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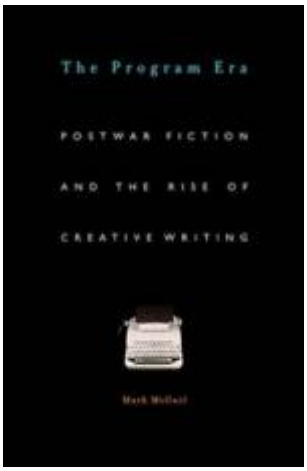
Reviews contents

TEXT review

The Program Era

review by Catherine Cole



Mark McGurl
The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2009
ISBN 9780674062092
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Mark McGurl's book, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, offers a compelling exploration of postwar literary developments in the United States and their parallel relationship with the country's creative writing programs. McGurl is Professor of English at Stanford (he was at UCLA when the book was published) and has written extensively on the novel. This book incorporates much of that knowledge but also adroitly couples it with what his publisher calls 'a meditation on systematic creativity', the 'systematic' largely referring to lessons taught in university creative writing programs. The book won McGurl the 2011 *Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism* and when receiving his award McGurl said:

> I'm proud to think that I have helped move the conversation about creative writing and the university forward a few steps and shed new light on recent literary history, but humbled by this reminder that contemporary literature is a much larger and richer enterprise than any one book or critic could grasp. (McGurl 2011a)

The book has been well received, its reviewers, including the often curmudgeonly Louis Menand, noting its importance in the field. Menand, a critic not averse to questioning the efficacy of creative writing programs, noted in particular the reflective nature of the book and its emphasis on

literary studies within the orbit of creative writing; 'McGurl's book is not a history of creative-writing programs', he noted:

> It's a history of twentieth-century fiction, in which the work of American writers from Thomas Wolfe to Bharati Mukherjee is read as reflections of, and reflections on, the educational system through which so many writers now pass. (Menand 2009)

McGurl's primary argument, sustained throughout the book, is that the rise of the creative writing program represents

> the most important event in postwar American literary history, and that paying attention to the increasingly intimate relation between literary production and the practices of higher education is the key to understanding the originality of postwar American literature. (ix)

McGurl is an interesting author who stays true to his quest to transform his readers' understandings of America's best-known writers. Not for him the niggardly judgements about house styles and sameness, pedagogical laziness or the complacent, self-congratulatory stances creative writing academics are often accused of displaying. He documents the responses of more strident critics though, including those commentators surprised by the transformations they were witnessing. These include Alfred Kazin who observed in the 1950s: '"All this represents a very great change… When I was in college in the 'thirties, it was well understood that scholars were one class and writers quite another"' (22). McGurl also cites John W Aldridge who censured writing programs for removing writers from the 'manifold stimulations of the real world' and for the 'damage done to the originality of the individual authorial voice' (26). The result of this, Aldridge said, was the 'clonal' fabrication of writers who produced 'small, sleek, clonal fabrications of literature.' It's time to move beyond these criticisms, McGurl says, to accept that writing programs have been around for a long time and to acknowledge and draw on that history. And in so doing, he is far more measured and generous in his appraisal than critics like Kazin or Aldridge or many contemporary commentators, arguing that creative writing programs have generated complex literary conversations and dilemmas which have been taken up, wrestled with and resolved by numerous postwar writers.

That said, McGurl doesn't simplistically take sides with creative writing either. He may suggest that creative writing programs have been important and beneficial for American writing but he also gives full range to his ideas – and full voice to critics and writers –swerving at times but always focused on the historical, cultural and creative developments of the postwar era, the supporters, critics and the fence-sitters. As a result this book isn't a mouthpiece for the creative writing advocate any more than for the confirmed critic of creative writing programs. Instead it points to bright, illuminating and often surprising connections between American writing programs and the writers within and external to them.

McGurl notes early in the book: 'this book will take up residence in the gap between freedom and necessity – or rather, in the higher educational institutions that have been built in that gap' (3). And he asks, 'what could be further from the dictates of rote learning ... than using one's imagination to invent a story or write a poem?' (3). Locating writing programs in their late 19th-century genesis he then historicises the utopian

ideals of the postwar period with its replication of 'the spirit of communal endeavour and mutual influence found in the Paris and Greenwich Village cafe scenes of an earlier era' (5). One of the key roles of the book, he says, is to illuminate and appreciate postwar American literature by placing it in its market context and 'examining how the university stepped forward in the postwar period both to facilitate and to buffer the writer's relation to the cultural industry and the market culture more broadly' (15).

McGurl has structured his book so the chapters allow full play to the duality to his expositions. He uses diagrams as well to provide a visual representation of his ideas. Developments in creative writing are thus coupled with developments in literature, the chapter titles making use of those popular if hackneyed admonitions to the student writer which he examines, dates and contextualises in his introduction. The book's structure supports this historical flow and its examination of the pre- and postwar era in the context of the political, social and cultural:

> Introduction: Halls of Mirrors
>
> Part One: *'Write what you know'/ 'Show Don't Tell' (1890-1960)*
> 1. Autobardolatry: Modernist fiction, Progressive Education, 'Creative Writing'
> 2. Understanding Iowa: The Religion of Institutionalization
>
> Part Two: *'Find Your Voice' (1960-1975)*
> 3. The Social Construction of Unreality: Creative Writing in the Open System
> 4. Our Phonocentrism: Finding the Voice of the (Minority) Storyteller
>
> Part Three: *Creative Writing at Large (1975-2008)*
> 5. The Hidden Injuries of Craft: Mass Higher Education and Lower-Middle-Class Modernism
> 6. Art and Alma Mater: The Family, the Nation and the Primal Scene of Instruction
> 7. Miniature America; or, the Program in Transplanetary Perspective
>
> An Afterword offers 'Systematic Excellence' in which he provides an interrogation of the role of the literary scholar.

These literary explorations offer the potent comparisons and analyses in the book. Through them the reader discovers engaging and revelatory stories about writers from Nabokov and his frustrations about teaching which in part shaped the narrative voice of *Lolita*, to the returned soldiers of World War Two, still damaged and bewildered and their exposure in writing classes to Ernest Hemingway and his diamond sharp prose about war, to Flannery O'Connor and the role of her teacher / editors and Raymond Carver, Thomas Pynchon – the list goes on and on, the writers' work examined within the context of both literary and creative studies. This binary approach makes for excellent reading. McGurl has a fine literary style, the book offering a novelist's narrative style.

Carver – America's 'postwar Hemingway' – is an interesting example of the writer 'found' by higher education, who attended creative writing classes, taught creative writing classes and whose work, McGurl argues,

needs to be read in this context. Carver 'owed' his literary career to creative writing programs, McGurl says. It should also be noted that Carver is studied extensively in creative writing programs, the sparsity of his stories offering the student 'the possibility of creating an aesthetic whole in the way that writing part of a novel does not'. Carver's minimalist short stories offer an 'occasion for aesthetic shame management: the text is small and simple, and the self-shaped therein remains under control, dignified and unembarrassed' (339).

There is much that can be said about the book – its breadth of scope, the historical location of text and creative writing development, the anecdotal writer portraits as well as the literary analysis of their work. It also displays an impressive understanding about and overview of American creative writing programs, one based on thorough and measured research and an objective embedding of literature within them. McGurl thinks much of the criticism of creative writing programs is overblown but he also acknowledges that creative writing programs have not and will continue not to suit all writers – 'certainly if you want to be the wild man poet, getting a degree to do so is a funny thing to do' he says in one interview (McGurl 2011b). While American writing may have lost some of its pretensions to wildness, there is no doubting the impact of writing programs on it.

The book is certainly an excellent resource in regards to the teaching of American literature *and* the teaching of creative writing. It offers the creative writing teacher the resources to examine and reflect upon the often curious conjoining of writers and scholars. It's also a fascinating, informative and enjoyable examination of America's rich literary heritage and the explosion of creativity after the war. It's a book that offers many encounters and one which a reader will dip into over and over again.

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TEXT review

Inscribing the Queer

review by D J Baker

Elizabeth Stephens
Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction
Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK 2009
ISBN: 9780230271739 (ebook)
ISBN: 9780230205857
Hbk 225pp AUD120.95

Jean Genet is a controversial figure. He is at once lauded for his darkly original and overtly erotic literary vision and denounced, by heterosexual and homosexual literary critics alike, for perpetuating homophobic discourses about male same-sex desire as pederastic, aggressive, opportunistic and sadomasochistic. Despite these criticisms, Genet's fiction continues to be popular among queer readers and is the ongoing focus of scholarly research.

Given this, Elizabeth Stephens' text *Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction* presents a timely and necessary critical reassessment of the dominant view of Genet in scholarly circles. Stephens provides this reassessment while simultaneously demonstrating that Genet's fiction provides a new (queer) way of approaching the study of writing practice itself.

At the outset, Stephens steps away from the 'psychobiographical' leaning in Genet criticism – epitomized in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* – which regards Genet's writing as a literal or autobiographical representation of his own sexual subjectivity (Amin 2010). The psychobiographical approach tends to use Genet's literary work to denounce or (rarely) to celebrate its author's sexual and criminal history (Amin 2010: 507). This kind of Genet criticism refers heavily to Genet's biography and presents him as, depending on perspective, a sexual radical or sexual criminal.

Stephens argues that Genet's fiction depends not on the inscription of a stable sexual subjectivity but on the deployment (or mobilization) of a 'perverse dynamic' within the written text itself. In other words, the homoerotic content of Genet's fiction can be seen as a discursive perversity mobilized within the text to disrupt heteronormativity rather than as the (autobiographical) reflection of the author's sexuality or identity/subjectivity.

The deployment of this perverse dynamic can be seen to be a writerly technique used to subvert dominant discourses around sexuality and to address the long-standing problem of the heteronormative inflection of language and, therefore, how to inscribe 'a sexual and corporeal specificity that is understood as inherently fluid and transformative' (158). Indeed, Stephens argues that Genet's novels provide 'one of the most detailed accounts of the difficulties of writing homoerotically within a language that is itself inherently heteronormative' (5). Stephens deftly demonstrates throughout *Queer Writing* that Genet's narratives frame themselves as a disruptive homosexual insertion into a (heteronormative) language constructed to exclude the homosexual other. It is appropriate therefore that Stephens uses Genet's work to theorize a way to inscribe sexual difference without investing in the notion of stable sexual identities or categories as the 'source' of narratives featuring sexual otherness. Stephens draws out the connections and confluences between Genet's 'textual strategies of camp mimicry and literary corruption' (5) and the textual strategies of Hélène Cixous. This is in itself significant. Queer Theory has been reluctant to engage with feminist poststructuralists such as Cixous, seeing the work of Cixous and others as somehow essentialist. This is despite the fact that Queer Theory has its origins in Poststructuralism (Jagose 1996; Spargo 1999). Indeed, Queer Theory employs a number of key concepts from Poststructuralism: the unstable, fragmented and de-centered identity of Lacanian psychoanalysis; Jacques Derrida's 'deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic structures'; and 'Foucault's model of discourse, knowledge and power' (Spargo 199: 41). It is refreshing to see a Queer Theorist not only acknowledge this genealogy but engage with it productively.

Stephens, in accord with Judith Butler and others, rejects the notion that Cixous is a sexual essentialist and demonstrates how, like Genet, Cixous sought 'to resignify a negatively constructed marginality and to inscribe its corporeal and erotic specificity in language' (Amin 2010: 508). Cixous' theorization of how this re-signification of language might be achieved is core to Stephens' framing of Genet's writing practice. By comparing and contrasting Genet's writing practice and the textual strategies of Cixous, Stephens proposes that Genet's writing be seen as *Écriture Homosexuelle,* a form of writing that inscribes the erotic and corporeal specificity of a queer subjectivity [1].

Building on Derrida's notion of *différance*, Hélène Cixous – in her landmark essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) – argued for a writing strategy that turns away from texts that reproduce, disseminate and reinforce uneven power relations between men and women and heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. Cixous argued against 'writing as dissemination' – or writing as heteronormative proscriptive discourse – that, she contended, typified much literature produced in 'phallogocentric culture' (Moi 1985: 100). Cixous advocated instead a kind of writing that she described as *écriture féminine.* This form of writing entails the inscription of (feminine) difference in both language and text (Showalter 1981). Cixous postulates this sort of writing as 'Other bisexual' or

'feminine' and sets it up in opposition to traditional (heterosexual male) discourses (Moi 1985: 107). *Écriture féminine*, then, is a style of writing that foregrounds plurality, openness and gender difference with regards to terms/norms or categories and also with regards to subjectivities (or reading and writing positions).

Genet, however, framed his inscription of corporeal and erotic specificity as 'perversity', not as 'other bisexual' or 'feminine writing'. Although Cixous and Genet share a similar deconstructive and radical intent, the strategies they adopt differ. Stephens notes these differences while also positing that 'femininity is for Cixous as perversion is for Genet, and as I am arguing of queer, itself understood as a mode of writing' (157). This could be read as a rather too neat conflation of the terms femininity/perversity/queer if Stephens had not already gone to pains to describe the openness and ambiguity of the terms as used by Cixous and Genet themselves. Given the 'built-in' ambiguity of these terms, it is perhaps more fruitful to see Stephens' statement as indicating not a slippage of terms but a radical (and queer) cross-contamination between terms and norms. This is a cross-contamination which mirrors the constitutive cross-contamination of all terms/norms set in opposition (man/woman, hetero/queer, etc.) described by Judith Butler as 'the logic of repudiation' (Butler 1993: 93).

Although the similarities between Cixous' and Genet's textual strategies are clear, Genet's 'perversity' can more confidently be described as 'proto-queer' in that it pre-empts many of the textual and critical strategies of Queer Theory. Genet's perversity is a textual strategy designed to confound interpretations of his work as 'an expression of his homosexual "truth"' (Amin 2010: 507). Furthermore, Stephens demonstrates that Genet's perversity included a confrontational appropriation of dominant norms in a way that, by deployment in a perverse and homoerotic narrative, deconstructs those norms. Genet, more than Cixous, seeks to problematize the very categories and norms to which he himself is subject, such as the terms 'homosexual' and 'criminal'. This deconstruction by Genet was often achieved by 'revealing the internal contradictions of these norms, their intimate dependence on their constitutive "outside", and their openness to corruption and contamination by this outside' (Amin 2010: 507).

This is a notion originating in Queer Theory with Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Judith Butler. Although Stephens draws on Judith Butler's philosophy to theorize the ways that Genet's appropriation of norms foregrounds those norms' dependence on their constitutive other – and their openness to corruption and contamination by that other – she does not make an explicit argument for defining Genet's 'perversity' as a kind of strategic textual performativity. This is a shame, if only because the connections are so apparent, but also because a more explicit statement of the performative nature of Genet's perversity would enable scholars to make easy connections between Stephens' research and other research around textual performativity; thus disseminating Stephens' ideas to a wider audience.

The circulation of these ideas, and those of other Queer Theory-informed writer/researchers, can only enrich scholarly discussion and debate in the Creative Writing discipline. Much scholarship on creative writing and literature 'theorizes writing in terms of the unconscious and/or the creative "impulse", usually with reference to psychoanalytic theories' (Baker 2010: 8). In contrast, a theorization of writing that is queered is likely to reject the sometimes 'essentialist' tendencies of psychoanalytic discourse and

might instead 'theorize writing in terms of performativity' (Baker 2010: 8). By theorizing creative writing as performativity, it is possible to displace the entrenched and essentialist Romantic model of creative genius while simultaneously 'disrupting the notion that discursive subjectivities appearing within literary texts are representations of the internal, stable identity of the creator' (Baker 2010: 8). Instead, creativity as performativity foregrounds the appearance of subjectivities within texts as a *deployment* or intervention into discourse for a critical or creative purpose (Baker 2010: 8). Thus, the writing of queer subjectivities into literature is not seen as a reflection of a writer's identity, a representation of some imagined 'internal' self, but rather 'as a deliberate inscription and dissemination of non-normative discursive subjectivities' (Baker 2010: 8).

Stephens makes this point clearly when she posits that Genet's writing

> …reframes its homoeroticism so that this is no longer seen as the expression of a queer exteriority – of a perverse author whose intentions determine the meaning of the text – but rather as a dynamic mobilized within that text. (19)

Stephens goes on to state that Genet's perversity (what we might call 'queer writing') 'provides a way to maintain the centrality of sex and eroticism to the narrative without positioning these as the coherent expression of a stable sexual identity' (19) and that 'queer writing need neither naturalize nor negate the role (or queerness) of the writer' (20). Stephens goes so far as to approach Genet 'not as an identifiable author or even as a stable thing but as an affect, a movement in and through the dominant language that disturbs and troubles it from within' (21).

Stephens' study of Genet draws on both Queer and feminist poststructuralist theory in order to re-contextualize study of literature away from a focus on the psychobiographical approach towards an approach that disconnects authorial identity from discursive subjectivity and, significantly, sees the latter as a dynamic mobilized within text. The bringing together of Queer Theories and feminist poststructuralist ideas on writing is innovative in the discipline of Creative Writing – as well as long overdue – and shifts the emphasis of study from the author to the text. This shift is not undertaken in the somewhat 'contextless' style of some Postmodern literary studies that have also privileged text over author, but in a manner that focuses on the particular strategies leading to the text's production; the way it was written.

In the discipline of Creative Writing, where literary texts are both studied and *produced*, the Postmodern negation of the author – epitomized by Roland Barthes' proclamation of the death of the author – provokes tension around how to: a) theorize the study of writing without ignoring the act of production (textual strategies) and b) maintain the critical insights provided by Postmodernism and Poststructuralism without denying the contexts and practices unique to the production (writing) of texts. The research of Stephens and other Queer Theory-informed writer-researchers within the discipline provide a method for doing exactly that, while also providing a methodology for theorizing the relationship between the corporeal and erotic specificity of the author and the erotics evidenced in their writing.

In conclusion, Stephens' positing of 'a specifically homoerotic writing' (23), or *Écriture Homosexuelle*, that draws on feminist poststructuralist theories of *écriture féminine*, is innovative and provides a method for

queer Creative Writing scholars to re-think how writing and discursive subjectivity are theorized. The notion of *Écriture Homosexuelle* also provides a template for how future study into written works that foreground sexual subjectivity might be undertaken.

Furthermore, *Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction* also provides an example for writer/researchers of how to successfully theorize the practice of writing (their own and that of others) in a way that distances itself from the Romantic model which demands an overreliance on interpreting writing practice in terms of the writers' identity and/or subjectivity.

Notes

1. I coined the phrase '*Écriture Queer*' in 2008, in a paper delivered at the *Derrida Today International Conference* (Sydney, 10-12 July) and in a paper published in 2010 (Baker 2010). In reading Stephens' *Queer Writing* for review, I became aware of her coining of the term '*écriture homosexuelle*', drawing on Cixous' theory. Although the two terms have a similar genealogy, my term 'écriture queer' brings together the theories of Julia Kristeva and Cixous and focuses on the abject aspect of the term 'queer', which has connotations of the strange, monstrous or uncanny. Stephens' development of *écriture homosexuelle* surpasses my own of *Écriture Queer* which is in a nascent stage. return to text

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TEXT review

Theorising the short story

review by Linda Weste

Carolyne Lee
Our Very Own Adventure: Towards a Poetics of the Short Story
Melbourne University Publishing: Carlton, 2011
ISBN 9780522858686
ebook, AUD39.99
Pb (print-on-demand), 304pp, AUD49.99

In recent years, the narrative turn in the humanities (Kreiswirth 2008) has seen a resurgence of interest in narrative inquiry, often to revisit research gaps and marginal areas of theory. Carolyne Lee's monograph *Our Very Own Adventure: Towards a Poetics of the Short Story* seeks to redress an identified research gap: the 'absence of the articulation of short story conventions in the corpus of short story theory' (3).

As Lee notes in the introduction, both the existing corpus of short story theory and the related teaching texts are troubled by conflation with the novel. Lee's research seeks 'to provide a framework for renewed discussion regarding the teaching of short story reading and writing' (17-18), and more specifically, to clarify and demonstrate the conventions of the short story in a systematic manner without defaulting to novelistic comparison.

Lee theorises the short story through reader-response theory, drawing from narratological text-based typologies to inform her approach. Clearly there is a tension between utilising narrative theory to explain the short story, while simultaneously uncoupling short story theory from theories of the novel, yet Lee's approach draws upon studies of the novel to elaborate key points without losing sight of the short story's imperative.

The opening chapter reviews the corpus of short story theory from Edgar Allan Poe (1842) to the present, and includes research by Janet Burroway, Susan Suleiman, Stanley Fish, Suzanne Hunter Brown, George E

Haggerty, Charles E May, Susan Lohafer, Suzanne C Ferguson, Valerie Shaw, Clare Hanson and Hupert Zapf. Lee identifies 'Zapf's theory of the two ways in which readers can be "in" a text' as pivotal to her own theory of how readers of the short story appropriate the storyworld (275). Lee additionally reviews narrative theory that pertains to narrative perspective or the short story genre, and discusses theorists such as Gerard Genette, Susan Sniader Lanser, Jonathan Culler, and Franz Stanzel.

A further five chapters in the volume examine five broad groupings of short stories deploying the broad generic types found in Franz Stanzel's typology of narrative perspective. Stanzel's typology is seminal, and generally serves many practical applications well, although the limitations of Stanzel's theory to convey more recently theorised first person + present tense narrative perspective are noted elsewhere by Dorrit Cohn (1999). Lee eschews Cohn's 'more accurate distinguishing terms… because they do not seem to be widely used by most critics' (232).

The study develops an understanding of the 'main convention of the short story… the heightened reader response' that Carolyn Lee terms '"narratorial presence"' (18). Narratorial presence is built on a type of close identification with fictional characters and interpolation into a fictional world. Lee points out that this occurs when we read novels as well, but since the latter involves interrupted readings due to its length, with the short story this experience is heightened and unified, due to the text's brevity.

Readers of Lee's monograph are likely to be well aware of the criticism levelled at reader-response theories. In the words of Phelan:

> as anyone who has followed the reader-response movement even in passing must already recognize, this mode of analysis depends on the repression of one crucial fact: different readers bring different subjectivities to texts and therefore sometimes have different experiences of the same textual phenomena. (Phelan 1994: 231)

These criticisms scarcely diminish the significance of this application of narratology for its capacity to rejuvenate short story theory. Arguably Lee's analyses will reach beyond proponents of reader-response theory. Nevertheless there are areas of research that warrant further explication: namely Lee's identification of plural speaking positions within the short story form; or indeed, the use of framed narrative within short stories, a practice which Lee claims, is even more complex and intense than a single level story. The theoretical conversation, begun by Lee, is thus likely to continue.

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Linda Weste's doctoral dissertation Productive Interplay: Poetic and Narrative Strategies in the Twenty-first Century Verse Novel *was recently completed at the University of Melbourne, and included* CXSIX: a Novel-in-Verse set in late Republican Rome. *Previous creative writing credits include* Best Australian Poetry *and* Westerly.

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TEXT review

Writing about Tom writing about Frank

review by Alice Robinson

Tom Grimes
Mentor: a memoir
Tin House Books: Portland and New York, 2010
ISBN 9780982504895
Pb, 242pp, AUD23.95

Prior to picking up *Mentor*, I am ashamed to say that I had never read the novels of either its author Tom Grimes, or muse Frank Conroy. After finishing the memoir however, I found myself trawling the web for information on the Iowa Writer's Workshop, the prestigious writing course with which both men were affiliated, and indeed the place at which their long friendship began. Little more really need be said to underscore the effect Grimes' beautifully written book had on me. He conveyed so simply and powerfully the symbiosis between his writing life and his friendship with Conroy, and what being at Iowa meant to the development of both, that as an emerging writer myself, I was deeply affected by Grimes' narrative and desperately wanted in on that world. Yet despite my own personal giddy reaction, this is not merely a book for writers, aspiring or otherwise, although undoubtedly it is one of the more poetic meditations on writing and the writing life. Rather, I wager that anyone who has experienced ambition and success and disappointment will appreciate and be affected by the poignancy of Grimes' prose, if not his heartfelt story. At its root, *Mentor* is also a book about enduring love between admiring colleagues who become friends, who become, finally, father and son.

Grimes is in his early thirties when *Mentor* opens and still working in hospitality, as is the way with so many aspiring creative types. Though for years he had been scribbling away in private between restaurant shifts, he admits to feeling 'condemned to lead a waiter's life, not a writer's' (4). Grimes captures beautifully the pervasive sense of helplessness and inertia that such a lifestyle manifests, in which the gulf between dreams and reality appears immeasurable; the rift between that glimmer of potential

and the hard slog of its realisation, impossible to overcome. In a last ditch attempt to make something of himself, Grimes applies to various universities. Here he underscores the literal and metaphorical tensions between writing and waiting tables:

> I still half believed that creative writing programs had nothing to teach anyone and was suddenly terrified of being rejected. I selected four programs... I assembled an application… I dropped four copies off at the Key West post office and then did what most young writers do – I waited. (5)

Simultaneous with the painful university application process, in the very first few pages of *Mentor*, the eager Grimes is brutally snubbed by Conroy – his literary idol – at a bookish event:

> "I've applied to the Writer's Workshop."
> "Yeah, you and eight hundred others."
> …he walked right past me. He'd spotted an old friend. Shoulder to shoulder, their backs to me, they sauntered off. (7-8)

This is a fantastic way to open and to introduce both men to the reader, because shortly thereafter Grimes is accepted into the Iowa Writer's Workshop, instantly achieving a long hoped-for measure of success. We are right behind him, having just borne witness to his lowest, most humiliating point. That the context of Grimes' success comes intertwined with the very person who so harshly belittled his advances only pages before, makes for good reading. More importantly, the book's opening is indicative not only of the unbelievable serendipity – perhaps even fatefulness – but also of the unexpected nature of Grimes and Conroy's relationship. In purposefully setting up his narrative in this way, by playing with the reader's expectation, Grimes displays both the power of his storytelling ability, and the measure of how much he has learned from Conroy about his craft.

Mentor is then an ode to Grimes' great writing teacher, not only in content, but in form as well. At times, Grimes' debt to Conroy-as-teacher is self-consciously explicit in his prose; Grimes literally channels Conroy's voice, largely in aid of writing those important, emotive scenes fundamental to both men's lives, and therefore the memoir. 'Don't just have the main character leap up and yell, "Yippee!"' Grimes intones as Conroy, when describing his own response to the offer of a place at Iowa, 'Understate the narrator's emotional reaction' (12). The closeness of their relationship and its profound effect on Grimes, are clear to the reader because Grimes makes pains to articulate Conroy's influence. But more implicitly, the impact of their friendship is clear because it is implicit in the way Grimes has constructed his prose.

By bringing us into the world of the struggling writer in the opening section of the book, Grimes renders his success, when it arrives, all the more sweet. But *Mentor* is no Hollywood tale of down-and-out writer making the big time overnight. Grimes has to fight for his writing achievements, and he doesn't always win:

> I'm a failure as a writer because I've overreached; my ambition was larger than my talent. Yet I willingly accepted that risk, believing I could overcome it. Every great novel,

> it's been said, is a "long story with a flaw in it." I've mastered the flaws. (169)

Grimes seems to be saying that the difficulty he experienced over the course of his career is due not so much to any major personal failing, even despite his long struggle with crippling depression, but because that's just how life goes. The narrative is starkly poignant for its true rendering of the ups and many downs inherent in a writing life. Despite the accolades Grimes exhaustively scrapes together over the course of his career, he continues to make mistakes, remains underappreciated as a writer; he suffers. 'Every day,' Grimes writes of his experience even now, 'I face a blank page knowing that the majority of the words I commit to the page will be wrong' (132). What Grimes so adeptly communicates is that, ultimately, writing cannot be a means to an end, but must be the end in of itself.

Aside from Grimes' captivating exploration of his long friendship with Convoy then, and interwoven with the development of both their writing careers, *Mentor* provides a wonderfully acute and inspiring image of what it means, and how it is, to be a writer. A portrait more unflinching and honest than others I have read, and in accordance with my own experience of writing, what sits at the heart of Grimes' account is the enormous debt of gratitude he owes for Conroy's mentoring. Without Conroy's guidance, his love, one wonders whether Grimes would have achieved all he did; in fact, the writer himself is convinced that he would not have. He writes, 'I didn't get everything I'd longed for, but I got more than enough… I've escaped my father's mockery and earned Frank's admiration… I know this: if I hadn't met him, I wouldn't be typing these words' (224-225).

Grimes makes a compelling case for the benefit, even requirement, of having a mentor, particularly as a writer and no matter what stage of career one is in. In reading *Mentor*, I felt warmly embraced by two great writers who both seemed to understand, intimately, just how hard the game of writing is; how badly each of us wants our work to succeed. In a sense then, the mentor of the book's title is not Conroy to Grimes-as-fledgling-novelist, but Grimes to his readers. In this way, the cycle of literary support continues, passed down through well-meaning, thoughtful prose, and transcribed memory.

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TEXT review

Poetic twitter

review by Eddie Paterson

Francesca Rendle-Short, Omega Goodwin and Marsha Berry (eds)
Poetry 4 U
School of Media and Communication, RMIT University: Melbourne, 2010
ISBN: 9780646545035
Pb, 123pp, AUD12.00
Online http://poetry4u.org/about: AUD10.00

> We can't help we were born in the narrative
> Generation. Give in to the passing emotional
> state. The future is a wet taste in your mouth.
> Aden Rolfe (51)

In a *New York Times* article from March this year, Randy Kennedy discusses the flourishing of literary output on twitter. As Kennedy points out, while there might be a tendency to dismiss or deride newer forms of writing, such as the strict 140 character limitations of the twitter post, there is no mistaking the potential of forums like twitter to develop innovative work (Kennedy 2011). The question is: what does this future taste like?

Poetry 4 U, an anthology of 'twitter' poetry edited by Francesca Rendle-Short, Omega Goodwin and Marsha Berry, is an enthusiastic contribution to the world of 'Twitterature' and 'Twaiku'. The project began life as an exhibition of poetry, as part of the Melbourne Writers Festival in 2009 and 2010. The best 'tweets', works of no more than 140 characters long, were displayed during the festival at Federation Square and around the Melbourne CBD, as well as being posted on twitter and as an online anthology. Indeed, one of the striking points of this project is the number of iterations beyond the book form, as its ongoing development will also include an iPhone app. Therefore, it might seem counterintuitive to issue an old-school paper version of the anthology, on which this review is based, when the project is so clearly engaging with new media. However, the editors are also clearly committed to providing poetry to as many eyes,

and in as many forms, as possible. This scope and commitment is reflected in the content of this anthology, which ranges from quiet and reflective musings on the everyday to playful incursions into the fragmented syntax of the contemporary text-speak characteristic of our smart-phone existence.

The collection contains numerous works that recall the images and structure of haiku or senryu, the best of which manage to inject strangeness or whimsy into the seemingly banal. The work of Rafael SW figures strongly throughout, with poems such as:

> Even after all these years
> I still dream
> of running (111)

and

> We lay in bed as you
> said the things we both knew
> didn't matter anymore (43)

These poems exploit the 140 character form, exploring a brief moment of transition, of movement and melancholy, before they fade from view. Similarly, though drawing on landscape and season as a primary motif, there are offerings by writers such as Amanda Betts:

> Driving the highway
> she envies the nature of clouds (118)

Ross Clark:

> falling asleep
> in your guest room
> an unfamiliar window
> frames the moon) (107)

Megan Watson:

> Day crisp with sunlight,
> chance view from my window stills
> my circumstances (39)

and Eric Yoshiaki Dando:

> Winter,
> I have no eggs to give you,
> only sprouting walnuts. (67)

Each of these works, as with many others included in the collection, delight in the everyday, though in stronger work this delight also results in a final image that resonates with the reader long after the poem is read: an oddness that demands a second look. In Dando's work we have the winter walnuts, in Betts' an envy of the sky, Watson notes the window stills (so close to sill) and the mystery of circumstances, and with Clark the sly wink of the lone bracket) signals the slip of the moon and the close of the poem. These moments cast new light on familiar preoccupations, whereas the weaker poems in the collection tend to telegraph their trajectory in a way that flattens impact. Nevertheless, *Poetry 4 U* suggests that numerous

proponents of the tweet are also writers with an attraction to haiku and other classic versions of the short form.

If I have a reservation about the poems in this collection it is that they are too respectful of tradition and not yet embracing the twitter form as a site for innovation. Such innovation is arguably present in the sense of play with which Aden Rolfe uses the tweet form:

> You'd've seen if you'd/ tried & verb / not
> tried to verb. At a party I ask what you write
> & she is like: oh that is great. Drink? (59)

Twitter is at once social media, potential site for poetry, and a place for throw-away lines. In Rolfe's work, the poem as a highly structured arrangement – put the verb here, the punctuation here and the romantic hero here – is knowingly undercut by drawing attention to the twitter form. 'Drink?', a final line that is dismissive and humorous (who wants to hear about writing anyway), points to the tweet straddling both the creative and social worlds.

However, the inclusion in *Poetry 4 U* of the radical work of @netwurker more fully demonstrates the huge potential for twitter poetry to engage with the contemporary brevity and weirdness of mobile phone messaging, email truncation, and blog and twitter posts. Consider two anthologised poems of @netwurker:

> [microchavacter-2:]
> view[W!] Lacement.
> [p]Lacement wakes
> from a s[d)L)[o[LI]iLED aeS[yn]thetic_scape.
> sHe bleeds_heat_like_So[A]rr(as)ow[s]. (108)
>
> [microchavacter-3:]
> w_oo[!] Ganic. [or]Ganic [t]winks
> +RT_[candy]giggles.
> It cs u in [tu]Lip_shaped_heaps+dOve[r]
> [pE]ta[l]ed[g]aping[s]. (12)

In these works the structure of the poems, and language itself, is simultaneously reducing and multiplying. The reader is confronted with a twitching syntax that reads, to me, like the hisses and pops of a fax machine sending its code down a phone line. Additional fragments and punctuation are wedged into a vernacular that is already abbreviated. That said, there is also meaning here – a play with character/chavacter – and a stuttering voice struggling to express itself: 'oo[!]Ganic, [or]Ganic [t]winks'. The work of @netwurker gives a glimpse into the potential of twitter as a format for surprising and experimental work. These poems serve to bookend the *Poetry 4 U* collection, an exciting beginning, and point the way forward to further twitterisations. It is a taste of the future, which is both organic and oo[!]Ganic, and work that I hope to see more of.

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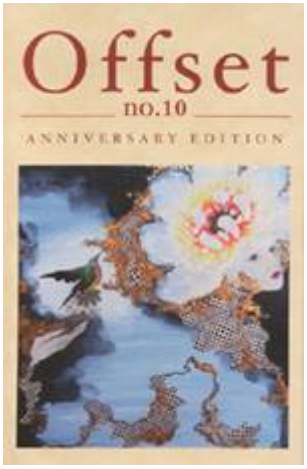
TEXT review

Offset: a literary journal

review by Tessa Chudy



Offset
No10 Anniversary Edition
Alison Whan (Managing Editor)
Offset Press: Victoria University, Melbourne, 2010
ISBN 97800646539058
Pb, 160pp, AUD19.95

Offset no 10 is a tenth anniversary edition of Victoria University's annual creative arts journal. The journal is edited and produced by third year students in Professional Writing, Digital Media and Communications. This edition showcases work of current and past students.

Offset is a solid and rather attractive journal which is neatly presented and contains works of fiction, poetry and fine arts. Accompanying the journal is a multimedia DVD containing works of animation, music and short film.

The idea behind *Offset* is a nice one – to present and showcase the work of students. However this may also be its greatest weakness. Too many of the pieces feel like works derived from generic class exercises and fail to transcend the feeling of limitation and constraint. These pieces often have a strong emphasis on science fiction, horror and character snapshots, like Samuel Pearson's 'In The Evening Light' which looks at a man in his vegetable garden, Charles Mallia's 'The Pilgrims' which focuses on the trials of pioneers, and the disturbing 'Green' by Emilie Goegan about a spurned lover.

There is however some excellent writing: Lucia Nardo's 'Something Broke' is an extremely evocative piece that explores domestic discontent. While Kirsty Stuart's 'The Special Place'explores loss from a child's viewpoint and Ashleigh Wilson's 'The Train' is an intriguing piece that creates a strong sense of dislocation:

> The carriage is empty. The seats are littered with abandoned
> newspapers and magazines. The only movement is an
> empty Coke bottle rolling back and forth across the floor
> with each sway of the train. (102)

The journal feature, 'Where are all the (Non-White) People?'written by Nazeem Hussain, explores the theme of multiculturalism and race relations, and these are powerful recurring themes throughout *Offset*, particularly notable in the poetry which deals repeatedly with terrorism and cultural perceptions. As in Ryan Samuel's 'You Can't Hug Your Children With Pipe Bombs':

> herald sun headline reads – front page, bold type –
> 'Australia corrupted by Islamic hype'

The images presented are vivid and suggest a very strong fine arts program. My big complaint here is that there is no description of media used – works could be paintings, or digital images, photographs or mixed media – it's hard to tell from the reproductions and even the artist biographies often fail to explore the artist's preferred mediums.

As an object *Offset* is quite pleasing with its striking cover image by Uyen (Katie) Doan. However, beyond *Offset*'s aesthetic qualities and outside the confines of Victoria University, it is less satisfying. Yes, I am probably being a little harsh in my judgement here, but for someone approaching *Offset* from outside, it really doesn't bring that essential something that makes you willing to drop everything and lose yourself in its pages. Perhaps a little more clarity in the presentation and explication of its content may help. There is too much overlap in the fiction presented with multiple works exploring similar themes or styles such as Andrew Hobbs-McIntyre's 'Helpless' and Janet Mann's 'Do You Hear Me?' which both revolve around suicide by train.

This is not to say that there are not certain delights to be found in the pages of *Offset*. The artworks by Melody McCormick and Amy Milne are striking and Delia Sinni's story 'The Virus' is an imaginative delight that follows a young tourist struck down by a truly bizarre virus: 'The main side effect of human contraction of this virus is that the human takes on the characteristics of the ingested vegetable' (46).

The trouble with *Offset* is that it fails to become more than a beautifully presented sum of its parts. However, the value of *Offset* and other university publications like it should not be understated as it is both a wonderful opportunity for students to present their work and for university outsiders to evaluate the strength of the various programs offered by the University.

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TEXT review

The Best Essays

review by Jay Daniel Thompson

Robert Drewe (ed)
The Best Australian Essays 2010
Black Inc.: Melbourne, 2010
ISBN 9781863954945
Pb, 356pp, AUD29.95

In his introduction, Robert Drewe declares that *The Best Australian Essays 2010* will explore 'what this country, and its culture, was *about* in 2010' (x; emphasis in original). The book goes some way towards achieving this aim, and it also makes for an absorbing read.

The essays compiled here have previously appeared in *Griffith Review*, *Australian Book Review* and *The Monthly*, amongst other publications. Many of the contributors are prominent names in the field of Australian writing while some are relatively unknown. They address such diverse topics as crime, immigration, the arts, vegetarianism, menstruation, Aboriginal communities. There is even a piece on selecting one's own burial plot.

The most impressive contribution to *The Best Australian Essays 2010* is Anne Manne's article on the autistic seven-year-old girl who starved to death in her family home in 2007. Manne paints a disturbing portrait of a defenseless child (here referred to as 'Ebony') who wound up as 'a skull wrapped in skin' due to neglectful parents and a welfare system that failed to protect her (128). Manne's description of Ebony's skeletal corpse lying in 'a bare room littered with faeces' is the most tragic image I have encountered in any piece of writing for some years (128).

In an equally powerful essay titled 'The Angry Country', Melissa Lucashenko covers similar territory to Manne. Lucashenko focuses on Jai Morcom, the fifteen-year-old who was killed during a fight at his high

school in Mullumbimby (a rural New South Wales town) in 2009. Lucashenko writes:

> A child's death at school – any school – is a particular kind of tragedy. Schools are meant to be special places for children. It is the essence of a school, at least in theory, that it nurtures and supports young people as it educates them. (274)

Lucashenko then acknowledges that 'no school can ever wholly protect our kids from those who would harm them' (274). The author describes the 'rumour mill' surrounding the events that led to Morcom's death (275). Lucashenko argues that this swirl of rumours 'led to devastating community morale' in Mullumbimby (275).

On a very different note, I thoroughly enjoyed Alex Miller's treatise on the joys of fiction-writing. Miller is a prolific novelist and the recipient of several literary awards. His passion for writing reverberates through passages such as the following:

> Enthusiasm, joy, energy and imagination, the vividness of memories, all are necessary to each other and are inseparable from one another in the creative act. And when we look back on what we have written, the best of it, we ask ourselves, 'How could I have done that? How could I have written that? It's beyond me.' (271)

A similar enthusiasm for the creative process (albeit a different kind of creative process) is described in Janet Hawley's essay on Charles Blackman. Blackman has been dubbed 'Australia's greatest literary painter' (181). His artistic profile flourished during the 1960s and 1970s (181). However, in recent decades, Blackman's fondness for a drink has led to him developing 'a form of alcoholic dementia' known as 'Korsakoff's syndrome' (180). As Hawley notes, Blackman's ill health appears to have dulled his creative edge.

There are moments of fine humour throughout *The Best Australian Essays 2010*. An example is Peter Conrad's look at how Kylie Minogue has fashioned herself as a sacred goddess for the MTV generation. He provides the example of her 'Can't Get You Out of My Head' video, in which the singer appeared in a 'hooded smock' that (according to the outfit's designer) tried to 'evoke "that whole Virgin Mary thing"' (77). Though, as Conrad wryly notes, 'it's doubtful that Our Lady would have had slits in her smock' (77). The intelligent wit and perceptiveness of Conrad's essay puts it a league above the standard tabloid celebrity profile.

The most contentious contribution to this volume is Robert Manne's analysis of media/political panics surrounding asylum seekers. Manne is an astute political commentator and a vocal opponent of xenophobia. He brilliantly describes how asylum seekers have been used as political footballs by the Labor and Liberal parties. Alas, Manne undermines the sophistication of his essay when he advances the following argument:

> Neither 'education' nor 'leadership' seems likely in the near future to make Australians open their hearts to asylum seekers or to challenge the mood of the conservative populist political culture that crystallized at the time of *Tampa*… This is the situation that Australian friends of asylum seekers must now honestly confront. (336)

Manne appears to suggest that the 'conservative populist political' approach to asylum seekers that was popularised by John Howard's government is virtually ineradicable, and that 'friends of asylum seekers' must face this reality. Such a suggestion is simplistic and defeatist. Elsewhere, Manne argues that debates around asylum seekers – particularly those debates that have taken place since 2001 (the year of the *Tampa* controversy) – have 'clearly separated Australia's "battlers" from the inner-city "elites"' (327). He fails to mention that this conflict between outer-suburban 'battlers' and urban 'elites' is actually a construct which Howard skillfully exploited in order to further his political agenda.

Finally, any volume titled *The Best Australian Essays 2010* will raise the ire of readers who will wonder why a certain piece was not included, or who will question the quality of certain submissions. To this end, Drewe's decision to edit this book was a thankless one. He must be commended for compiling a volume of engaging and politically-conscious prose.

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TEXT review

New stories

review by Anneli Knight

Aviva Tuffield (ed)
New Australian Stories 2
Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2010
ISBN 9781921640865
Pb, 346 pages, 29.95AUD

The editor of *New Australian Stories 2* is frank about the purpose of this short story collection. Scribe's Aviva Tuffield writes in her editor's note that opens the book: 'One of the central aims of this anthology is to offer new and emerging writers the chance to appear alongside more established names'.

The established names among this collection of 26 authors might mores aptly be described as 'celebrated' with the inclusion of this year's Miles Franklin short-listed author Chris Womersley; darling of the short story genre Cate Kennedy; and Marion Halligan, a recipient of an AM for her services to literature.

Tuffield says of this genre:

> Short stories are vital training ground for our writers: they allow a flexibility and scope to experiment with an idea or a character or a voice – to perfect something in miniature. (Editor's note, n.p.)

And the training ground is well represented. A significant proportion of contributors are creative writing students undertaking Masters or PhD courses, being published alongside a generous selection of teachers of university writing programs.

The collection begins with Paddy O'Reilly's timely recipe for 'How to Write a Short Story' (1) which I have used in this review (in italics) to provide a guide to entice you to this delicious book:

Take the first person, gender her, name her, crack her, separate the body from the soul and set body aside...
In A.G. McNeil's story 'Reckless, Susceptible' (184) we meet Drew who is cracked by childhood memories amid a long absence from his girlfriend when his soul is set aside from his body by wine and whisky.

Put the remaining people into the place… marinate… for at least a week...
The bar is always a good place for marinating and even better on a relentlessly rainy night where we find ourselves in Zane Lovitt's 'Leaving the Fountainhead' (279), in which a mysterious traveller seeking directions triggers memories of his time in a pickle.

Preheat the situation…
Ruby Murray's 'Outback' (202) introduces us to the simmering desires of Mark, owner and shop assistant of 'Australian Outback Adventure Outfitters on Ryrie Street, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, population 132,770' who has resolved to do more, today, than fantasise about his future.

Fold…soul back into her body...
In Fiona McFarlane's 'Exotic Animal Medicine' (38) we are warned of the event that will risk wrenching soul from body in the story's first sentence: 'The wife was driving on the night they hit Mr Ronald', before we hear the story of this young couple on the day of their furtive wedding.

Place in a superheated situation...
Two sisters sharing the same man is a recipe for superheating, and Peggy Frew's 'No-one Special' (66) navigates the complexities of this most complicated set of relationships.

Test whether the story is done by inserting a reader....
On Paddy O'Reilly's suggestion, it can be concluded this collection of short stories has been baked to precision, serving up a tray of closely-observed morsels.

Anneli Knight is a freelance journalist, regular contributor to The Age *and* Sydney Morning Herald *and co-author of* Flirting with Finance *(Fairfax Books). She is soon to complete a PhD in creative writing, with her novel set in the Kimberley where she has spent much of her time over the past six years.*

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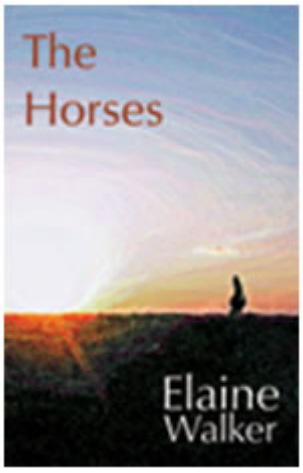
TEXT review

A story of hope

review by Sandra Burr



Elaine Walker
The Horses
Cinnamon Press, Gwynedd, Wales 2010
ISBN 9781907090097
Pb pp239 UK8.99

What do you do when Armageddon strikes? How do you survive when all but a handful of the creatures living in your world suddenly disappear? We find out something about the resilience of humans and animals in this book by Welsh debut novelist Elaine Walker.

An ecological disaster strikes while Jo and his family are holidaying on a remote Scottish island and their lives are changed forever. This is a tale of many parts. It is a post-apocalyptic story, a teenage coming of age story, a book for aficionados of magic realism and lovers of horses and a story of environmental disaster and recovery. It is also a text that subverts the dominant discourse of global economics, political disenfranchisement and bureaucratic domination. Despite this apparent complexity *The Horses* is neither dark nor difficult and, unlike similar stories such as the deeply pessimistic Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, this is a story of hope. Very early in the novel this sense of optimism is signalled by the belief amongst the protagonists that 'the world will get going again' (15).

The author, Elaine Walker, is a freelance writer with a doctorate in English Literature. She lectures on writing for the Open University and the University of Wales. Walker is also a horse owner and lover. She writes poetry and fiction with an interest in magical realism, and nonfiction that centres on equestrian history and culture.

Walker clearly knows not only her subject matter but also the stuff of writing with *The Horses* exhibiting a true storyteller's sensibility. It is beautifully crafted and sparsely populated by believable and (mostly)

likeable human and nonhuman characters. The narrative follows a satisfactory trajectory that, with a few detours and worrying moments, carries the reader to a fitting end. Reading this novel is like eating a really enjoyable meal.

It is a beautifully constructed work, elegantly simple yet richly complex and this is squarely attributable to the author's abilities as a writer. Walker uses a simple linear narrative that draws the reader forward. The past is gone and the family, trapped between the obliterated past and an unknowable future that 'rolled away across the meadow leaving me behind' (94), can only concentrate on getting through each day and planning for the shortest of terms – growing food, tending the animals, surviving the winter, and looking after each other. We experience this world through Jo, and this use of the first person narrator produces a strong sense of immediacy, placing the reader inside the unfolding narrative. The dramatic moments are well balanced, the difficulties the family faces are real and believable and an air of vulnerability permeates the novel as teenage Jo struggles to find a foothold in this shattered world.

Further tragedy occurs when Jo's father dies as a result of being kicked in the head by a bull. His death marks the beginning of Jo's transformation from ordinary teenager supported by a loving family to a key player in the survival of what is left of his family – 8-year-old Ginny, Jo, 'a half-grown boy' and Moth, his pregnant mother. It also marks the introduction of the magic realism elements in this story as Jo continues to hear, feel and see his dad's presence 'beyond the corner of my eye' (51), and more amazingly, as a herd of horses arrives out of nowhere and stays to help the family. This event references Edwin Muir's poem, 'The Horses', which Walker acknowledges and which addresses similar themes. It begins:

> Barely a twelvemonth after
> The seven days war that put the world to sleep,
> Late in the evening the strange horses came…

Walker ensures the believability of these and other magical events by anchoring them in reality. Horses are her forte. It is evident from the way that Walker writes about them that they are as familiar as breathing to her and there is a beautiful description of riding a galloping horse that I wish I had written:

> He went off like a firework with its tail lit, his back legs thrusting so hard to power his movement that I could feel his hip joints right underneath me. He was a streak of cloud, a hurricane, a bolt of lightning in a clear sky... (138)

It is Walker's ability to express her empathetic understanding of the horse-human bond that allows the reader to believe that the horses actually do possess magical qualities. Indeed anyone with a deep knowledge of horses appreciates that there is more to these alluring creatures than the merely physical. The healing power of horses is well known. It is used, for example in a modality called Equine Assisted Therapy (EAP), a process that places troubled humans and horses together, with the horse selecting which human it will give emotional and psychological support to. In much the same way, Walker's horses befriend and ally themselves with individual family members and soon prove to be integral to the family's well-being, without sacrificing their innate equine traits. The humans, for their part understand that they must wait for the horses to get 'a bit more used to us' (19). The way they approach the horses and respect them, their

tentative first rides and slowly developing bonds, are much more believable than say, the way that writer John Marsden (*Darkness be my Friend*) has his teenage protagonists catching and riding, without saddles or bridles, a herd of excitable farm horses at breakneck speed through the black of night. Walker's descriptions, even with the elements of magic realism, are infinitely more convincing.

Characterisation is another of Walker's accomplishments. While some characters slide towards caricature (e.g. the menacing Phil) they are saved by Walker's excellent ear for dialogue and her ability to translate it onto the page. Clearly Phil, a man with no redemptive qualities, is a metaphor for a world gone wrong, for the tyranny of technology and for humanity's disregard for the natural world, and he serves his purpose well. Jo is equally well drawn – a child man who has bouts of anger and frustration, and outbursts that he later regrets. Complaining that 'I want my life back' (33) not only makes Jo more human and therefore understandable, it also captures the essence of what it is to be a teenage boy.

This work is marketed as general fiction; however it displays many of the hallmarks of young adult fiction which certainly broadens its appeal. Young adult fiction, for example often instructs its readers and Walker handles this with tact. The words of Jo's dad guide him through the difficulties ahead: 'Dad always said that no matter what stupid things humans did to each other, nature would come back just when you thought everything was over' (45). Moth, who is also warm and likeable, guides Jo with a balance of discipline and wise words. When Jo rails against the things that threaten his newfound stability, Moth says: 'It's being tested, Joel, like anything that needs to be strong' (184).

The cover design is both mysterious and attractive; however, if I have one quibble it is that the title lacks imagination and fails to indicate what this book is about. It might, in fact, turn off readers who think it is only about horses. The title may also be confused with another nonfiction book with a similar title written by Walker, *Horse* (Reaktion Books, 2008).

This book deserves a wide audience not only for its technical accomplishments but also for its message of hope in a bleak world. I wish it great commercial success.

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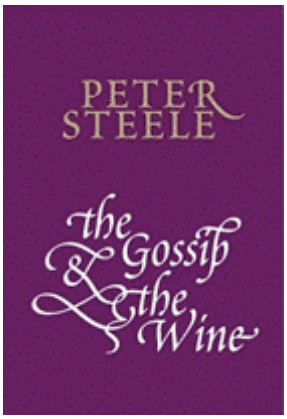
TEXT review

The heavenly and the human

review by L'aine Gillespie



Peter Steele
The Gossip and the Wine
John Leonard Press, Melbourne 2010
ISBN 9780980852301
Pb 65pp AUD24.95

DH Lawrence wrote in his essay, 'Chaos in Poetry' (1967):

> The essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort of attention, and 'discovers' a new world within the known world.

Poetry is, in one sense, a new expression or view of something old or previously known that brings attention to an uncommon knowledge or point of view, or sheds light on the familiar. Peter Steele has captured the essence of poetry in this sense in his collection of poems titled *The Gossip and the Wine* and cleverly told a new version of an old story. This collection tells the Gospel stories from a different perspective: instead of highlighting a man of miracles, it relates a story of human and divine elements in a somewhat storm-tossed world. Steele's journey amongst these elements turns the biblical stories into a refreshing portrayal of men and God.

Throughout my reading of Peter Steele's work I was reminded of the frailty of human existence, the faith and the hope for something greater than ourselves, and the traces of the existence of an almighty God which that human faith and hope rests upon. The 'gossip' is apparent in the role of human participation while the 'wine' is reminiscent of the divine dimension. Steele sets up the human element in the first two lines of the first the poem, 'Advent':

> All my life I've been at the school of yearning
> where masters come and go. (1)

Yearning is a psychological state that either drives an individual forward in life or becomes an unsatisfied longing. Either way it is an unavoidable weight that accompanies the state of being human. Steele draws attention to these human strengths and weaknesses immediately in this first poem. As the collection progresses, Steele attempts to offer a reconciliation of sorts between the human and heavenly dimensions in some of the poems, while others place them worlds apart. In his poetic method of reasoning he draws on the concept of spiritual belief and where it rests in human experiences. Throughout, Steele weighs the human and heavenly against each other as he revisits various events that are based on biblical stories.

Some of the poems journey in and out of time; some, such as 'Contemplation with Ashes'(10), are positioned within particular events. Yet others, such as 'Water Man' (9), suggest the personal point of view that the water man, or Jesus the hero of the Gospels, may have had regarding various events and experiences.

'Water Man' takes a different slant on the story of Jesus and the disciplines in a boat on stormy seas. Rather than presenting the miraculous calming of the storm, Steele brings the almighty being to a human level:

> Yes there was dreaming though he could not say
> how long it lasted. He found himself
> now in familiar waters, coasting the lake
> his friends would fish for a living, now
> in the open sea, possessed like herring or dolphin
> by unbiddable currents... (9)

The water man wakes in the midst of the storm but his attention focuses on the commotion of sea life. In the biblical version Jesus turned to his fearful friends in the storm-tossed boat and said, "Oh ye of little faith..." then turned away and commanded the seas to be still. But in Steele's version the water man, in his waking state, takes in the miracle of life tossed in the 'unbiddable currents' and says:

> 'You never enjoy the world aright till the sea
> itself floweth in veins.' He made
> the most of the dreamtime, still uncertain when
> it must give way to showtime... (9)

'Water Man' shows the biblical hero as a man who marvels at life in the friction and the rise to 'showtime' which I assume, in this instance, to be the miraculous calming of the sea. Having said that, it also draws to mind the ultimate 'showtime' of the crucifixion. The poem then transports the reader to Jordan, the river where, as the biblical story tells us, Jesus was being baptised by John when a voice from heaven claimed him to be the son of God. Steele refers to this event as 'water blessing him on his way'.

There is something of a tongue-in-cheek flavour entwined amongst the abstract and the common elements of human and heavenly representations in this collection. Steele has counter-balanced one against the other in order to re-present the Gospel stories. He embraces the yearning and the hope of humanity and accesses the ambiguity of the divine. Some poems are referenced by particular scriptures implying a specific story or person that Steele has re-presented and wants the reader's attention drawn to. In following his lead in the poems, you take a journey that leaves you questioning these biblical stories and the religious faith they were intended to inspire.

Steele uses historical figures and makes other historical references to convey his point. After references to Homer and Dante, the last four verses of the poem 'Advent' turn to the life of George Herbert, seventeenth-century priest and poet, a man not afraid to argue 'it out with God', and who 'went on hoping, as the lungs declined'. Herbert, a well-worn and well-liked man, was 'a troubled soul' and 'brave spirited'. Disillusioned by worldly ambition, he eventually found solace in the priesthood. Steele refers to Herbert, a saintly man, in other poems such as 'Trees' and 'Reverie in Lygon Street' (17) as though he were proof of the religious claims Steele makes.

The poems 'Simon' (52)and 'Peter' (47) are delivered from the ordinary by scriptural events that connect these characters to the divine being or plan. Introducing these poems with scripture has an impact on their combination of creativity and creation: the scriptural references highlight the context of the poem which then tones down the 'fact' or 'fiction' controversy that has surrounded the bible for centuries, and will no doubt continue to do so. While consciously recognising two versions of the story, one of human creativity and the other of divine creativity, we see that truth or belief is not enough and has no meaning unless faith shows us another world. Steele makes the scriptural and poetical come together to create reflections on each other in this collection, showing us other worlds contained within the Gospel stories.

Steele brings the humanity of the bible characters to the forefront and makes them realistic. His poems make Jesus, the biblical icon, a 'real' person, part of a human existence rather than just a miracle man. The poet does not dismiss anything that suggests the power of the imagination, or creation. He states his belief in God in 'Reverie in Lygon Street':

> Believing Him here, as in my folly I do,
> the once and risen mortal, prompts me
> to ask about the old days.

The Gossip and the Wine reflects the priest-like task of the poet that Robin Skelton refers to in *The Poet's Calling* (1975). In this book Skelton suggests that a poet believes in an ability to create awareness and heal the misconceptions of humanity. In my opinion, Steele attempts to reconfigure the Gospel stories and draw attention to the idea that perhaps there is some reality in them, perhaps these stories were about ordinary people who did extraordinary things. I think Steele has, once again, delivered a poetical masterpiece that, from a Christian viewpoint, enhances the Gospel stories and the divine promises of grace as a panacea for the wretchedness of human nature in a way that is not overly religious or pious but simple and real.

The Gossip and the Wine unveils the mystical and religious characters of the Gospel stories in a way that invokes the question: Who was that man?

L'aine Gillespie has recently completed a PhD at Southern Cross University. While focusing her research on the relationship between poetry and philosophy, she has also completed a collection of poems titled 'Thirty Odd Years Ago' that focuses on the beach and drug culture of the Gold Coast in the 1970s.

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TEXT review

Just Glad Wrap

review by Caroline van de Pol

Francesca Rendle-Short
Just Glad Wrap
The Five Obstructions
Margaret Lawrence Gallery
2011

In *Just Glad Wrap,* as part of The Five Obstructions art exhibition at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victoria College of the Arts, writer Francesca Rendle-Short opens her notebook and splashes it over a stark white wall unwrapping her writing in a way we might unwrap a precious book or overflowing salad sandwich. There's much to pick through and savour.

While I felt a kind of unease peering at her writing sprawled over a gallery wall, I also admired the courage of this artist-writer who, in her own words, explores what it means to 'write with the body'.

In making the work, Rendle-Short stepped into it, became the work with her writing body – muscle, graphite, rain. In turn, she invites the viewer, as she puts it, to *fall* back into the work with her and to write the work for themselves *as reading*. It becomes a multiplex experience, inviting transgression and disobedience. Before this, Rendle-Short had never *writtenonwalls* quite like this.

This idea of 'never', of 'obstruction', is what informed the exhibition and the 'instruction' from curator, Martina Copley to all five artists Copley invited to work with her. In her invitation Copley said: 'The five hindrances/five easy steps (working title) is about the obstructions to making and viewing art, and the freedoms, constraints and refusals implicit in the exhibition process. There is no curatorial brief.' Copley did, however, ask the writers to give her five things that characterise their practices – or five things they 'would never do'. She then chose one 'freedom' that the artists had to work from: for Francesca it was 'steal an

idea'. She stole books from her father's bookcase, books still wrapped in Glad Wrap: a 1917 Holy Bible with Scoffield References and an 1870 Samuel Bagster *Daily Light*.

In *Just Glad Wrap* Rendle-Short explores the possibility of writing her father (a man who was the patron and founding chair of the 'apologetics ministry' Creation Science Foundation) in a way that matters. And in thinking about something Hélène Cixous once wrote – 'I ask of writing what I ask of desire' – Rendle-Short explains that she considered possibilities of creating a 'a non-acquisitional space' where neither one nor the other makes demands or argues back. She asks: 'Can this *writingonwalls* become transformative and reach for what Inga Clendinnen might name as "incandescence"? Is it possible to make a portrait of her father, or "other", as a portrait of desire and possibility?'

For the viewer, *Just Glad Wrap* feelslike you are unwrapping family secrets as Rendle-Short combines memories with installations to reveal something of her father – and grandmother, including a precious 1917 bible 'protected' by glad wrap and inscribed: 'To Mrs Rendle Short with Love and Appreciation from the Members of the Shaftesbury Bible Study Class, February 1924'.

Some of the writing on the wall leaves the viewer feeling as if they have secretly opened the artist's emails (a graphic youtube image and link) or stolen the writer's notebook (never not cry… never ever say everything). But rather than any sense of guilt there's a kind of gratitude that something so personal can be made so public, that the private art of writing can be shared in an art gallery rather than the more traditional writer's festivals, shared alongside the work of other artists who are not writers.

Looking at the words, all looped and rounded, falling off the end, rubbed out and written over, you might also feel pain. Like me, your hand might ache as you imagine yourself doing the writing, and your head might hurt from the flurry of ideas shooting across the wall as the words move from the wall inside you, active words of the body (squeeze, push, smooth, knees, fingers).

love my father's knees
squeeze folds between fingers
push skin up and down

It's all very physical and emotional. Like an outpouring of memory and stories, both painful and important to the writer, the artwork meanders through a life remembered and illustrated for the audience.

glad = giving joy
glad = bright beautiful
from the Latin – glabrous = smooth

Having read some of the exciting and eclectic writing of Rendle-Short, who stretches the possibilities of words and writing in new and unconventional art forms, we can now look forward to more writing, more poetry and more art from her.

Caroline van de Pol is a lecturer in Media and Communication at RMIT University. She is a journalist and editor and has worked at the Herald Sun *and as a freelance writer for* The Sunday Age*. Caroline has published*

two non-fiction books and is currently completing her PhD at the University of Wollongong in creative writing.

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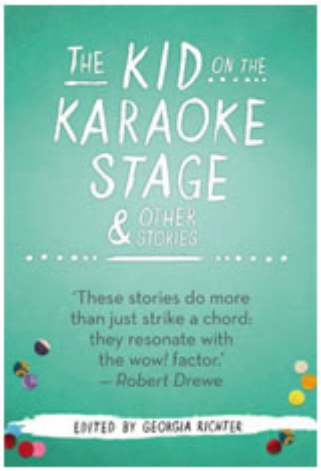
TEXT review

Moments of realisation

review by Helen Gildfind



Georgia Richter (ed)
The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories
Fremantle Press, 2011
ISBN 9781921696831
Pb 272pp AUD27.95

Richter introduces this collection as one that straddles both fiction and creative non-fiction, with both genres sharing the need to tell a story well and to be, on some fundamental level, '*true*' (8). Richter recounts how the stories made her reflect upon how 'we turn to writing to crystallise moments of realisation' (7, 8). By telling stories 'to make sense of who we are' we create something in which others can see glimpses of themselves (10). This collection does these things for reader and writer alike, but it also seems to be the product of an unstated agenda to publish stories that in some way – through their content or author – give readers glimpses of the people and places of Western Australia.

The book begins with Sj Finch's story (whose title names the collection) where the narrator searches for the relationship between performance, pretence and truth amongst the happier memories of his adolescent past, when drinking and fooling with his mates made him feel that 'Everything Is Okay With The World' (19). Bruce L Russell's 'A Night in Hell' also follows a teenager's travels through the seductive – and dangerous – world of camaraderie created by men and drink.

Peter Docker's 'Funeral Song' sees Irish Australians farewell a man whose death not only shows them how little they knew of him, but how little they know of the Aboriginal people who mourn for him in the dust outside of the church. Alice Nelson's 'The Pearl Divers' seamlessly integrates story and history to expose the reality behind the 'brilliantly spun mythologies' (211) of the colonials who built fortunes from the spilt blood of immigrant and Aboriginal pearlers of 1920s Broome. Andrew Relph's travels also

leave him reflecting upon alienation and community, and choice and destiny. His random encounters with the psychologically and physically maimed leaving him wondering: 'Yes – you get what you get. But we are all affected by what everyone else gets' (238). What the protagonists in Natasha Lester's 'One Week Later' and Paula Gallagher's 'Rebyonak' get are unwanted pregnancies, with each female character confronted first by the fact of their pregnancies and then by their bodies' refusal to sustain the lives inside them.

Marcella Polain's 'Beautiful Negatives' traces the topographies of grief which define one woman's experience of loss in a world where doctors have replaced God: 'it is doctors who hear us, who peer within, into our bodies and our stories, who look into our blood and return with judgements' (110). Erin Pearce's 'My Scallywag Suit' also writes to the tune of grief, though does so through the ostensible silliness of the protagonist's reflections upon her predilection for dressing as a pirate. Frances Finch's 'Little-big Sister' disguises nothing of her family's struggle to care for an adopted sister who writhes in an agony of ungraspable identity.

The Australian outback appears both as a refuge and a place of danger in this collection. Goldie Goldbloom's naïve child narrator in 'The Road To Katherine' is left forgotten, in the desert, by her dysfunctional family. When she hitches a lift with a truckie she intuitively realises her danger and, like Scheherazade, attempts to stave off death by telling stories. Pat Jacobs' 'The Chrysoprase Plane' palpates with tension as a woman walks into the red dust of a desert whose harsh planes represent both her desire and inability to face the unknown: though nothing 'happens' in this story, everything is learnt. Jo-Ann Whalley's 'Saltwater Memories' accompanies a women and her daughters' escape from domestic abuse to the anonymous canvas of Nowhere, a place which not only offers crows and dead kangaroos, but the chance for a family to rewrite themselves into a new life. This story ponders the relationship between memory and reality, and is laden with a child's guilt at not being able to protect the adult who was, after all, meant to be protecting her. Stories like those by Whalley and Goldbloom, and David Hutchison's 'Snakes Don't Die Until Sunset', all show a deep concern for children's voices and experiences in a world dominated by adults.

A curiously high number of stories in this collection are preoccupied with the strange, the magical, and the mythical. Meredi Ortega's 'The Wardrobe', Naama Amram's 'The Exhibition' and Graham Nowland's 'Chomsky and the Kultigator' all take us on journeys that leave us wondering how an individual creates meaningfulness when they are riddled with self-doubt or when they are surrounded by consumerism and pretension. Incredible plots and fantastic narrative plays with Time define both Jon Doust's 'The Man with a Moustache' and Glen Hunting's 'The Island,' while Malcolm Rock's 'The Deluge' sees London disappear underwater, its inhabitants frozen beautifully in death. These surreal stories seem to emphasise the importance of the imagination in comprehending a world whose meanings seldom lie in its apparent realities.

In Max Taylor's 'Caterpillar Men' the surreal meets the too real in the story of a Korean comfort woman's survival of war. Taylor powerfully forces readers to confront the gruesome reality of sexual destruction in the figure of Aikiko who tries to deal with her horrific experiences by translating them into fable. She envisions the long line of Japanese soldiers

eternally queuing outside of her dorm as a caterpillar, identifying herself and her fellow ex-slaves as mere leaves on a plant which contains 'something' that will someday bite that caterpillar's head off and kill it. Sure enough, the war ends and the men go, but it is too late for Aikiko: 'The whole battlefield is in my stomach,' she says, 'I am pregnant with war' (175). After the war, the protagonist returns to her village with one of the other comfort women who eventually gives birth to a boy who has the wings of a moth. Together they build a new home where Time and the seasons magically overwhelm them with an abundance of food and beauty. The boy grows into a worldly and woman-seeking man, finally leaving the village with a new caterpillar of men who march towards a new war that has shattered their village utopia. War also appears in Ted George's revelation of the boredom and false bravado of frightened young men dreaming of home while stuck in Vietnam, while Samuel Carmody's 'Deep Water' traces one man's return from the incomprehensible, dehumanised, technofied warfare of Kandahar to his home in Australia: his coastal refuge is gone; instead he finds an 'ocean disturbed' (192).

What is most striking about *The Kid on the Karaoke Stage* is its stories' range of style and genre, a range which seems to suggest that Fremantle Press has generously – and quite unusually – created a collection that includes both the voices of writers who have mastered their craft and those who are still very much finding their voice. While this means that some stories still seem to need more editorial intervention – especially in terms of over-writing, the vice of all new writers – this engaging collection offers direct insight into the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of a regionally and historically specific group of Australian writers. It is encouraging that a quality house should publish such a book.

Helen Gildfind lives in Melbourne and has published poems, short stories, essays and book reviews in Australia and overseas.

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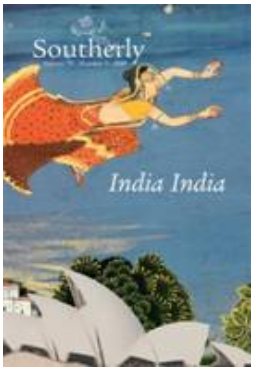
TEXT review

Southerly

review by Sue Bond



Santosh K Sareen and G J V Prasad (guest eds)
David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon (eds)
Southerly: India India
Volume 70, Number 3
Brandl Schlesinger, Sydney 2010
ISBN 9781921556159
Pb, AUD26.95

To describe this issue of *Southerly* as a cornucopia of literary riches is an understatement. In his editorial, David Brooks describes it as a 'show bag' in the quintessential Australian sense, as he thought this was fairer than attempting to be representative in such a large field as Indian/Australian literary relations.

However, not all the contents are related to the theme of India and David Brooks comments in his editorial that the theme does not consume the entire issue, and that this is usual for the journal. I also think it helps to vary the content, and maintain the reader's interest, by interspersing non-themed pieces through the journal. Like mixing the poems, stories and essays instead of having them grouped together, it works well.

There are eighteen poets represented, eight short stories and eight essays, plus more in the wonderfully named Long Paddock (http://southerlyjournal.com.au/long-paddock/70-3-india/) the online only section of the journal on the new website. All the reviews for this issue are also placed online due to space restrictions.

The theme was chosen because of the intense interest Indians have in Australian literature, an interest which unfortunately doesn't seem to be reciprocated to the same degree in Australia for Indian literature (a point noted by Paul Sharrad in his essay, discussed later). Which makes this issue all the more important for continuing and extending that literary conversation between us, and making more readers aware of its richness and diversity.

I read the issue in the order in which the editors presented the works, beginning and ending with poems: Judith Beveridge's dignified 'The Deal' and 'Little' from Devadatta's Poems, through to Ali Alizadeh's political and angry 'Election Announced' and 'The Bubble'. On the Contents pages, however, everything is arranged according to category, including the 'Long Paddock'. There is a pleasing balance in the distribution of poetry, stories and essays, exercising and stimulating the mind as it changes gear from one form to another. The poems and stories are particularly strong in this issue, and the essays have an eclectic selection of subjects: Aboriginal and Dalit women's subjectivity; Mary Louisa Skinner, neglected Australian author; Aboriginal theatre; bogans; immigrant identity in a Hazel Edwards' novel; and others. It's of course impossible to address every piece in this review, so I shall focus on a select few that I feel particularly noteworthy.

Beginning with poetry, Richard Deutch, an American who came to Australia in the 1990s, and who died in 2005, has three visceral and striking poems included (and two more online). 'Postcard', 'for my mother', and 'Pinochle' all speak of family and its disconnects, in stark and strong language that is extraordinarily moving and arresting. In 'Pinochle', which is 'from an early draft of "A Christmas Letter to my Father"', Deutch shows his father bursting into the bathroom while he is showering, and beginning to cry:

Then
let out a groan, as if your very life
were issuing from your lungs, as if, at last,
you were empty. Then you started to cry again. (120)

At last, his father's sobs stop, and:

You reached around
for the towel hanging from the door, and I saw
your face through the opacity of the glass.
It was the face of a child, I thought, a red-faced
child, constricted with pain. (120)

Deutch believes this means his parents are splitting up, but it turns out that something else had happened, something much more wounding and primal, in a way.

All the poems here are uncomplicated in their language, but raw and powerful in their meaning, including Jennifer Maiden's substantial 'The Year of the Ox'. Here is Maiden's description of herself as having been born in the Year of the Ox, so her 'element is earth' and she:

plough[s] my furrow
heavily and fruitfully and my seldom rage
is that of the earth like an earthquake, sudden
and efficiently gutting. (123)

Such is her savage political eye at work throughout this poem that I had no doubt about the gutting potential. In contrast is her daughter who was born in the Year of the Tiger, and whose element is fire. Maiden's two recurring characters, George Jeffreys and his girlfriend Clare Collins, are here, along with Barack Obama, Diana Spencer, Hillary Clinton and her mentor Eleanor Roosevelt, Tony Blair and Jack Straw ('As an ox, I am/ Lying on Straw and watching Straw Lying') and the Bushes.

Amongst the politics is the personal, with a memory of Dorothy Porter, and lines depicting Maiden's inner turmoil and grief:

Mud
scatters beside me and my hooves slip
under me often and always then my heart
like an ancient engine coughs in terror, but
the muddy ditch holds. (127)

'The Year of the Ox' is like a sustained conversation, a continuation from previous poems, an epic broken only by its placement in different spaces. Indeed, Maiden stated in an interview with Jason Steger in 2010 that it is a 'further progression of the reconciliation between the different subject matters in Friendly Fire and Pirate Rain'. For me the key lies in these lines:

the only
thing certain if you kill someone to avoid
something is the death not the avoidance. (125)

Maiden has Eleanor quote this from Conor Cruise O'Brien, and the repeating concerns of war and venal political decision-making thunder out loud.

Temsula Ao's poem 'A Thousand Beds' speaks of wandering and love in lyrical terms, and a return to home and a loved one as something 'to refurbish my dreams' (64). This contrasts with the poetry of caste activist and feminist Meena Kandasmy, which with clever and ferocious turns of phrase, skewers patriarchal and political hypocrisy in 'Jouissance' and 'Speech comes after swallowing'.

Of the short fiction, Aashish Kaul's 'A Dream of Horses' is an atmospheric, mysterious, melancholic short story about writing and love, amongst other things. It begins in the voice of an unnamed man who works in a legal office, but is also a writer who hasn't written for four years, and is convalescing from an unknown illness. He reminisces about a young woman he met in a bookshop, and the second part of the story changes to second person, shifting the reader's perspective, and feelings. It's highly effective and the story is mesmerising and sophisticated.

Chris Raja's short story 'The Burning Elephant' has a hidden power that comes with repeated reading, and Graeme Kinross-Smith's 'Famille' is haunting. Kunal Sharma writes of disconnection and tragedy in 'House and Happiness'; the title is as stark and ironic as the writer's tone and style. As with poetry, not all the stories conform to the theme in an obvious way, such as Sarah Klenbort's bracing 'The Chinese Circus Comes to Cessnock', but this is not a distraction.

The essay by Maria Preethi Srinivasan, 'Constructing Aboriginal and Dalit Women's Subjectivity and Making "Difference" Speak: an Illustration through the writings of Jackie Huggins, Kumud Pawde and Bama', discusses the commonalities that exist between the two cultures of Indigenous Australian women and Indian Dalit women, and the difficulties they both experience with Western feminism's sometimes narrow viewpoint. The author includes excerpts from her interview with Jackie Huggins, bringing her voice directly to us.

Paul Sharrad's 'Reconfiguring "Asian Australian" Writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay' is an exploration of how much attention is paid to South Asian literature in Australia, compared to other Asian writing. He mentions the 'first Indo-Australian literary work', a collection of stories *Time of the Peacock* by Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew in 1965, and notes that its 'impact lies in depictions of nostalgia for India and the organic link to traditional practices' (14). Much more South Asian literature appeared in Australia with the era of multiculturalism, but he argues that 'there is not a consistent or equal two-way literary traffic between India and Australia' (15). He lists various Indian, Anglo-Indian and disaporic writers, before turning to Inez Baranay, a 'quite different writer inhabiting transnational space, physically and imaginatively' (18), whose last two novels were published and reviewed in India. This is an absorbing, informative, and well argued essay.

Other outstanding pieces include Mark Macleod's quietly evocative and reflective piece 'Reading my first time in India: the ACLALS Conference 1977'. It contains such images as 'a woman bent at ninety degrees with a lump of coal the size of a pig strapped to her back' (228), and a sensitive approach to describing being taken to see a panther at feeding time. A white goat is tethered on the roof of a hide. Macleod expresses a sense of horror and completely forgets what happened, only that he wanted to get out: 'The sound of those hooves has wiped out everything else' (234).

The essay by Meenakshi Hariharan and C T Indra, 'Negotiating Immigrant Identity: Hazel Edwards' Fake ID as a Techno-Gothic Child Narrative', is a scholarly but approachable exploration of an author they obviously love and admire. They note her prolific career, prodigious imagination, and strong sense of justice: 'When asked if there was one thing she could change about the world, she replied, "Intolerance of people who are different"' (254). They first contextualise the issue of migration in Australian history before discussing Edwards' novella with respect to immigration and techno-gothic child narrative. It is an enthusiastic discussion.

Not all of the essays are as well constructed and presented as these, with some loose structure and problems with expression, but the majority are good examples of scholarly discussion.

In the Long Paddock, there are six short stories, eight poems, and an essay on the collaboration between Indian and Australian authors to produce a collection of 'cross-cultural narratives' about terrorism; there are also discursive reviews of eleven books of poetry and short fiction. The website is easy to navigate, and attractive to look at and read, and is a valuable extension of the journal.

There are a few errors in the text of the print journal, and some grammatical and spelling mishaps throughout. There is a reference to Roger Fry being a 'name in Australian Art' (43) (he was a member of the Bloomsbury group and I can find no mention of him even coming to Australia) and the poem 'Hauling' has a contradiction: in the fifth stanza the roads are untarred but in the sixth they are tarred.

These are minor, and I don't feel they detract from what is an absorbing and intelligent collection of creative and critical work shared between India and Australia. It is a journal to be savoured over time, and returned to regularly, such is the volume and quality of its contents. It also encourages the seeking out of other work by the authors.

The cover, I should mention, is a brilliant melding of Indian and Australian, capturing instantly identifiable images with humour and beauty.

Works cited

Steger, Jason 2010 'First the fire then rain'. *The Age*, 28 August 2010. Available at http://newsstore.fairfax.com.au/apps/viewDocument.ac;jsessionid=CB47C6DF6DEC61D9E082EB665CF32414?sy=afr&pb=all_ffx&dt=selectRange&dr=1month&so=relevance&sf=text&sf=headline&rc=10&rm=200&sp=brs&cls=18883&clsPage=1&docID=AGE100828A37DK4EQK9V [accessed 21 August 2011]

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