

Introduction

Welcome to the December 2024 issue of the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*.

JASAL has long provided an important platform for scholarly work exploring the diverse and dynamic traditions, voices, and methodologies shaping the nation's literary landscape. This issue continues that tradition, featuring a diversity of voices that reflect on, engage with, and raise critical questions about contemporary conversations in the field of Australian literature. As we celebrate the continuing evolution of the field, and indeed the resilience of Australian literary studies, we also mark a significant transition in the journal's leadership. This issue is the final one in which we, Robert Clarke and Victoria Kuttainen, serve as general editors. When we signed on at the beginning of 2022, we signalled that a healthy journal editorship should last no longer than three years. As we step down as general editors, we have also stepped up into other roles, with Robert as the Coordinator of the University of Tasmania Hedberg Writer-In-Residence program, and Victoria as the Centre Head of the new Roderick Centre for Australian Literature and Creative Writing.

It is time to pass the baton, and as we prepare to do so, we take this opportunity thank the ASAL leadership for their ongoing support of this important organ of Australian literary scholarship and creative writing, and to reflect on the three strands we introduced when we assumed the role: *Worlding Australian Literature*, *Writing Australian Literature*, and *Teaching Australian Literature*. These strands have helped guide our editorial vision, and we are proud to see them represented in the essays and reviews featured here.

In a year that has again witnessed an erosion in the level of governmental and institutional patronage of Australian literary studies in this country, the official opening of the Roderick Centre for Australian Literature and Creative Writing in 2024 is an important investment in our field. Established from a generous bequest from the late Professor Colin Roderick and Dr Margaret Roderick, the Centre aims to foster excellence in reading, writing, creating, teaching, and engaging with Australian literature in all its forms. Among its key initiatives, the Centre offers what promises to be a vibrant and well-patronised Visiting Fellowship Program. The Inaugural Fellow in 2024 was Professor Philip Mead and here we print an essay based on his Roderick public lecture, "Australian Literary Studies Now." We are also pleased to present a series of responses to the paper by way of a formal reply by Associate Professor Nicholas Birns, and two reflections on the practice of writing by award-winning authors Shankari Chandran (2023 Miles Franklin literary award recipient and 2024 Roderick-sponsored Whitsunday Writers' Festival Keynote speaker), and Dr Eugen Bacon (2024 University of Tasmania Hedberg Writer-in-Residence). Taken together this suite of essays provides insights into the directions and energies that promise to buoy and sustain our field in an increasingly difficult environment.

It is not by coincidence that all four of these essays have been supported by philanthropic investments in Australian literature, as Mead notes that philanthropic interventions in the field have kept Australian literary studies and creative writing going in a time of large-scale government and university disinvestment. Surveying the current state of the Australian literary landscape, Mead admits that one could easily reach a series of conclusions about the hopelessness of the situation, in the face of an ongoing "crisis" of "rationalisation" in the Australian tertiary sector, and by extension in the humanities and literary studies fields more broadly. But Mead considers how government and philanthropic interventions since the turn of the century, as well as longstanding initiatives such as AustLit and the work of archives such as the Fryer Library are helping to buttress the infrastructure of Australian literary studies

at a time when university administrations are divesting themselves of their support for the teaching and research of Australia's national literature. Moreover, Mead sees in the turn toward trends such as critical regionalism and corresponding critical nationalism, informed by the efforts of First Nations critical and scholarly endeavours, two paradigms that promise to expand the intellectual and historical insights of the field of Australian literary studies. Mead's critical examination and personal reflection on Australian literary studies as a field in its own right and as a subfield of literary studies is thus clear-sighted about the challenges, developments, and opportunities for ongoing development of Australian literature studies, both within universities and beyond, and within as well as outside Australia.

As Mead himself acknowledges, both locally and transnationally engaged scholars in the field of Australian literary studies, and practitioners of Australian creative writing, are a key part of the field's current resilience and buoyancy. Thus, it is apt that Nicholas Birns, a key figure in Australian literary studies, based in New York, offers an essay in this issue that represents our effort to introduce the strand of *Worlding Australian Literature* and extend a warm welcome to scholars based outside of Australia. In his response to Mead's essay, Birns provides an international perspective on the evolution of Australian literary studies. He also offers a provocation to engage more deeply with an Australian literary canon. Taking a position contrary to longstanding scepticism toward canons in literary studies, Birns argues that canons can serve useful purposes—not least for promoting and disseminating the field, and observes that a canon of Australian literature has never been fully formed. Finding common ground with Mead's arguments relating to critical regionalism and nationalism, Birns argues for engagement with “a canon for tactical reasons—in full awareness of the provisionality and arbitrariness of the very idea of canons.” Doing so, Birns argues, would, from an international perspective, move the field beyond the status of “event” to something more sustainable, with a shape recognisable to outsiders and newcomers.

While these essays mostly focus on Australian literary studies as a field of critical and scholarly endeavours, Mead and Birns also reflect on the still relatively recent integration of creative writing within Australian literary studies, and how that development has enriched the discipline. This shift is one we have wholeheartedly embraced during our time as general editors. In light of the provocations offered by Mead and Birns, we have also chosen to showcase keynote speeches given by two award-winning fiction authors, Shankari Chandran and Eugen Bacon. The pairing of essays by Mead and Birns with these essays by Chandran and Bacon offers a sense of complementarity that enacts the state of the field and its continuing evolution.

The contributions by Chandran and Bacon represent the growing inclusion of a creative voice in *JASAL*, aligning with the journal's engagement with contemporary issues in Australian literature. In contrast to the critical perspectives of Mead and Birns, the essays by Chandran and Bacon focus on the role of writers in shaping and influencing social attitudes and fighting for social justice here and abroad. Both authors reflect on why they write, offering compelling insights into the power of literature as a tool for change. Both Chandran and Bacon have also benefited from institutional support for Australian literature, underscoring the importance of such investment in nurturing both the study and creation of Australian literary works. Chandran's essay, for instance, was delivered as the keynote at the Whitsunday Writers' Festival, supported by the new Roderick Centre for Australian Literature and Creative Writing. Similarly, Bacon's essay emerged from her fellowship as the 2024 University of Tasmania Hedberg Writer-in-Residence, an initiative dedicated to the future of Australian literature.

Writing Australian Literature was one of the three strands we introduced when we assumed general editorship of the journal. We have been enormously grateful to Jessica White for curating a wonderful collection of exegetical scholarly essays and original literary works for publication in *JASAL* throughout our tenure. Jess brings us two outstanding creative pieces

in this issue. “Fatigue Markers,” a story by Fiona Murphy, provides an original and enigmatic vision of the way grief distorts time and marks itself upon the body. “Lucretia on the Island: Revisiting Randolph Stow’s Masked Poems,” by Caitlin Maling, belongs to an emerging creative practice research project on Stow’s poetry, involving the “eclogic . . . re-singing” of/to his poems, reimagining the histories and myths of the Batavia wreck and its aftermath, and the significance of these events for Stow’s poetry.

The issue also showcases an extensive list of reviews of important new resources in Australian literary studies from recent years, a further testament to the buoyancy and resilience described by Mead and Birns. There are reviews of significant new works of fiction—Maria Takolander on Alexis Wright’s *Praiseworthy*; Jane Scerri on Tony Birch’s *Women & Children*; and Louise Henry on *Restless Dolly Maunder* by Kate Grenville—and new and collected poetry—Adele Jackson on Rachel Mead’s *The Art of Breaking Ice*; and Chris Tiffin on *TransPacific: Collected Poems of Ernest G. Moll*. Explorations of the dynamics of, and key figures in, Australian literary culture are represented with reviews by Per Henningsgaard of *Emperors in Lilliput: Clem Christesen of Meanjin and Stephen Murray-Smith of Overland* by Jim Davidson; and *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First-Century Book Culture* by Kim Wilkins, Beth Driscoll and Lisa Fletcher, reviewed by Marina Deller. We also feature reviews of two biographies on the life and work of Frank Moorhouse: Adam Gall examines Catharine Lumby’s *Frank Moorhouse: A Life* and Matthew Lamb’s *Frank Moorhouse: Strange Paths*. And Nathan Hobby reviews *Time, Tide and History: Eleanor Dark’s Fiction*, edited by Brigid Rooney and Fiona Morrison. Two new works on the practice of creative writing studies are reviewed here: Gay Lynch reviews Julia Prendergast, Eileen Herbert-Goodall and Jen Webb, editors, *The Writing Mind: Creative Writing Responses to Images of the Living Brain*; Debra Adelaide reviews *A to Z of Creative Writing Methods* edited by Deborah Wardle, Julienne Van Loon, Stayci Taylor, Francesca Rendle-Short, Peta Murray, David Carlin. The political voices of Australian authors past are examined in Katie Hansord’s *Colonial Australian Women Poets: Political Voice and Feminist Tradition*, reviewed by Monique Rooney, and Dougal McNeill’s *Forms of Freedom: Marxist Essays in New Zealand and Australian Literature*, reviewed by Marvin Gilman. The theme of time and peculiarities of antipodean temporalities are examined in Paul Giles’s *The Planetary Clock: Antipodean Time and Spherical Postmodern Fictions*, reviewed Nicholas Birns; Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell’s *Cosmological Readings of Contemporary Australian Literature: Unsettling the Anthropocene* is reviewed by Tony Hughes d’Aeth. And the collection is capped off with Samuel Cox’s review of *The Cambridge History of the Australian Novel* edited by David Carter. The wide array of book reviews and review essays in this issue is an enormous credit to the fastidious work of Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Smyth.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to all our subeditors who have contributed to the development of these new strands, and especially to Jess White, and our book review subeditors Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Smyth. Jess has helped *JASAL* extend its networks into exegetical scholarship and creative practice. Cheryl and Elizabeth have worked diligently and tirelessly to ensure that recent Australian scholarship reaches a wide audience, making significant contributions to the journal’s continuing growth and relevance. We would also like to thank ASAL executives who have supported us during our tenure, especially Julieanne Lamond and Roger Osborne, along with the many peer reviewers, book reviewers, and readers who enable the continuance of *JASAL*.

Looking Ahead

As we conclude our term as general editors, we reflect with gratitude on the opportunity to serve in this role and to oversee the journal's continued evolution within the shifting currents of Australian literature. We are grateful that work towards forthcoming issues for 2025 is well underway: Brigitta Olubas will guest-edit an issue dedicated to the work of Michelle de Kretser; and Emily Potter and Brigid Magner will guest-edit an issue dedicated to the 2023 ASAL Conference themed on Recentring the Region. We also look forward to featuring a version of Larissa McLean Davies' 2024 AATE/ALEA Garth Boomer Address, a prestigious keynote that celebrates and advances critical new directions and important discussions in English education.

We are supremely confident that *JASAL* remains in excellent hands, with Jessica Gildersleeve and Kate Cantrell stepping in as the new general editors. Jess White will continue as a subeditor, and Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Smyth will maintain their roles as book review editors. We look forward to seeing how *JASAL* continues to thrive and adapt in the years ahead, under their stewardship.

Thank you for reading, and for your ongoing support of *JASAL*. We are proud to have contributed to the journal's legacy and to have seen the growing integration of creative, critical, and pedagogical voices in Australian literary studies. It has been an honour to work with an able team, not least Angela Rockel, *JASAL*'s talented copyeditor and typesetter.

We leave the journal in capable hands, looking forward to the rich and exciting directions it will take in the future.