

Introduction to the Special Issue

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In November 2017, I was with Dr. Martina Horáková, sitting in a small eatery on one of the side streets of Brno, in the Czech Republic. I had just finished a week as a guest lecturer at the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University, presenting a condensed version of Australian poetry to a group of graduate students. Tired from the emotional and intellectual labour of teaching an entire term's worth of poetry in a week, but equally animated and buzzing from the ongoing discussion of the poetry community in Australia—and my luck in being involved in it—Martina asked if I would pull together an issue of the *Journal of the European Association for Studies of Australia*, of which she is the main editor. Given the generosity she showed in hosting me, and in recognition of the week's discussion with students—which ranged from David Unaipon to Jill Jones, from Banjo Patterson to Alison Whittaker—I told her it would be a welcome opportunity to bring a sharper focus to some Australian poems and histories.

This special issue of *JEASA* represents the manner in which literature carries life with it, the manner in which literature upends, or explicates the “entangled significance” (van Dooren 7) of our days. It is aimed at exploring how poetry is experienced, revised, lived, analysed, enunciated, performed and measured in our everyday life. The issue is a collation of commissioned and happenstance interventions. In sending the call for submissions out to various friends for scholarship, the details provided were vague; I asked them that they submit something which demonstrated their excitement, to write on something that compelled them in their reading and in their scholarship. The responses received demonstrate a flourishing engagement with Australian writing at the very heart of our intellectual community, and attest to the possibilities of Australian scholarship and the communities of thought developed here. This work evidences the various ways we attend to the complex and ethical significance of poetry, of writing that makes meaning in the world, and the scholarship we are publishing today generates distinctive encounters with the material of language. As a means of expressing my commitment to and acknowledgment of the ongoing possibilities of Australian writing, it is my honour to share these essays with all of you, the readers.

Corey Wakeling's “Surviving Zombie Capital” is a striking encounter with the Eurydicean counter-lyric in the poetry of Gig Ryan. Wakeling argues that *The Division of Anger*, and the radical pessimism Ryan fostered in the 70's and into the 80's “suggests a presentiment of a biopolitical condition located specifically at the heart of the neoliberal Anthropocene” (14). The transformations that Ryan engenders in her poetic expression throughout this period entail a radical rewrite of the subject and the possible futures in which “70's youth culture becomes the context for and subject of critique of forms of zombie ontology ramified by capital and patriarchy” (13). Wakeling argues that Ryan's anti-ballad confrontations with Orphic lyric traditions indicts the systems of capital and systems of gendered oppression which the affective violence of the reprisal poems such as “If I Had A Gun” comprise. Wide-ranging, fast-paced, and with searing insights into Ryan's post-punk sensibilities, Wakeling's essay represents a defining analysis of the political and ethical work of one of Australia's most important poets.

Grounded in poetic analysis but encompassing a wider engagement with environmentalism, ecopoetics and species ethnography, **Michael Farrell** examines the complicated social relations produced by and reflected in the performed poetry of Amanda Stewart. In “The Conceptual Lyrebird: Imitation as Lyric in the Poetry of Amanda Stewart” Farrell utilises the figure of the lyrebird to analyse the experimental conditions of a sonic poem and to mark these conceptual frameworks against other “earth-based tradition of lyric” (29). Farrell proposes “an alternative version of the conceptual lyric voice, one that is ecological in terms of its relation to other sounds and types of ‘sound-makers’, as well as to the earth itself” (29). Synthesising critics as diverse as Craig Dworkin and Susan Stewart with ethological poetics, Farrell argues that in the interconnected world in which we live, the traditions of the lyric voice stand in relation to Stewart’s lyrebird poesis, which mimics, mocks and fragments the sonic ecology of the public. Farrell argues that “Stewart’s use of cut-up creates explicit and virtual repetition: she emphasises, stalls, satiates, empties, meta-critiques, producing what might be called an ecology of form, or perhaps lyric ecology” (33-34). What Farrell’s article does exceptionally well is to explore the entangled complexities of place, to explore the “more-than-human-geographies” (Whatmore 165) of Australian writing, and the diverse relationship between poetic expression and the world.

In proof that Gig Ryan’s impact upon contemporary Australian poetry is mounting and dramatically shifting the structural registers and modes of expression open to writers, **Siobhan Hodge** opens her article with an extended quotation from Bonny Cassidy and Jessica Wilkinson, who reflect that:

Poetry is a site characterised by continued and radical change—no other literary form (bar perhaps those expressed in new digital media) expresses such capability to shift and flex as the need arises, and this is perhaps the most necessary aspect of considering the ever-evolving and transformative territories of feminism. (xi)

Hodge’s article “Modern Myths: Feminism and Literary Predecessors in the Poetics of Gig Ryan and Cassandra Atherton” articulates and examines the transformative territories indicated above, destabilising feminist reflections in the broader poetry cannon, but also examining and problematising the literary legacies of women’s bodies. Hodge combines historiographies and feminist lineages to explore Ryan’s Niobe in the poems “Niobe of the Pillar” and “Parable of the Shackles”, as well as grapples with the legacies of literary men and women in Cassandra Atherton’s “Viv”. Her analysis of Atherton’s prose poem explores the representation of Vivienne Haigh-Wood Eliot (T. S. Eliot’s first wife) and presents a series of questions which punctuate Atherton’s subtly critical representation of subjecthood and femininity, as are depicted in the poem. The legacies of women silenced are at the centre of Hodge’s article, and she presents a wry, inquisitive and constantly-challenging examination of the poems of Atherton and Ryan.

Louis Armand and Rosalind McFarlane offer two longform examinations of everyone’s favourite poet, Bella Li. **Rosalind McFarlane**’s “‘The Rain Might Bloom’: Diaspora, Place and Depictions of Water in the Poetry of Bella Li” offers an engagement with geography and place, reflected through the double properties of water. The poems analysed in the article, “Just

then” and “Drowning dream,” are intertextual poems, framed against the poetry of Sexton and Ashbery, respectively, where the use of water provides analogous terrain for the possibilities of transformation and reflection that migration entails. McFarlane flows across philosophical, cartographic and intertextual discourses to argue for the creation of “doubled places”—places simultaneously cut off from and interconnected by bodies of water. Utilising the work of Bhabha, Braziel and Mannur, McFarlane analyses Li’s poetry with rapt attention to the lived experience of diasporic consciousness that infiltrates the poems, as well as the imaginative creation that diasporic poetics entails. In parallel with some of the insights seen in John Kinsella’s *Polysituatedness* (2016), McFarlane argues that an intertextual “writing through,” as with the lived experience of elsewhere, creates the prospect of multiplicity, represented in Li’s poetry as a “diasporic place-making,” a complex material intersection of observation, reflection and experience: a poetic present, a lived multiplicity. Transformations of life through depictions of water each evoke the plenitude and destructive capacity of past literary waters, and McFarlane’s analysis develops out of a nuanced understanding of this literary history, opening Li’s poems to antecedent exploration which is read in fine contextual detail. McFarlane has the acute ability to provide a nuanced and detailed charting of Li’s poetic development from *Maps*, *Cargo* through to *Argosy*, and I think it will stand as one of the great articles written about Li’s early work.

As might be expected of the Director of the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at Charles University, Prague, **Louis Armand**’s examination of Bella Li’s poetics of materiality is an indexical modernist history which situates Max Ernst’s practice of Surrealist collage against the political and aesthetic programmes of avant-garde experimentation. Armand’s naturally fluid, interdisciplinary analysis exposes the interconnections between art and writing, arguing that the intent of modernist art is to raise the “radical incommensurabilities to produce an unforeseen re-ordering of sense and of the constitution of the ‘real’” (68). Bella Li’s *Argosy* is, Armand argues, such a radical revision, defining a poetics of collage from Ernst’s *La Femme 100 têtes*. Li’s reversions of Ernst’s collages unpack Ernst’s *détournement* and, Armand argues, in the section “*Pérouse ou, Une semaine de disparitions*” Li’s ability to juxtapose prose poems with dreamlike collages, critiques the “Freudian perversion among the European bourgeoisie [which] gives way to an ethno-anthropology of the fantastically other” (69). The mode and materiality of poetic enquiry that Li establishes, Armand argues, is

one of a more *implicit détournement* of the representation of gender. In conjunction with the examination of ethno-exoticism in “*Pérouse*,” “*Hundred Headless Woman*” thereby touches upon a larger recurring element in Surrealist antipodeanism, which is that of the conflation of the “feminine” and the “primitive” as tropes of a seductive/emancipative *irrationalism* to be ranged against the morbidity of European “civilisation” *à la mode*. (70)

Armand’s article, “*Surrealism’s Antipodes: Max Ernst, Bella Li, China Miéville*” offers an evocation and challenge to a whole *stylistics* of poetic invention.

The final articles in this issue approach literary texts that deal with Indigenous subject matter. Both Jean Page’s “*The ‘Jindyworobaks’: Finding Home in the Language of the Other*” and Joan Fleming’s “*The Limits of Knowledge: A Reflexive Reading of the Poetics of Jardinwanpa Yawulyu: Walpiri Women’s Songs from Yuendumu*” open with reminders that

Western epistemologies and systems of academic discourse often run counter to the modes of knowledge production and dissemination for Aboriginal people internationally. The article by **Jean Page**, a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of Lisbon, Portugal, provides a detailed critical history and social account of the literary culture in which the Jindyworobak writers sprang. Page provides a nuanced account of this development, exploring the nascent group from both sides, but then shifts towards an analysis of the Jindy group as undertaking acts of cultural appropriation. Her ability to critique the Jindyworobak group through contemporary post-colonial theory as well as with more recent developments in international fiction provide interesting fodder for a sustained analysis.

Joan Fleming's article approaches the book *Jardinwanpa Yawulyu: Walpiri Women's Songs from Yuendumu* by Coral Napangardi Gallagher, Peggy Nampijinpa Brown, Georgia Curran, and Barbara Napanangka Martin (2014) from a fictocritical perspective. Interweaving stories of her personal and family connection to Walpiri Country, in the Tanami desert, Fleming critically reads the Western modes of production utilised in creating the *Jardinwanpa* book, which contains songs and stories performed as part of the Jardinwanpa ceremony. As Fleming accounts:

Each textual moment in the book is pressurised, in its connection to intricate and, to me, inscrutable systems of indigenous signification that involve kinship, relationship with country, ceremony, mythology, and social law. ... It is a text that serves as a training ground, provoking a sensuous, active, and efficacious mode of reading. (92)

The disorientation that Fleming encounters in the text relates to its production of maps and mapping as a method of storytelling, and evidences “frisson between the incommensurable elements of this open text, [where] there is a pushing and pulling at work: between the *kardiya* wish to know and to document, and Warlpiri modes of knowledge-sharing, the complexity of which underlies and is only slantly articulated in the text at hand” (95). Fleming's analysis works to delineate between the transmission of knowledge and the limits of this transmission and argues that the Western control of this text impacts upon the intricate and deeply situated specificity with which Walpiri story is tied to place. The systems of knowledge used to design and produce the *Jardinwanpa Yawulyu: Walpiri Women's Songs from Yuendumu*, and its treatment by Western editors, Fleming argues, cannot account for the slow learning processes of Walpiri law and the complex social systems which govern its telling. Fleming articulates that “[t]hese intricate systems of permission and withholding sit uneasily against western philosophies of knowledge acquisition and the archival impulse, which presumes access and seeks closure” (94).

In final remarks, I offer my thanks to those many people who make a journal like this possible. To the poets whose work is on display, for their efforts to write out of the “entangled significance” of our days; to the publishers of this work, for the inestimable support their belief provides; to the scholars who produced these articles, for their endless work in reading, researching, thinking through and writing these essays; and to the peer-reviewers who offered their expert and attuned attention to these works of criticism, and upon whose anonymous effort all journals progress. Let these essays speak to the potentials and possibilities of an ongoing critical community which actively engages with and supports Australian writing.

References:

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About contributors:

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Corey Wakeling is a poet and critic living in Nishinomiya, Japan. His second full-length collection of poems, *The Alarming Conservatory*, appeared with Giramondo Publishing in 2017. Wakeling co-edited *Outcrop: Radical Australian Poetry of Land* (Black Rider Press, 2013).

Michael Farrell is a poet and critic living in Melbourne. He has published several books and chapbooks of poetry, most recently *I Love Poetry* (Giramondo) and *Cocky's Joy* (shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Award for Poetry in 2016). His scholarly book, *Writing Australian Unsettlement: Modes of Poetic Invention 1796-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), theorises a new approach to the history of colonial poetics. He co-edited an anthology of Australian gay and lesbian poets, *Out of the Box*, with Jill Jones (Puncher & Wattmann, 2009).

Siobhan Hodge has a PhD in English literature. Her dissertation focused on Sappho's legacy in English translations. Born in the UK, she divides her time between Australia and Hong Kong. Her recent book *Justice for Romeo* was published by Cordite Books in 2018. She has had critical and creative works published in a range of places, including *Westerly*, *Axon*, *Contrapasso*, *Peril*, and *Plumwood Mountain*.

Rosalind McFarlane recently completed her doctorate on depictions of water in Asian-Australian poetry and is currently working as the English Connect Program Coordinator at Monash University. Her critical and creative work has been most recently published in *Hunter's Anthology of Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry*, *Antipodes* and *Axon*.

Louis Armand directs the Centre for Critical & Cultural Theory in the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, Prague. He has edited *Contemporary Poetics* (Northwestern, 2006), *Avant-Post: The Avant-Garde under 'Post-' Conditions* (LPB, 2006) and *Hidden Agendas: Unreported Poetics* (2010), and is the author of multiple books of poetry, fiction and criticism.

Jean Page is a candidate for PhD in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Lisbon, her dissertation exploring the dynamic and motif of transformation in the work of Australian poet James McAuley (1917-1976). A researcher in the University's Centre for English Studies (ULICES), she is a member of the European Association for Australian

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Joan Fleming is the author of two poetry collections published by Victoria University Press, *Failed Love Poems* (2015) and *The Same as Yes* (2011), and a chapbook, *Two Dreams in Which Things are Taken* (Duets, 2010). As a scholar, she is interested in competing epistemologies in poetic texts and the impossibility of perfect communication. She has published essays and a book chapter on the Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson, and has recently finished her PhD in ethnopoetics at Monash University with a project that has arisen out of family ties and ongoing relationships with Warlpiri people in Central Australia.