her more commercially successful novel *Indelible Ink* (2010), the urban spatiality of Sydney looms large from the property-obsessed suburbs of the wealthy North Shore to inner city subcultural spaces. In particular, *Chemical Palace* effectively captures the transgressions of the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras through characters such as 'traffic', an artist, who exemplifies queer identities as she

slips from lesbian relationships and queer performance art to heterosexual sex work within the urban and commercial spaces of the harbour city. In Tsiolkas' fiction, Melbourne is consistently inscribed with queer spaces that explore the ways ethnicities, religions, sexualities and politics criss-cross, meld and coexist. Ashley Sievwright's *The Shallow End* (2008) centres on an iconic gay male space for preening in inner Melbourne, the Prahran swimming pool, while Henry von Doussa's *The Park Bench* (2005) visits and represents the queer spaces of cities and country towns, of beats and saunas. The erotic stories in Andy Quan's *Six Position* (2005) collectively venture out like flâneurs into queer spaces such as the sauna, but these narratives also contest the assumed whiteness of gay culture by positioning the reader within the desires and multiple identities of a Chinese-Canadian-Australian gay man. The above contemporary realist fictions all foreground and reclaim queer spaces within the public realm, which also does the important political work of linking queer spaces to queer visibility within Australian culture.

The visibility of queer lives in realist fiction can take a more notorious turn when notions of celebrity come into play. Neal Drinnan's *Quill* (2000) examines the very public life of a scandalous gay Australian author who has a tendency to produce thinly veiled autobiographical works summed up by the aphorism 'beware of ex-lovers with quills' (10). In Drinnan's novel, it is not just ex-lovers who are fictionalised and exposed to the scrutiny of the reading public but also the author's mother. Tsiolkas's story, 'The Hair of the Dog' from *Merciless Gods*, provides an inversion of this scenario as the gay German narrator must live with his mother's infamous autobiographical books that detail her sex life and drug use. The opening line of the story reads: 'My mother is best known for giving blowjobs to Pete Best and Paul McCartney in the toilets of the Star-Club in Hamburg one night in the sixties' (67). In a different vein, Sievwright's *The Shallow End* explores the media frenzy that occurs when a gay man inexplicably disappears while swimming at the Prahran pool.

Contemporary queer realist fiction has also made its mark in the genre of the verse novel. Before her death in December 2008, Dorothy Porter cemented her reputation not just as a poet, but as a writer of exemplary verse novels. After the success of her previous forays into this genre with *Akhenaten* (1992) and the best selling *The Monkey's Mask* (1994), Porter continued to explore the queer fictional possibilities of the verse novel with the cosmic *Wild Surmise* (2002) and returned to the hard-boiled detective genre with *El Dorado* (2007). Inspired by Porter's work and in part homage to *The Monkey's Mask,* Rebecca Jessen's *Gap* (2014) is a crime verse novel that suggestively plays with the interstices, fissures and cracks of the narrator Anna's criminal actions and her unexpected reunion with her ex-high school lover, turned policewoman, Sawyer. The erotic exploration of lesbian detective/crime fiction by Porter and Jessen builds on a strong tradition within Australian literature, notably the prolific output of Claire McNab who in the 2000s added six titles to her Carol Ashton series which began in 1988 (for a grand total of seventeen novels). McNab has also produced five novels in her Kylie Kendall series and six in her Denise Cleever series.

Surrealism

In the above ways, contemporary realist texts continue to dominate the field of queer Australian fiction, but have strategically moved away from the traditional 'coming out' story to provide a more diverse range of narratives that offer the reader complex articulations of present-day queer lives, desires and spaces within and against mainstream Australian society. Surrealism has long been another effective way to challenge the normative. Queer Australian surrealist writing and the associated genres of supernatural fiction, science fiction, magic realism and trans-realism often create worlds where the assumed universality of heteronormative thinking is exposed as a fallacy and placed under definitional strain. Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* (2005) is a complex novel that positions its contemporary realist narrative centred on the gay Greek-Australian Isaac returning to his parents' homeland, against a fable-like historical narrative about a curse triggered by the killing of a Jew during World War II. Eventually the two narratives start to meld. Through a supernatural transference of inherited familial and cultural guilt, Isaac transforms into a vampiric sexual predator within the entrails of modern capitalist Europe. Tsiolkas' novel has garnered more critical commentary than any other work in this survey. At last count there have been eighteen critical essays on *Dead Europe* ranging from a focus on spectrality, hauntology and trauma studies to Freudian readings, anti-Semitism, the abject and cosmopolitanism. A more traditional rendition of queer vampires appears in Christian Baines' *The Beast Without* (2013), where the protagonist Reylan, a 'Blood Shade', preys and feeds on gay men in Sydney's Oxford Street. Baines has continued his foray into paranormal queerness in his more recent novella *The Prince and the Practitioner* (2014). In the realm of speculative queer fiction Neal Drinnan's fourth novel, *Izzy and Eve* (2006), presents the gay erotic cartoonist Israel and his best friend Evangeline, in a dystopic future riddled with social violence, prostitution, sex clubs and the reality-altering drug 'silt'.

Paddy O'Reilly's *The Wonders* (2014) blends elements of a realist narrative with the surreal and the magic realist through her three main characters who come together to form a modern-day 'freak show'. Australian Leon is saved from the brink of death by an experimental operation that gives him a visible mechanical heart, while gay Greek performance artist Christos has implanted metal wings and Kathryn, an Irishwoman, has her Huntington's disease cured through radical gene therapy which has the fantastical side effect of covering her body in black wool. The novel provides a valuable critique of contemporary celebrity culture and ideas about disability and normativity by deconstructing the very notion of 'the freak' as outsider. Leon, for example, poses the questions: 'Perhaps every human was a freak. Hadn't he read that every person has at least a handful of damaged genes? That all humans embody a myriad of nature's mistakes?' (53). The image of clockwork hearts, cyborgs and celebrity culture central to O'Reilly's *The Wonders* are also key features, though in vastly different ways, in Nike Sulway's genre and gender-bending sci-fi novel *Rupetta* (2013). Sulway's work rewrites elements of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* when the part mechanical, part human, Rupetta is created by Eloise Reni in rural France in 1619. The literal key to Rupetta's consciousness is her clockwork heart that is intimately and erotically linked to the series of women who wind her:

> She slipped her hand inside me and pressed her fingertips into the chambers, testing their texture and heat and weight. She smiled, tilting her head to look at me, before she pushed her hand home, into my heart. There was a sharp white pain and then silence; apple green (22).

Sulway's world-building creates an alternative version of European imperialism spanning some four centuries from France in the 1600s to the present day in the Territories (located somewhere in the Moreton Bay region). At the heart of this Empire is a religion based on the queer cyborg-human same-sex relationship between Rupetta and her female 'wynder'.

The rich queerness of the surreal in contemporary Australian fiction is perhaps most evident in Tom Cho's *Look Who's Morphing* (2009). Cho's short story collection is part postmodern parody of popular culture, part his autobiography as a Chinese-Australian and part a gender-bending play on the boy-girl binary. In Cho's opening story, 'Dirty Dancing', the classic 1980's film and its white heterosexual romance plot is subverted and queered when Baby, who is at the resort with Auntie Feng and Uncle Stan, discovers the sexual animism of the dance instructor Johnny:

> In fact, as Johnny is panting and thrusting, I feel very detached from the experience. It is like I am a bystander, looking on as someone else is having sex with Johnny. And that someone else is a Caucasian man with a moustache. This man is tall and very well built. He is wearing a leather cap and leather chaps. His name? Bruce. As Bruce reaches for Johnny's wrists, I take the opportunity to watch him. I find myself admiring the sheer physical power of Bruce's masculinity. And Bruce is so confident when it comes to sex [...] In the end, I watch as Bruce and Johnny spend all night having the hottest sex you can imagine (Cho 2009: 4).

As Cho has argued, his fiction takes inspiration from fan fiction and the idea of inserting the self into the text to offer new queer renderings of popular culture. whether this is Godzilla films, *The Sound of Music*, Bruce Willis or protecting Whitney Huston in *The Bodyguard* (see, Cho 2008).

From fantastical morphings, vampires and cyborgs to paranormal and dystopic futures, then, the surreal in queer Australian fiction continues to push the boundaries of what is normative, real and possible. Collectively, these fictions pose a challenge to heteronormative thinking by reshaping, distorting and contesting the knowable and the prosaic via erotic explorations into surreal worlds, moments and desires.

The historical turn

The large number of novels that can be classified as historical is an interesting development in queer Australian fiction, but not a unique one. A similar 'historical turn' has occurred overseas: as, for example, in the success of the queer historical novels written by UK author Sarah Waters, whose works include *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), *Fingersmith* (2002), *The Night Watch* (2006), *The Little Stranger* (2009) and *The Paying Guests* (2014). More broadly, historical novels have seen a general upsurge in popularity in mainstream literary fiction and award/prize lists in Australia and elsewhere, the most notable recent example being Richard

Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013). Despite such trends in global publishing, the question remains: why is historical fiction such a popular mode for queer Australian fiction? Perhaps the explanation might be a perception among the LGBT communities of a lack of queer history? Typically, non-normative sexual identities and desires, in all their many variations and differences, have been strategically erased or ignored from the historical record (Weeks 2010). When queer lives do appear, it is usually as a figure associated with heresy, crime, punishment, death, humiliation and ridicule (Weeks 2010). This need to redress a lack of history, to read the queer silences and follow queer traces, is an important political project (Weeks 2010) akin to previous and ongoing projects of rewriting women or colonised peoples back into historical narratives. The desire to create and give flesh to the invisible histories of queer lives also has the effect of creating a bond or affinity between queer characters from the past and contemporary queer readers.

One approach taken by several authors is to rewrite pre-existing historical subjects and events by unearthing queer lives from the historical archive. Annamarie Jagose's *Slow Water* (2003) revisits the infamous nineteenth century sex scandals involving the English missionary Reverend William Yate and six young Maori men and boys he had converted and possibly abused in New Zealand during the 1820s. Jagose's novel decentres this scandal by focussing on Yate's four-month return journey to the Antipodes in 1836 aboard the *Prince Regent*, where the sexual relationship between Yate and the third mate, Edwin Denison, blooms:

> Edwin said something then, the possibility of human speech sounding a raw surprise in Yate's ear. *William* he thought it might have been or *Will you*, the thrill of either such that he couldn't choose between them. He let down his own trousers and took Edwin in his mouth, the collar of skin rolled back, the tip the colour of weak tea. *Will you, William?* Edwin's voice breathy, Yate came off almost at once, kissing and sucking as if he might draw further speech from him (205).

Another queer subject recovered from the colonial archives is the convict known as Little Jock in Amanda Curtin's *The Sinkings* (2008). Curtin's novel recounts the discovery of a dismembered body near Albany, Western Australia, in 1882. The remains are identified as that of the male Little Jock, but after an autopsy, Little Jock is declared to have been a female. Curtin's novel importantly historicises and makes visible intersex lives by linking her colonial narrative about Little Jock's horrendous murder to a harrowing present day account of living within an intersexed body. Through its twin colonial-contemporary historical narrative structure, *The Sinkings* helps to forge a trans-historical community of intersexed people; an affinity between the past and the present that is as much created by continuities as it is discontinuities.

Queer Australian historical novels have also ventured outside of a strict antipodean frame when shedding new light on forgotten or ignored queer historical figures. Kelly Gardiner's *Goddess* (2014) brings to life the vivid queerness of Julie d'Aubigny, more infamously known as Mademoiselle La Maupin. Gardiner's version of La Maupin's tempestuous life in France and Belgium during the late 1600s and early 1700s explores her sexually ambiguous desires for male and female lovers, cross-dressing, sword fighting and opera singing. David Malouf's *Ransom* (2009) briefly retells the

love of Achilles for Patroclus. Sonia Orchard's *The Virtuoso* (2009) recreates the life of the brilliant gay Australian pianist Noel Mewton-Woods in 1940s London, while Robert Dessiax's *Corfu* (2001) is inspired by the expatriate life of gay Australian actor Kester Berwick in London and the Greek Islands.

In addition to rewriting pre-existing figures, the historical turn in queer Australian fiction has seen the creation of new queer historical subjects that attempt to fill the profound gaps and silences that permeate the official historical record. A fictional examination of mid-Victorian male homoeroticism occurs when the unnamed narrator in Nicholas Drayson's *Confessing a Murder* (2002) falls in love with Charles Darwin's cousin in England. Drayson's novel makes direct allusions to Darwin's great works as 'the Theory', but it is only when the narrator ventures to the antipodes that an evolutionary world of queer differences is discovered. Drayson offers his readers an alternative queer version of evolution through his invention of a series of non-normative creatures and relationships. These range from the same-sex mating rituals of the cattle-like 'gadzocks' that the narrator reads as an example of 'Greek love' (21) to the rare Golden scarab beetle (*Copris darwinii*): 'They have evolved beyond sex. One might justifiably say that the golden scarabs have evolved beyond evolution' (274). Another example of historical fiction creating new queer nineteenth century subjects is Jessica White's *A Curious Intimacy* (2007). Set in Western Australia during the 1870s, White's novel employs the Jarrah forests and botany as key tropes for exploring a colonial female version of 'the love that dare not speak its name' in the relationship that develops between Ingrid and Ellyn. As forms of neo-Victorian queer fiction, Drayson's and White's novels highlight and rewrite the often implicit references to non-normative sexualities and desires found in canonical Victorian fiction.

A series of new queer historical subjects set in the twentieth century are shaped by the events of World War Two. Sara Knox's *The Orphan Gunner* (2007) explores same-sex female desire and early versions of lesbian identities with the relationship between the two main protagonists Evelyn and Olive. The novel exploits the notion of passing or cross-dressing in both a literal and metaphorical sense when Evelyn the pilot starts to cross-dress as a male gunner and participates in the bombing of Nuremberg and other German cities. World War Two is also the period Cory Taylor sets her 'home-front' novel *My Beautiful Enemy* (2013). Taylor's work centres on a prisoner of war camp in the country Victorian town of Tatura during the 1940s and features an unconsummated love affair between a young white Australian guard, Arthur Wheeler, and the handsome Japanese prisoner of war, 'Stanley'. Frank Moorhouse's 'Edith Berry' trilogy of *Grand Days* (1994), *Dark Palace* (2000) and *Cold Light* (2011) covers a diverse and ever-changing array of queer identities and desires throughout the twentieth century from the 1920s to the 1970s with Moorhouse's larger-than-life creation of Edith Campbell Berry as our guide and mentor. We first meet Edith Berry as the young, sexually adventurous Australian diplomat working in Geneva at the League of Nations, who ends up marrying her cross-dressing bisexual English lover, Major Ambrose Westwood. Lyn Hughes's novel *Flock* (2011) explores a range of queer lives across a narrative frame split between the socially conservative Cold War Australia of the 1950s and 1960s and a more progressive late-1980s.

A re-creation of more recent past queer lives occurs in Michelle Moo's *Glory This* (2004). Moo's novel takes the reader, via the main character Mayne, into an angst-ridden teenage world in the working-class Melbourne suburb of 'Franga' (Frankston) during 1977. Mayne's understated queerness as a defiant member of Melbourne's so-called 'Sharpie' subculture is beautifully captured in an often terse, unsentimental and minimalist vernacular. Moo vividly recreates the sounds, cadence, smells, tastes and asexual ambiguity of the Sharpie era. Upon discovering her boyfriend kissing another boy, Mayne stumbles from the room thinking:

> Two boys, unmistakable. Pushing back through the crowd, shoulder height. All around her boys so she can't get through. Beer being spilt all over the carpet. The whole room all hips and cock, all skinny legs pressed up close [...] Boys so close they can smell each other. So that she can smell them. Strong and thick on the back of the throat. Like cock. Like cock in her mouth, or theirs. Boys yelling all around each other, their tongues so close (11).

Whether it is Sharpie culture in 1970s' suburban Melbourne or colonial gentility in 1870s' Western Australia, these fictional worlds are populated with queer historical subjects that revive the past in order to problematise and dramatise present day inconsistencies. In turn, such a narrative strategy serves to construct present day queer subjects, not just through reading practices, but by showing us other forms of sexual organisation and the essential fluidity of all sexual desires and identities.

Cosmopolitanism

The understanding of cosmopolitanism in Australian literature has thankfully matured since 1993 when Frank Moorhouse's Geneva-set *Grand Days* was deemed as not being 'Australian' enough by the judges of the Miles Franklin award.[1] Several of the novels in this survey have no discernible Australian connection apart from the author and sometimes place of publication, such as Kelly Gardiner's *Goddess*, or have minimal Australian references as in Sulway's *Rupetta* and O'Reilly's *The Wonders*. Such a move from an exclusive focus on 'Australia' to a more cosmopolitan outlook in relation to content also implies the same for the actual product. Australian independent and mainstream publishers continue to support local queer fiction, but authors are also finding a niche for their fiction overseas, as for example, in works by Baines, Drinnan, Quan and Sulway.

Cosmopolitanism is also about engaging with 'the other', crossing borders, and movement away from the known and knowable. In Moorhouse's *Dark Palace* (2000) and *Cold Light* (2011), the type of cosmopolitan sexuality Edith Berry develops and experiences with the suave and debonair Ambrose is far from the heterosexual norm, in effect, they both queer heterosexual marriage and normative homosexual relationships. In the process, Edith and Ambrose create a different, non-normative and nameless sexuality that defies any easy classification. Ambrose's cross-dressing and bisexuality complicates and challenges the heteronormative as he desires sex with Edith when he is dressed as a woman: they both have a fetish for silk on silk. When Ambrose is crossed-dressed, *en femme*, he adopts the name Carla and we learn that he and Edith share a dildo in their love making which is affectionately and rather queerly

named 'Jennifer' (*Cold Light*, 121). Edith consistently calls Ambrose her 'Nancy boy' and, correspondingly, Ambrose calls Edith his 'Nancy girl' (*Cold Light*, 121). Towards the end of the third novel in the trilogy, Edith makes the following revelatory declaration to herself about her life and sexuality with Ambrose:

> Again it crossed her mind, as it had over the years, as to whether she was at heart a *lesbe*. Whatever Janice's and her affections were for each other, Janice's communism and puritanical rules seemed to block that. Or was she more a *femme de pede*? Or was she something else for which there was no name? How lonely to have a personality for which there was no name. Or was it a form of invisibility? (*Cold Light*, 377).

The trajectory of Edith's thinking here sees her begin with the German colloquial term for lesbian, '*lesbe*', before moving to the French vernacular term for fag hag, '*femme de pede*', and subsequently her logic dissolves into a nameless desire until she is confronted with the prospect of invisibility. Edith's attempts to find a suitable name for her complex and ambiguous sexual desires are fruitless: her sexuality defies easy categorisation, eluding normative definition. Edith's sexuality can be read as queerly cosmopolitan as it crosses not just heteronormative sexual and gender boundaries but also linguistically flirts with and creates affinities across borders, national cultures and sexualities.

A common trope in queer Australian fiction that explores the theme of cosmopolitanism is the Australian traveller, tourist or expatriate who becomes sexually involved in a foreign land. Moorhouse's Edith Berry is one striking example, though unusual, in that it is more usually the image of a white Australian gay man travelling that has been the dominant focus. For example, in Errol Bray's *Berzoo* (2011) we follow the middle-aged gay travel writer Roger Staines in Sydney, Berlin and Venice. Robert Dessaix's *Corfu* (2001) dreamingly charts the life of a gay expatriate actor from Adelaide to London and Greece, while in Neal Drinnan's campy farce, *Rare Bird of Truth* (2010), the reader is invited into the life of a gay Australian editor living in London and Ibiza. More complex negotiations of this trope occur in Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* through Isaac's dark and challenging experiences of modern Europe. The central focus of John Bartlett's *Towards a Distant Sea* (2005) is a young white Australia Catholic priest coming to terms with his faith, sexuality and imperialism while living in the Philippines during the years of military rule in the 1970s. Despite these disparate subjects and settings, all these novels share the figure of the white gay Australian male travelling overseas in search of meaning, self, pleasure and love.

The subaltern flip side of the above types of white gay male cosmopolitanism in Australian queer fiction is Lara Fergus' *My Sister Chaos* (2010). Rather than the expatriate or tourist, Fergus' novel narrows in, and centres on, the figure of the refugee. *My Sister Chaos* is a novel about two unnamed sisters who are torn by war from their homeland and displaced as refugees into an unnamed city and country which resembles contemporary Melbourne in Australia. Fergus' intense narrative positions the sisters, one a cartographer, the other an artist, against each other and their traumatic collective past of ethnic violence, systematic rape and missing or dead

loved ones. The artist sister's trauma is compounded by her love for a missing woman:

> Under the paint, under the contours, is her country, a country that no longer exists. The sister takes the pin marking the place where her lover was last held and turns it in increasing circles, widening the hole beneath. She needs something else here, something that will draw the eye, suck everything in, pull perspective down into a whirlpool of absence. A connection between the world and what it is trying to forget (186).

Fergus' novel demonstrates that the theme of cosmopolitanism in queer Australian fiction is not simply all about middle-aged white gay men living in Europe. Her narrative explores another type of cosmopolitanism where movement between countries is not by choice but due to forced removal: a type of cosmopolitanism belonging to the subaltern. Even though Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* explores the subaltern experience in contemporary Europe, Fergus' novel brings this experience and all its associated horrors back 'home' to Australia.

Conclusion

After providing evidence from forty novels and short story collections published in the last fifteen years, it can be argued that the field of queer Australian fiction has not been a short-lived publishing trend of the 1990s. Rather, the twenty-first century has seen a diverse range of queer fictions making their way into print creating numerous moments of 'rapture and rupture' for readers. There has been a mainstreaming of some queer fiction and authors, notably Tsiolkas, but experimental texts that play with modes, language and ideas are also being produced and finding homes with local and overseas publishers. The current state of queer fiction in 2015 looks promising with new works such as Hoa Pham's *Wave* (2015) and new voices such as Karina Quinn's *Rolling Soap* (2015) being released by Stein & Wilde along with several other titles from the Australian-based publisher Dykebooks. Erin Gough's recently released and well-received young adult novel, *The Flywheel* (2015), moreover, suggests the mainstreaming of positive representations of queer youth. The existence of the queer creative writing publication *Polari Journal* is another bright spot in the contemporary literary landscape, as is the recent establishment, under the general editorship of one of the editors of this special collection, Dallas J. Baker, of Australia's only exclusively queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex publisher, Stein & Wilde. Of course, nothing can be taken for granted, but the 'rapture and rupture' that contemporary queer Australian fiction provides for its readers will hopefully continue to explore and represent new queer spaces, identities and desires.

Endnotes

1. See the brief history of the Miles Franklin Literary award at the award's website: http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/about_history

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