

Marion May Campbell. *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality and Subversion.*

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Marion May Campbell has long been one of Australia's leading experimental writers, and one of the most innovative feminist writers to have emerged in the 1980s when Australian women's writing became a significant presence in Australian publishing. Having studied in France, the influence of French critical theory on her development of an *écriture féministe* is marked by a rigour and critique only gained by being part of the context of production. Indeed, if one were to trace the configurations of poststructuralism in Australia, Campbell's work would be a good place to start. So it is an important event when she publishes a major work of literary criticism such as *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality and Subversion*.

As the title suggests, Campbell's writerly interest in textual experimentation and its political potential continues in this study. She focuses on the relationship between the literary technique of intertextuality and textual and political subversion in a range of twentieth-century writers, with chapters on Jean Genet, Kathy Acker, Monique Wittig, Angela Carter, Kathleen Mary Fallon, Kim Scott, and Brian Castro, to explore 'how works of intertextual complexity can, at the very least, remind us that resistance and critique are now, in 2013 more important than ever' (23). Campbell draws upon Linda Hutcheon's account of intertextuality, as against pessimistic readings of parody in the postmodern context, such as Fredric Jameson's. According to Campbell, Hutcheon demonstrates that postmodern intertextuality fulfills a demythologising function and shows an awareness of cultural politics (22). Hutcheon's concept of 'ironic trans-contextualisation' explains how these occur, as it refers to the process whereby 'the hypertext-hypotext dialogue' activates historical context and an awareness of generic codes for the reader, thus leading to a critical, indeed political reading, of the text (24–25). So it is intertextuality in combination with other literary devices (style or narrative structure, for instance) that makes for a potentially subversive text. Moreover, such a reading practice is a way in which the reader can counter the waning of memory and historical consciousness that Julia Kristeva sees as characterising our society of the spectacle.

Campbell's introduction provides a fascinating, if idiosyncratic and compressed account of 'the fetishized coupling: poetics and revolution' (13). Rather than making early twentieth-century avant-gardes central to her account, she focuses on the French avant-gardist formation surrounding and symbolised by the journal, *Tel Quel*, and its linking of radical poetics with sociopolitical change. This gives a context and conceptual framework for Campbell's study. Accordingly, there is a condensed but insightful discussion of intertextuality in Barthes' and Kristeva's work, before Campbell moves on to later theorisations such as those of Genet and Hutcheon. This may be my personal preference, but I would have liked to have seen a more detailed exploration of 'the fetishized coupling,' as a fetish. This is a rich idea that allows a critical and original angle on the avant-garde and radical poetics, and would make clear Campbell's critical distance from some of the more problematic assumptions of radical poetics, such as the causal link between textual radicalism and political change.

Campbell then explains her choice of writers, aiming for generic diversity—including novels, plays, and short stories. At first glance this appears to be another account of postmodern writing, with Acker and Carter, for example, being exemplars; however, 'The Poetic Revolutionaries' of the title resonates with the early twentieth-century avant-garde. *Poetic*

Revolutionaries wants to give these writers this doubleness of location, part of a cultural project being translated into late capitalism, arguing that ‘all of these writers are informed by the French tradition of revolutionary poetics’ (28). There is, however, another idiosyncrasy with the study: her inclusion of three Australian writers. While I agree that one doesn’t have to always frame a writer within a national literature, and that Campbell is correct to argue that ‘The interrogation of intertextuality and subversion in Australian writing can be more productive if seen through the lens of the recent Western radical tradition’ (28), the structure of the book almost demands otherwise. We have four diverse writers that supposedly provide a context, followed by a critical mass of three contemporary Australian writers, therefore making the book read as having two distinct parts, and potentially two different lines of argument. This looseness of structure is also found in the inclusion of an appendix, in which Campbell discusses Hutcheon’s reading of an Andy Farbo painting. The appendix doesn’t add anything to the argument and could either be incorporated into the conclusion or deleted.

Regardless of this structural issue, the readings are excellent and the scholarship is exhaustive, with Campbell able to access many sources in French—you definitely don’t want to skim the footnotes. Campbell’s close reading analyses one or two techniques used in combination with intertextuality by each writer, but she is also careful to contextualise each work and their transgressive shock when first published/performed. For Genet’s *Les Bonnes/The Maids* (1947) and *Les Paravents/The Screens* (1961), the key technique is scenographic parody. Campbell demonstrates the way in which Genet’s scenography spatialises parody, and how it progresses from the inverted neo-classicism of *Les Bonnes/The Maids* to the extremism of *Les Paravents/The Screens*, seemingly marking the end point of Genet’s subversion of drama. This focus on scenography is a unique approach to parody and offers many insights regarding Genet’s politics. Her analysis of Wittig’s *Le Corps Lesbien/The Lesbian Body* (1973), is similarly strong, displaying Campbell’s deep understanding of French culture and feminism, and of experimental poetics. She turns her attention to Wittig’s ‘scenographic performance of the body.’ Given the text’s difficulty, Campbell gives a lucid and uncompromising reading that delineates the massive network of intertextuality drawn upon by Wittig.

Campbell turns to the high point of feminist postmodernism—the late 1970s and 1980s—with her readings of Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Acker’s breakthrough text, *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978), and Fallon’s *Working Hot* (1989). Campbell argues that Carter subverts the generic conventions of the fairy tale to rematerialise the female body, demonstrating a great feel for Carter’s opulent and inventive language use. With the two less accessible writers, Acker and Fallon, Campbell avoids the common trap of critical writing which mirrors the difficulty of the text under discussion. Rather, Campbell gives lucid and wide ranging readings of both, drawing out the novels’ ferocious anti-patriarchal politics and thus highlighting the difference of these texts as avant-gardist. There is a double irony at work when Campbell focuses on Acker’s parody of Genet (an aspect of *Blood and Guts in High School* deserving more discussion). It is particularly heartening to see Fallon receive more critical attention; Campbell goes to some lengths to carefully contextualise the novel at the time of its publication, thereby reconstructing its ‘shock of the new’ quality to Australian women’s writing. As with her discussion of Wittig, Campbell foregrounds the sheer scale and ambition of *Working Hot*—its encyclopaedic nature.

The final two chapters move into twenty-first century transgressive writing and away from feminist iterations of subversion. Campbell identifies four techniques used by both Scott’s *Benang: From the Heart* (1999) and Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* (2003): a tessellated and

hence anti-teleological structure, tropes of abjection, parody, and heteroglossic subjectivity. Again, Campbell's own inventiveness enables her to detail the powerfully polyvocal nature of *Benang* and its role in parodying the colonial order's linguistic and material subjugation of Indigenous Australians. *Benang* identifies writing as 'a technology of [white] terror' (223) and both writes of and writes out this technology with its corporeal counter-history. Scott's careful and brutal rendering of the bodily abjection of Indigenous peoples is physical evidence of the effects of colonial practices and discourses. In the final chapter Campbell gives a careful account of *Shanghai Dancing's* ludic expansiveness, its multiple techniques paralleling the multiple nature of subjectivity explored in Castro's fictionalised autobiography. Castro's notion of 'disorientalism' arguably marks the end of sentimentalist and governmental versions of multiculturalism and multicultural writing, coming from a place of permanent exile and melancholy.

Given this critical mass of recent Australian writing explored by Campbell, its particular contours (the lesbian feminist erotic novel, the heteroglossic Indigenous novel, and the disorientalist fictionalised polybiography), and the cultural critique intrinsic to these works, I can't help but feel that there is another argument, another history, another politico-literary trajectory trying to be told here. Perhaps these works suggest that an alternative form of Australian literary history is possible—one that Campbell should rightly claim (and is part of)? And perhaps this question is related to an angle of analysis that could have been given more space: a broader historical context or narrative underlying the reading of subversion. We have here Genet writing in the 1940s and 1950s; Wittig in the mid-1960s; Acker, Carter, and Fallon in the 1980s; and Scott and Castro in the 2000s. So that while Campbell does carefully contextualise the individual works and provides compelling readings of each, and wishes to locate their subversions in a post-1968 avant-gardist practice that in itself has links to the earlier twentieth-century one, there is a sense that intertextuality and subversion become transhistorical categories. Is it that techniques of subversion (and therefore methods of reading for subversion) don't change across the decades and seem immune to institutional settings? Isn't the changed location of contemporary poetic subversion precisely Kristeva's fear in *Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000)?

And one final quibble: I wish that Rodopi would give more attention to copy editing, particularly in a work that contains so much careful and caring scholarship. When I see 'Donald Winnacott' or 'Roman Jacobson' my eyes hurt—or maybe it's just an outsourcing of textual subversion.

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