

Katie Hansord. *Colonial Australian Women Poets: Political Voice and Feminist Tradition*. Anthem Press, 2022. 252 pages. AUS\$125; ISBN:9781785272691. Hardback.

Katie Hansord's *Colonial Australian Women Poets: Political Voice and Feminist Tradition* explores the writings of Elizabeth Hamilton Dunlop, Mary Bailey, Caroline Leakey, Emily Manning, and Louisa Lawson within networks of imperial feminist poetics. Hansord underscores the internationally networked political approaches of these women writers, who engaged with gender equity, anti-slavery movements, and other social issues, aligning them with Romantic ideals of political resistance. Context is crucial for understanding these poets' works, which often reflected a quick response to contemporary events despite the distance from their European influences. While her chosen women wrote from the perspective of the Australian colony, Hansord reads these poets as belonging to an "imperialist" strand of feminism that did not acknowledge the perspectives of First Nations Australians. At the same time, she challenges the notion that colonial women's poetry should be deemed entirely genteel and moralistic, arguing for a reevaluation of settler colonial women's political engagement through their poetry.

Part of Hansord's argument against perceptions of colonial women's poetry as "genteel" is her attention to the periodical press in which their poetry was published and its influence on ways their writing was devalued. In her Foreword to the book, the late Elizabeth Webby writes: "[This] is the first major study of the work of five of the more significant of the many women who wrote poems in Australia during the nineteenth century," noting further that one reason for their neglect has been because their poetry was published in "newspapers and magazines rather than in volumes and so has remained difficult to access until recent mass digitisation of newspapers from the period." In *The Ephemeral Eighteenth Century: Print, Sociability, and the Cultures of Collecting* (2020), Gillian Russell examines how the prominence of the codex-form book throughout the eighteenth century depended on the ostensible transience of other print forms, which captured everyday social and cultural activities. The term "ephemera," often used in library science and bibliographies, originally referred to short-lived phenomena and, around 1800, began replacing the word "fugitive" or "flying" to describe sheets not secured in a bound volume. By the nineteenth century, "ephemera" came to distinguish non-book print, reinforcing the idea that books have more lasting cultural and literary value than newspapers.

Colonial Australian Women Poets is sensitive to perceptions of ephemerality shaping systems of value that, in turn, condition how writing in nineteenth-century periodicals was valued, leading to the devaluation of poetry published in newspapers and magazines alongside news stories and "everyday" popular culture stories. One of the significant and innovative contributions of Hansord's book is thus its examination of how nineteenth-century periodical press has been understood as entangled with fleeting everyday events, and thus not worthy of the attention given to volumes of poetry. Hansord is alert to how such ideas play into hierarchies of literary and cultural value, leading to the neglect of female-authored poetry published in newspapers and magazines. She emphasises that newspapers were more widely read and more quickly disseminated than books. This is significant not only for understanding the nature of female engagement with poetry and politics but also for understanding the history of our present social media content, which—though embedded in the durable form of the digital—can be lost within the sheer volume of content. In our digital age, where newspapers and single-sheet documents are preserved digitally and the concept of ephemera has expanded, even books become fleeting within the vast amount of online content.

Hansord addresses the marginalisation of colonial poetry compared to novels and acknowledges the importance of scholars like Webby in this literary tradition. She highlights

the challenges posed by the apparently short-lived nature of the periodical press, noting that the works of most female poets of the time were not anthologised or published in standalone collections. She also writes that while digitisation projects like Google Books and Trove Newspapers help to raise the profile of these poets, digitisation processes tend to occur according to national categories, which can impede the visibility of colonial poetry with international or transnational associations; this is crucial for understanding the transnational flow of materials through the periodical press. Hansord's work underscores the significance of the periodical press as a space for a female political voice.

Chapter 1 focuses on Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, exploring her anti-slavery politics alongside her "imperial feminism" within the context of Romanticism. Dunlop's poetry appeared in newspapers and magazines across several countries. Born in Ireland in 1796, Dunlop emigrated to Australia in 1838 and published "The Aboriginal Mother" the same year, responding to the Myall Creek Massacre. The poem appeals for recognition of shared humanity, tapping into transatlantic literary conventions. Emphasising the importance of Romantic poetics and politics in Dunlop's verse, Hansord draws attention to the poet's exploration of widow-burning practices in India, and also notes the significance of Dunlop's Irish nationalism through an examination of "The Irish Mother," a poem written in phonetic and Anglicised Gaelic. In the context of the book's interest in the apparent evanescence of work that appears in the periodical press, I was particularly struck by Hansord's brief note that Dunlop had alluded to her poems as "ephemeral blooms," perhaps "suggesting the exclusion from canonicity faced by women writers" (24). Chapter 2 focuses on Mary Bailey, born in 1792, a prolific poet who moved to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) in 1844 following her husband's transportation for forgery. Her work appeared in various periodicals, including the *Colonial Times*, where she critiqued transportation and compared Tasmania to Elysium. Bailey's poetry exemplifies the transposition of Romantic Hellenism to a colonial context, often including classical references and anti-slavery polemics, while using the newspaper as a platform for dissent and advocating for women's rights.

Caroline Leakey, a poet born in 1827 in Exeter, England, is the focus of Chapter 3. Leakey's *Lyra Australis: Or Attempts to Sing in a Strange Land* (1854), which was published as a standalone volume, explored female sexuality from a female perspective within the context of British Romanticism and symbolically linked Tasmania, a place of exile, to women's social identity. The "fallen woman," a transnational figure found in both British Romantic and Victorian women's poetry, is taken up in Leakey's poetry to explore sexual double standards. Dora of *Lyra Australis* is aligned with repeated images of stars, falling autumn leaves, and flowers as analogues for women. I wondered whether these images, like Dunlop's "ephemeral blooms," might be viewed in light of the apparent transience of the poetry. As Hansord argues, Leakey challenges middle-class domestic ideals of the Victorian era by sympathetically portraying destitute working-class women, often regarded as prostitutes, while re-centring women's sexuality within a transnational and imperial tradition and linking it to the experiences of female convicts in the colonies, euphemistically termed "exiles."

Chapter 4 focuses on the spiritualist poetics of Emily Manning. Writing under the pen name Australie, Manning authored *The Balance of Pain and Other Poems* (1877), which challenges gender roles through religious and spiritual movements. Born to a wealthy family in Sydney, she engaged with intellectual settler circles and began her career in London, contributing to Australian periodicals such as the *Town and Country Journal* and the *Sydney Mail*. Her poetry emphasises themes of occultism, spiritualism, and imperialism, reflecting a legacy of Romanticism and addressing social and gender inequalities. Manning's work arising from her involvement with the occult revival was disseminated through periodicals. Encouraged by Professor Woolley of the University of Sydney, Manning published many of her poems in newspapers before compiling them in a London-published volume, which also

included hymns. Just as I was struck by Dunlop's "ephemeral blooms," I was struck in this chapter by a reference to the naming of periodicals in Manning's time as "ragged schools" that were nevertheless crucial for the dissemination of occultism and spiritualism as topics through which women negotiated gendered binaries affecting the production and reception of their writing.

The final chapter of *Colonial Australian Women Poets* focuses on Louisa Lawson's poetry and the importance of her feminist journal, *The Dawn* (1889–1905). As Hansord shows, Lawson's poetry appeared not only in *The Dawn* but also in other periodicals of the time, such as *The Worker* (1892–1903), the *Town and Country Journal* (1870–1919), and *The Bulletin* (1880–2008). Lawson stands out as the first working-class female poet who uniquely occupied the roles of both editor and author. While Lawson is often discussed in the context of nationalism, Hansord examines her work through the lens of internationalism, highlighting the transnational nature of her poetics and philosophical influences. Women's sensation novels, the New Woman writers of the fin de siècle, and Romantic tropes of women's writing were all vital to Lawson's poetics, as were the processes of periodical print cultures. A Whitmanesque bardic poetics can also be seen in Lawson's work, revealing the influence of such American periodicals as *The Atlantic* and *Harper's Monthly*. Moreover, *The Dawn* provided a forum for her activism, offering employment for women in print media and embracing radical literary movements such as the Pre-Raphaelites, which encouraged an appreciation of the native Australian environment.

I recommend *Colonial Australian Women Poets* for its brilliantly thorough and lucid attention to the hierarchies of value within transnational contexts and the ephemeral nature of print media. The book addresses the constraints on women's voices within restrictive personal, domestic, and social contexts while challenging the notion that newspapers and journals were dominated by masculine poets focused on democratic ideals, showing instead how women were a force within this context. Notably, the book provides an appendix with previously unanthologised poems by Eliza Hamilton Dunlop and Mary Bailey. While Hansord's book frames colonial women's poetry as being complicit in imperialist structures, it also provides a brilliant angle on how these women poets exposed hierarchical structures that relied on perceptions of the transitory nature of newspapers. I appreciate that the last words of the book are a tribute to First Nations people as "the oldest living culture in the world." This is a powerful testament to another culture that, once deemed by Europeans as ephemeral and thus unworthy, continues to survive.

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