REVIEWS

Where the Ancestors Walked: Australia as an Aboriginal Landscape
Philip Clarke
Allen and Unwin, 2003

Colonial poets and cartoonists often personified Australia as a virgin, a young, untouched (white) female, waiting to be claimed and made fertile by British manhood. Such images have now largely disappeared from literature and the media, yet their ghost lives quietly on in the idea of wilderness. It is only recently that cultural geographers and ecological historians have publicly revealed the secret that Australia was not a virgin when claimed by Cook for Britain in 1770. As Philip Clarke explains in *Where the Ancestors Walked*, "'wilderness' as a natural system did not exist when Europeans first settled here. The land was humanised by Aboriginal people both culturally and physically, even if that was not at all obvious to the newcomers" (219–20). Areas that non-Aboriginal Australians might think of as "wilderness" were not pristine and untouched, but already "walked," already shaped by human use, already part of human culture, not virginal nature.

The fourteen chapters of *Where the Ancestors Walked* take readers all over Australia, as Clarke comprehensively examines the ways "natural" environments have been made by Indigenous cultural practices. The book is divided into four broad sections: Origins of Aboriginal Australia, Materials of Culture, Regional Differences, and Cultural Change. Throughout, Clarke offers a coherent, concise consideration of his subject matter, and for those who seek further information, the footnotes and extensive bibliography offer a network of paths to travel. The twenty-six page bibliography contains all the well known names, from the early English journal keepers such as Dampier, Cook, and Tench, through the classic 19th and 20th century ethnographers and anthropologists, to today's theoretically informed, politically committed, historians, anthropologists, interdisciplinary researchers and public intellectuals. Clarke's own considerable original research findings are

scattered discretely throughout the chapters, rather than amassed and elevated to a privileged position at centre stage.

The great strength of *Where the Ancestors Walked* is that it brings together a vast body of cultural and historical knowledge, and presents it coherently in a form accessible to both academic and non-academic readers. The book is a mine of information about everything from food and medicine, to religious beliefs, social customs, trade, the visual and performing arts, tools and implements, and the central and northern calendars that divide the year into four, six or eight seasons. This is a useful book. I know I'll use it a lot, and I find its central argument entirely convincing.

Where the Ancestors Walked occupies an interesting position in the market-place. Like Inga Clendinnen's *Dancing With Strangers*, it straddles the distance between the airport bookshop and the university research library, as many scholarly publications are required to do these days. Clarke's book displays neither the seductive narrative speculations of Clendinnen, nor the theoretical virtuosity of Paul Carter. Yet the writing is down to earth, patient, modest, and lucid, and it certainly highlights the diversity of Aboriginal cultures that have humanised the so-called "wilderness" in different parts of the Australian continent.

Where the Ancestors Walked is a resolutely conciliatory book. It neither embroils itself in political debate, nor worries about the politics of its own role as a processor and disseminator of Indigenous knowledge. The traditional Indigenous religious truth that the Ancestors travelled over the land and water, shaping the world and giving it meaning, sits calmly beside the Western academic truth that the biological ancestors of present-day Aboriginal Australians inhabited *all* of Australia when the ancestors of present day Anglo-Celtic Australians first arrived. The title, like the country itself, is a textual space where different ancestors meet without necessarily merging.

Despite Clarke's careful attention to the diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures, he makes some alarmingly essentialistic generalisations, such as " [I] t is the essential nature of all cultures to absorb change. [. . .] All cultures undergo change over time" (210). Considering what Clarke must know of white Australia's black history, the word "change" is euphemistic to say the least. This is a book that stresses continuity rather than rupture, and it foregrounds the fact that many Aboriginal people today continue, figuratively and literally, to walk where the Ancestors walked. Even though this walking may not be apparent to many non-Indigenous people, Clarke rightly insists, on the final page of the book, that "Aboriginal identity survives if the self-identifying group believes that continuity has taken place" (226).

Penny van Toorn, University of Sydney

Australian Short Fiction: A History
Bruce Bennett
University of Queensland Press, 2002

This year a colleague and I introduced a first year course at our university that concentrates on the short story. Our reasons were essentially pragmatic, the result of some hand-wringing over how to get students to keep up with reading, albeit mixed with more optimistic pedagogical thinking that we would be able to introduce a range of theoretical concepts via the short story as well as having some fun with such a versatile genre. The outcome was extremely positive. There was something for everyone, and students, on the whole, embraced the stories and revelled in their diversity and richness.

Our course looked at short stories from around the world, but this imaginative life and extraordinary variety is also manifest in the Australian short story, as is made apparent in Bruce Bennett's encyclopaedic account of its history from early beginnings to the present day. Whilst covering a wide range of writers and their stories, he has shaped the history of these writings into a narrative that adds layers and nuance to our understanding of them. The book is structured as a very accessible chronology, with chapter headings suggesting the central issues and concerns of particular periods—for example "Unquiet Spirits: 1825–1880," "Local Loyalties and Modernist Impulses: 1930–1950." This approach encourages a complex sense of the way Australian short fiction feeds into and reflects social movements and change.

Throughout Bennett demonstrates the way stories might be read against and in relation to each other, and he is careful to look at counter and dissident voices—voices that unsettle any assumptions we might hold about the interests, scope and gender of the Australian short story. For example, the chapter "Alternative Traditions: 1880–1930," which follows on from "'A Masculine Ascendancy'" represents voices which take the story in other directions than the celebration of Anglo-Saxon masculinity and its association with the bush. These "alternative" stories are told by women, immigrant settlers and travellers. In his discussions of particular writers Bennett, often through an illuminating survey of critical opinion, opens up new ways of reading. His detailed account of Lawson illustrates the various ways that stereotypes about him have been demythologised, from new historicist readings, to reading him in relation to his contemporaries, to reassessments in the light of twenty-first century consciousness of the dangers of jingoism. Lawson's story is linked to a succinct yet detailed account of the history of the *Bulletin* and its role in "a larger narrative of national development" (60) including the fears and anxieties attendant on the construction of the imagined nation of Australia.

Bennett suggests the way the story represents and explores these fears and anxieties as well as the hopes and aspirations of nationalist sentiment; as he says at the end of the second chapter, "Unquiet spirits," "The migratory spirits of Australia's colonies were testing the short story's shape and possibilities as a vehicle for their observations, anxieties and hopes" (39). There is particular emphasis on the significance of location in time and space for the Australian story, and Bennett considers the idea of place from a range of angles, from stories which locate Australia in relation to England, or Oceania, to stories which arise from the specificities of the local: Balmain, Melbourne, the suburbs. More abstractly, the stories are located in relation to international movements, such as modernism and socialism, and to international short story writers, giving rise to illuminating comparisons and contrasts.

As well as location in place, the importance of historical location is emphasised, and Bennett shows the way stories are embedded in their social, cultural and political context, as well as demonstrating that shifts in the way we think about ourselves can lead to different ways of seeing, so that, for example, renewed interest in Oceania opens up re-readings of writers such as Louis Becke, just as new historicism allows us to think about Lawson in new ways. The chapter on the post-Second World War story, entitled "Politics, Location and Storytelling: 1950–1970," looks at the "response to the pressures of history" revealed in the short fiction of this period, arguing that the view of the 1950s and 1960s as insular, conservative and bland is belied by the "pressures and anxieties expressed in short fiction of these decades" (145). A summary of the international and domestic political situation effectively introduces discussion of a range of stories from this period, from the left, from migrants, and from particular evocations of place.

What is perhaps most appealing is the series of vignettes given of the numerous writers discussed. In some ways these read as short stories in themselves—tight, enticing and quite often suggesting the drama and intrigue of eccentric, or at least unconventional, lives. Commenting on Frank Moorhouse's *Tales*, Bennett says that they "may be most profitably read from cover to cover, [but] most have a stand-alone quality that enables them to be read outside of the book's cumulative effects." The same may be said for Bennett's own book. Whilst I started at the beginning and worked my way through the end, accruing as I went a sense of the heterogeneity of stories we have told about ourselves through time, the sections and subcategories, whilst best read in relationship, do have a "stand alone" quality that would make this a very satisfactory book for quick reference. The discussion of individual authors packs a great deal into a small space, situating them a context and, as well as giving quite generous thumb-nail sketches of (for more prominent writers) a number of stories, including some critical reading.

Inevitably, there is a sense of fullness and completion in the account of the Australian story in the earlier chapters of the book, and the discussion of the story from

the 1970s onwards brings out one's own prejudices and preferences: I'd have liked to have seen more emphasis on Black Australian writing and experimental short fiction, and whilst it is effective to conclude with two volumes published in the twenty-first century, it might have been more interesting to suggest a number of emergent writers rather than to leave us at the end with Liam Davison and Mandy Sayer. It is difficult to fit Davison, born in 1957 and with a number of publications up his sleeve, into the young and emergent category. My only other quibble is a few slips in detail—Elizabeth Jolley's wonderful story "Mr Berrington" is called "Mr Berrigan" in the index and the text, and there is a comparison made with Maxine Hong Kingston, where the title of her book is erroneously given as *China Woman* (a conflation of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*?).

In his acknowledgements Bennett says "This book has been a companion through the 1990s and into the new century." His fascination with the short story is palpable, his enthusiasm infectious and his knowledge enviable. His book has lured me back to stories I already know and enticed me with others that sound too good to miss. I've started meditating on the possibility of introducing another course—one that focuses on the Australian short story—and *Australian Short Fiction* would be an invaluable companion to it.

Carol Merli, LaTrobe University

Moral Hazard
Kate Jennings
Picador, 2002

"Business in particular has to take much of the blame for its waning influence [. . .] The community at the moment is not willing to listen to any moral lectures from anyone who is actually running a company": thus states the "Power 2003" edition of the *Financial Review Magazine* (October 2003, 27). With John Howard at the top of the "Overt Power" list and his closest adviser Arthur Sidonis tipping Janet Howard into second position on the "Covert Power" list, political power is announced as the new sublime. The decline in the influence of the corporate sector is perhaps a little premature, capital is ever in cycle, booming and busting, and many of us can only applaud if Treasury has fallen away as the new God. We can only hope that economic rationalism is in such disrepute that the economists are retraining. Prediction, policy, altering the course of history, this is now the business of defence, the intelligence agencies, immigration, foreign affairs and the coalition of the willing to sign a free trade agreement. The real political and economic issues that face Australia—Medicare, infrastructure, salinity, tree clearing, education funding, indigenous communities—flutter away in

the urgency of now terrorism, now power, now our place in history.

In the same issue of the *Financial Review* the power list panel announced that "The failure of the arts to seize the popular imagination is perhaps understandable, given the security environment. It may have something to do with [. . .] the "creeping conservatism" of John Howard's Australia: a country in which elites of any kind have been discredited, and cultural institutions from the ABC to the National Museum of Australia threatened" (28). This is closer to home and I have to stop and think, is this so? Who would I put on the list? And does it matter?

These quotes come from a panel of twenty or so eminent persons who meet and decide on a series of lists, on who has overt, covert and cultural power. Unsurprisingly, most on the list are men, as are most on the panel, and most of the discussion is about the rise of national politics as the sphere of influence over corporate and cultural fields. The cultural list is dispiriting, only one artist, Tim Winton, gets a mention. In nominating Winton, Max Moor-Wilton said: "The guy's been voted by his peers as the promising author in the country, and he's been out there on the airwaves talking about Ningaloo Reef."

Lists, prizes and popular journalism are not proof of anything but they are reductions, indicators, a form of gossip: part of the public conversation about the complex and chaotic present tense. The *Financial Review*'s discussion of the loss of influence of the corporate sector—all the crash and burn, the debts and deceptions—are predicted in Kate Jenning's *Moral Hazard*, lived, taken in, ingested, lived beyond. In this novel we are in the realm of consequences—outcomes in management-speak—in the ways lives are shaped and diverted, challenged and decided, and in the realm of action and speech, how to live. Kate Jennings, like most writers, will never appear on a list of ten influential artists, although this novel, her finest work to date and a winner of several prizes so far, speaks clear and loud on two of the driving issues of our time: public corporate culture and the private world of love, disease and loss.

Moral Hazard is a fine short novel, almost perfect in pace and structure, and it really fixes the moral dilemmas of the age: Cath has to sell her soul in corporate land in order to fund the emotional and health costs of Alzheimer's. She is married to Bailey, an artist, twenty years older and in the early stages of the disease. She is a writer and in order to pay for the health and home care for Bailey, she must find a job. Through contacts and connections, with her research and writing experience, she becomes a speechwriter at an investment bank, working with the jargon and discourse of late American capitalism on Wall Street in a bull market. While smoking in a park outside the office, in the shadow of the World Trade Centre, Cath meets Mike, the other character in this novel, one of the Vice Presidents at Neidecker Benecke, an old hand, an old lefty, high up the beanstalk now, a fund of knowledge and advice, a still calm core in a life of escalating chaos.

It is one of Jennings' many achievements in this work that she evokes the world

of high finance with grace and simplicity, taking the reader with her through Cath's bemusement at the language and concepts:

> I was writing a speech on derivatives for Niedecker's general counsel to be given at a gathering of an international regulatory body in Japan. Hellishly complicated, computer generated financial contracts, derivatives are the brainchild of those math pointy heads known, in Wall Street lingo, as "quants"—from the word "quantum analysis," I'd guess. (5)

Cath's day job in the world of finance, a world of arcane knowledge and immense power, doubles her private story, in which she cares for her husband through the long decline of his disease. The mirrors and metaphors that pass between these two worlds might seem contrived if the bits of story Cath chooses to tell were not so finely balanced and paced to escalate, as Alzheimer's does, onto precarious edges of damage and horror, all the more dreadful for being everyday. The stages of the disease, from mild dissembling through mystification, outbreaks of violence and loss of inhibition, to silence and anger and bouts of sweetness, are all invoked precisely and with a brevity that refuses sentimentality. Everyone I know has a friend or family member dealing with this condition. I suspect the daily awfulness of the suffering refuses fiction: Cath's brittle self-reflection and years of toil, for it is years, seven at least, perhaps ten, are the fundamental material of the novel. Work, the business of work, is relief.

The balance of the novel is risky. High finance up against the lonely private sorrow of illness and loss: too much cliché in one or bathos in the other will turn us away. Jennings manages the risk with poetry, humour, and resonance, calling up the world:

> Joseph Jett, Nick Leeson, the Asian meltdown, CNBC, irrational exuberance, the 10,000 Dow, the dot-com boom—that was to be the future. As was the dot-com bust, the obliteration of the World Trade Centre, recession, fear. Dragon's teeth sown. (5)

Cath and Bailey's personal crisis is here, at the centre of the world. The nature of their lives, their interactions with the health care system, her daily race, his terrible death, stand tragic and close, alongside the spectacle of the centre. In this sense *Moral Hazard* is a political novel. The politics of the public and the personal are intimate:

> I could not afford a nursing home without Medicaid; not many can. On the other hand, to have Bailey placed on Medicaid, the law

> required that I, the "spouse in the community," be pauperized. (Unlike "strategize" or "incentivize," "pauperize" is a real word. And a real government policy: To impoverish.) (110)

Moral Hazard is many things, but above all it is a novel of language, the language of the market, of course, but also of poetry, image, interpretation, and meaning. Cath on her way to work:

> I headed across the World Trade Centre plaza, skirting the towers, slowing my steps to crane at their immoderate height and listen to the keening that flowed down the fluted aluminium facades. The gods, I liked to imagine, bemoaning the hubris they saw in the pokey skyscrapers, dog-leg streets, and chewing gum-stained sidewalks of New York's unprepossessing financial district. (25)

September eleven is a moment in *Moral Hazard*: the novel tells of the years before and is told from the time after. Prescience is one of the marks of a good novel, indicating that it will hold its story through time, that it will continue long after its writing to capture not just a particular time and place, but a resonant moment, when things clarified and changed and we understood something.

It is rare for novels to deal with the world of work. Apart from campus novels (where the workplace is usually a set for the theme of adultery) and detective stories (where the "work" of the detective is the story). For me one of the great attractions of *Moral Hazard* is the corporate setting. Cath gives us one view of the corporate finance world, and for the uninitiated she is a good guide, naïve at first, unreliable, but smart, educated, determined. She rattles between questioning and keeping quiet, and tries to maintain some semblance of self in the workplace, though she generally fails. Her friendship with Mike—a high flyer, an old lefty fond of Leonard Cohen—gives Cath a dialogue about capital and business ethics that is marginal, slightly subversive, and direct. As the third character in the novel, Mike is barely sketched and sometimes seems too good to be true, but Jennings creates a plot around him that turns the title ironic: morality is dangerous in the corporate world, and irresolvable in private.

The neatness of the structure, alternating work and home, capital and the body, is also a risk, but Jennings builds nicely on coincidence and accident and Mike personalises the abstraction of the money market against stereotype. This is no mean feat. The papers are full of alarmingly stereotypical corporate crooks. Here is one of the most recent I noted: the subject is an accountant and a bankrupt. He is, the article notes, "immaculately dressed [. . .] a charming and confident businessman [. . .] wore Armani suits and drove a Porsche 911 which he upgraded to the latest $300,000 Mercedes-Benz CL-500 coupe just months be-

fore going Bankrupt [. . .] Enjoyed long lunches with fine wines and French Champagne [. . .] he had a never ending pot of money [. . .] [if] lunch drifted into Dinner [. . .] [he would] book into a suit at the Crown Casino [. . .] travelled first class" (*Age* 30 October, 3). In 1999 he was top of the *BRW* list for productivity in *BRW*'s Top 100 Accounting firms. By 29October 2002, he was bankrupt. Product placement et cetera.

In the memoir, *Experience*, Martin Amis notes that "We live in the age of mass loquacity. We are all writing or at any rate talking it: the memoir, the apologia, the C.V., the *cri de coeur*. Nothing, for now, can compare with experience—so unanswerably authentic, and so liberally and democratically dispensed. Experience is the only thing we share equally, and everyone senses this. We are surrounded by special cases, by pleadings, in an atmosphere of universal celebrity" (*Experience*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2001, 6). Kate Jennings has written poetry, essays, short fiction and two novels. She has talked in the press about the autobiographical aspects of *Moral Hazard*, she did work as a speech writer, and her husband suffered from Alzheimer's. So why didn't Kate Jennings write *Moral Hazard* as a memoir? Jennings herself identifies the issue in her earlier writings, as indeed she addresses many of the issues raised in the novel, ethics, the moral high ground, self righteousness, one's personal politics. (As a women's liberationist, poet and later a feminist, Jennings has often been a critic, an engaged critic, of the various feminisms developed over thirty years of activism and scholarship.) But for her and for literature there is a point to writing a novel, not a memoir. *Moral Hazard* avoids an exclusive commitment to the private being, it is funny, unsentimental, does not dwell on hardship or unfairness, is not special pleading or confessional. It is a tough work, the characters make tough decisions and live hard lives, but there is pleasure, the pleasures of work, and of memory, of living as well as you can, decently, with humanity and compassion and toughness. In *Moral Hazard* the world is quotidian, which is always equivocal, chaotic, and strange.

After the newness of working for a corporation, the struggle to care for Bailey in the evenings, Cath finally puts Bailey in a nursing home and finds a new boss to work with:

> [. . .] Horace, insulated by wealth, cocooned by privilege, should be taken out and shot. But I enjoyed him, our conversations [. . .] he wasn't a screamer, he wasn't poorly socialised, although I steered clear of discussions of race, feminism, homosexuals, the disabled; there were some rocks I didn't care to look under. He had intelligence, and some wit. He had manners—he said thank you. He made my days easier. What can I say? (85)

Fiction allows Jennings to evoke but not dwell in the world of Alzheimer's. The nursing home is barely bearable, the nightly visits often shocking. Cath hires a carer to do much of Bailey's daily care. By this stage in the novel the investment bank is in chaos, the Asian economic crisis has hit the hedge funds badly. Cath raves at Bailey about the horror of the market and watches as Mike unravels. When it is all over, Cath sums the experience: "Actually I did learn something. The dailiness of life—that's what gets you through the hard times. Putting on your pantyhose, eating breakfast, catching the subway. That's what stops your heart from breaking" (171).

In her essays and journalism Jennings is revealed as a cranky soul, worrying at the world and her own view of it: as an expatriate she takes on Australia and Australianness, in particular our love of alcohol, victim feminism, her own colourful past, moments of envy. On the memoir/fiction question, she writes:

> Some of the stories (in *Women Falling Down in the Street*) resemble essays and memoirs, for I was playing with these forms, satirising them, pushing boundaries, but they fall under the rubric of fiction because the truth—snake-slippery truth—has been distorted or exaggerated and events and characters cobbled together from bits and pieces of real life. On occasion even fabricated. (*Bad Manners*. Port Melbourne: Minerva Press, 1993. 68)

This fairly banal statement of process, of justification, seems to me to have been resolved in *Moral Hazard*, a work that is so clearly a novel, a work of fiction, and so saturated in experience refined through poetics. It would have been a hard work to write, the spare prose, the humour and distance of the almost sketched stories, the etching of horror and terror, the structuring of dramatic relief through the world of work. Writers rarely talk about the painstaking work of crafting sentences and chapters into a rhythmic whole that is both resolved and open, still, at every moment.

One of the things I like most about *Moral Hazard* is that Cath is a speechwriter. This seems to me to be brilliant piece of casting, the new profession par excellence. The crafting of speeches for public and corporate figures, the combination of jokes, literary and historical quotations, history, prediction, spin, talking up, planting ideas, the slogan, the take-away, the new phrase, the lie disguised; all these things and a million more are pregnant in the job, constructing the persona of the public figure, its worth, almost, certainly its place in history. This is the quintessential art of fiction in pursuit of money, an ironic job that pays well because it is language in service to power.

We never read one of Cath's speeches, which is probably just as well. Although she does make a few speeches of her own, most often to Bailey and occasionally to

Mike, these are mostly entertaining rants and contrast nicely, wonderfully, with Cath's personal language, which is poetry. Towards the end she reads an Elizabeth Bishop poem to an unconscious Bailey:

> From Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,
> Please come flying
> In a cloud of fiery pale chemicals
> Please come flying (160)

Moral Hazard would make a good film, set in New York, in an investment bank, and dealing with the private narrative of Alzheimer's. The dialogue is witty and erudite, the arcana of Wall Street humorously explicated, and much of the action takes place outside in the weather and in the shadow of the World Trade Centre. I can imagine it now, Nicole Kidman (although I would prefer Toni Collette), cast as the tough middle aged Cath, pressed into working as a speech writer in an investment bank at the peak of the bull market, her husband, declining in health, her private struggle, her ambivalence at her work world; attracted to men of power, needing the money, good at her job, but nonetheless, when Bailey dies, she gives up the job, and, the novel implies by its existence, returns to her writing.

And there we would be, the Hollywood machine inviting us to the cinema, none of us will have read the novel, but there will be a story about the lead actress being seen to smoke on screen, moral hazard indeed.

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The Ice and the Inland:
Mawson, Flynn, and the Myth of the Frontier
Brigid Hains
U of Melbourne P, 2002

In the last decade, the field of spatial or environmental history has flourished in Australia: geographical space, as Paul Carter's landmark *Road to Botany Bay* asserts, is not simply a static, neutral surface on which culture occurs; rather, space itself is a dynamic cultural product. Spatiality is now rightly recognised as a constantly shifting composite of land, cultural attitudes, and cultural practices—what Sarah Whatmore usefully terms a "hybrid geography." For the relatively young settler/invader culture of white Australia, spatiality is a particularly active, and anxious field: it is only just over two hundred years since the continent was invaded and annexed, and for non-Aboriginal Australians the processes of situat-

ing the land in familiar epistemological frameworks and of defining a relationship to the land are still very much in progress. Works such as Ross Gibson's *Diminishing Paradise* and *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, Simon Ryan's *The Cartographic Eye*, Ros Haynes's *Seeking the Centre*, and Carter's *Lie of the Land*, to name a few, have productively opened up Australian spatialities to examination, revealing their dynamic, contested, and multiple histories.

Brigid Hains's *Ice and the Inland* is an exciting addition to the field of Australian spatial history. It attends to white Australians' early twentieth century attitudes towards the nation's two "ecological frontiers"—land in which inherited European modes of environmental perception and practice cannot be sustained—the central deserts and eastern Antarctica. Hains selects two iconic frontier figures as a means of focusing her analysis: *Ice and the Inland* is a detailed study of Douglas Mawson's 1911–1913 Australasian Antarctic Expedition, and John Flynn's Australian Inland Mission and Royal Flying Doctor Service between 1900–1932. By studying these figures and their frontier work, Hains produces an excellent genealogy of early Australian attitudes to, representations of, and relationships with, lands considered "wild." At the same time, she demonstrates the ways in which specific versions of Australian national identity were articulated and tested through encounters with these physically and epistemologically liminal spaces. In short, *Ice and the Inland* is a spatial history of Australian frontier mythologies, an account of white Australians' enduring fascination with the arid zones of the centre and the south.

There can be no question that white Australians have produced the ten central deserts and the polar desert of Antarctica as sites saturated in nationalist significance. The difficult lands of the centre and the far south may be distant from the bulk of Australia's largely metropolitan population, but they have long been firmly situated at the core of the white Australian imagined community of the nation. The question of why white Australians have mythologised these marginal spaces so vigorously, for so long, invokes a catalogue of responses—a desire to settle imaginatively lands which would not support physical settlements such as farms; a need to generate a unique Australian national identity through relationships with distinctly non-European natural environments; and, in the case of continental Australia, a legal need to sustain the fiction that the land was unsettled and available before it became a white possession. Although Hains cites the motivations underpinning frontier mythologies, *Ice and the Inland* is not a work of pathology. Rather, and perhaps more usefully, the book is instead a careful anatomy of the mythologies that have arisen as a result of these needs. Just how Mawson's and Flynn's frontier work articulated white Australia's relationships with its arid lands is the focus of Hains's study.

Hains examines several key tensions at the heart of the frontier ethos of early twentieth-century Australia. One of these tensions revolves around urban civilisa-

tion and its supposed effects on "national character": in the early twentieth century, urban life was increasingly seen as a vitiating force that sapped the virile energies of the settled population. Leaving behind the comforts of urban domesticity for athletic confrontations with the extreme natural environments of the frontiers promised to reinvigorate, regenerate, and re-masculinise Australia's increasingly modern urban population. This myth of masculinist national regeneration, however, came into conflict with a second potent frontier discourse: the colonial imperative of settling and taming "the wilderness." Mawson and his all-male expeditionary team, as Hains explains, may have sought to escape settlement, domesticity, and urban crowding through muscular encounters with the Antarctic frontier, but for ten months of their polar year they lived in a single wooden hut together—cooking, singing, bickering, putting on pantomimes—in closer domestic proximity to each other than that experienced by urban occupants. Similarly, while visceral encounters with the brutal Antarctic environment were of paramount discursive importance to the AAE, so too was the utilitarian cooption of polar space into the bloodless data of scientific rationality. The contradictory imperatives of settlement and of leaving settlement behind, of adventurous physical struggle and orderly scientific mensuration crosshatch in the AAE's Antarctic writings; the frontier, as Hains argues, is not a space of discursive simplicity, but a protean zone in which multiple anxieties and desires intersect and collide.

Although the deserts and Antarctica are radically different spaces physically and politically, Hains demonstrates the numerous discursive continuities forged between the two distant sites. Flynn represented the centre as the ideal locus for the creation of a unified national community. In the centre, he wrote, white Australians could become "bushborn conquerors over nature," endlessly replaying the drama of colonisation, while at the same time guaranteeing the future strength of the white race through heroic struggles with nature. These myths, too, came into conflict with other discursive formations: the romanticised figure of the lone white bushman at once fortified myths of masculine freedom beyond the constraints of the cities, and threatened to undercut a sense of cohesive national community and permanence. Similarly, Flynn's vision of subduing the centre through white settlement and technological developments such as the wireless and the airplane collided with his desire for the "natural" frontier encounter to remain a core element of Australian identity. Like Mawson, Flynn represented the centre as a site of eugenic racial renewal, where the difficult natural environment would result in the birth of ever more vigorous white Australians. Yet the racial reality of the centre was not one of ever-improved whiteness, but rather of miscegenation; Flynn worked tirelessly to bring white women into the centre so that they could produce white babies, a move which conflicted with the myth of the frontier as a zone of masculine freedom and unrestricted adventure. But these

conflicting mythologies, as Hains argues, did not result in the collapse of the notion of the frontier. Instead, they produced frontier spatialities as complex sites in which a young settler/invader nation attempted to forge an identity through meaningful relations with its lands.

Ice and the Inland is primarily a work of textual analysis: Hains surveys the published journals, unpublished diaries and letters, lecture notes, and articles produced by Mawson, Flynn, and AAE team members in order to identify persistent discursive tendencies and tropes in their representations of Australian frontier spatiality. Hains's decision to consider both published and unpublished material together is a strategic one: *Ice and the Inland* is not just a study of authorised representations, but of the entire "repertoire of images and feelings by which early twentieth century Australians sought to comprehend wilderness" (31). Hains's archival work not only brings important unpublished material to light, but also points up some of the tensions that ran through frontier mythologies: the unpublished letters and diaries of Mawson's AAE team, for instance, detail the "epistemological nightmare" of the men's sometimes unsuccessful attempts to slot Antarctica into their inherited frames of perception in a way that the official published narrative does not (38). Hains's investigation of Australian spatial attitudes and beliefs is all the more convincing and powerful for its use of unpublished material.

Ice and the Inland is a significant work: it is among the first attempts to address critically Australia's Antarctic spatiality, and it accounts thoroughly for a key period in the genealogy of Australian national identity. However, with its focus set firmly on discursive spaces and discursive environments, the articulation of "imaginative possession" (148) to the politics of land possession and control is left largely unexamined. Hains's focus is environmental discourse and mythologies rather than on the geo- and legal politics of Australian territory. Some more substantial inclusion of these other potent cultural technologies of spatial production would have added greater contextual depth to Hains's meticulous discourse analysis. For instance, the sole legal foundation of white Australian possession of the continent and half of Antarctica is *terra nullius*—the claim that these lands were not owned prior to white arrival—but Hains does not cite this as a key factor in the enduring myths of the "wild," "empty," "virgin" frontiers. Flynn's representations of the centre as untrammelled nature certainly shored up a number of discursive formulations of national identity; they also reiterated the state's legal claim to the continent. The statement that "Antarctic exploration was always bound to remain in the realm of the symbolic" (28) disregards the fact that Mawson's expedition laid the foundation for a continuing Australian claim to six million square kilometres of polar space. At times, the important difference between "psychological or emotional ownership of the entire continent" (133) and legal possession of land is unclear in the book. As Jane Jacobs points out, "discursive and representational prac-

tices are in a mutually constitutive relationship with political and economic forces" (*Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*. London: Routledge, 1996. 9). The spaces produced and maintained by frontier mythologies, in other words, are more than simply discursive. But accounts of the legal and geopolitical histories of desert and Antarctic space already exist: *Ice and the Inland*, with its focus on discursive histories of these spaces, is a productive complement to them. With Hains's study, an important chapter is added to the genealogy of Australian spatiality.

Christy Collis, University of Queensland

Sugar Heaven
Jean Devanny
Vulgar Press, 2002

Bobbin Up
Dorothy Hewett
Vulgar Press, 1999

Whatever one's stance on the issue of socialist realism might be, anyone seriously interested in the teaching of Australian literature and the possibilities of a robust literary public sphere more broadly, must be breathing a sigh of relief as Ian Syson's Vulgar Press gets cracking with its scholarly editions of "Vulgar Working Classics." One of the difficulties the field of Australian literary studies faces is the invisibility of its own subject matter: the scarcity of contemporary editions of titles by all but the most usual of usual suspects. This is not just a problem for university teachers trying to construct varied and historically representative syllabi, it is also makes serious debate about Australian literary history difficult, because that history is very narrowly defined, imperfectly understood and still prone to the simplest of polarities: realism as opposed to modernism, the political as opposed to the aesthetic. By republishing works that belong to an elided history of socialist literature, Vulgar Press is intervening into the mechanics of canon formation in a way that promises to complicate this picture.

Both *Sugar Heaven* and *Bobbin Up* let us glimpse what a politically motivated and engaged literature looked like in the middle decades of the last century and invite debate about what one might look like now, in economic and political circumstances that are constantly disarticulated by their global character. Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* is undoubtedly the harder of these two texts because of its more committed reproduction of a socialist realist aesthetic that takes up the imperatives of Soviet cultural policy circa 1934 quite directly. According to this policy, socialist literature, in opposition to the decaying modernism of a decadent

West, should be focused on the life experiences of the working class and should aim to bring this class to a consciousness of itself and its historically transformative potential by representing the reality of revolutionary development and subjectivity. The aim of this kind of writing was ideological transformation, not through a simple didacticism (though that was never out of the question) but through a structural dynamic that enacts a kind of coming to consciousness. Needless to say the rhetoric of Zhdanovian aesthetics—"revolutionary Romanticism," the writer as the "engineer of the human soul"—strikes us as grotesquely Orwellian today. It is, however, a mistake to tar someone like Devanny with this brush. Her politics and her adaptation of Zhdanovian aesthetics have to be understood in terms of the proletarianisation of agricultural life in a barely post-imperial, capitalist economy. *Sugar Heaven* is set in the cane fields of Northern Queensland, in the midst of a cutters' strike over the spread of Weil's disease. As the cutters mobilize and industrial conflict intensifies, the novel's central and animating consciousness, Dulcie Lee, begins to shed the vestments of false consciousness to emerge, by the end of the novel, as the embodiment of the radical subject. The novel foregrounds a mode of empathy in which class solidarity and identity emerge, and through which individuals are able to move beyond the monadic isolation of bourgeois consciousness to grasp the necessity of collective subjectivity. For Dulcie and Eileen, the novel's other principle touchstone, this process finally moves towards an integrated, cosmopolitan and feminist consciousness in which aspects of private life yield up a political significance not glimpsed before. It is the relay between political-industrial processes and the developing subjectivities of the characters that is the real point of interest in this novel. If this relay is sometimes heavy-handed in its didacticism, it also offers an insight into the utopian, even messianic subtext of socialist poetics that is utterly fascinating. Towards the end of the novel Dulcie glimpses socialist knowledge as if it were a "godhead" from which "streamed out to all corners of the globe broad paths trodden by millions" (219). Today, with the utopian projects of the last century either in ruins or quickly getting there, this sort of vision is like a dream image left over from the sleep of great transformative ideologies. It is a pity that the phantasms of global capitalism are not as immediately transparent.

The novel itself is unevenly written. Devanny is big on euphemism and rhetorical abstraction as her language strains to accommodate its political project. Phrases like "the virgin springs of her vitality" (33) and "the dank waters of realisation" (89) do a lot of work as Dulcie gradually learns to wrap her heart "around that mass brotherhood," quivering to the "mass music of their calling" (123). Yet a lot of the novel is also concerned with the procedural minutia of the strike action, which is related chronologically and in an extremely disembodied manner dominated by the use of passive voice. These stylistic qualities don't always make for easy reading, but they interestingly indicate the ways in which the novel, as a

narrative form inherited from bourgeois society, struggles to adapt itself to the imperatives of socialist art with its stress on collective processes and a form of liberation concentrated not in the individual (the reference point of the novel as it is traditionally understood), but in the mass. *Sugar Heaven*'s "revolutionary Romanticism" is in keeping with the Romantic strain in Marx's 1844 manuscripts, according to which the evocation of a sort of sentient, organic subject brings the alienation of bourgeois experience into view. This is one textual strategy that might be taken from the novel. It allows us to read Devanny's text as one that is not just about a specific political conflict, but is also concerned with aestheticised strategies of consciousness-raising that may yet live to fight another day.

Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up*, written twenty odd years after *Sugar Heaven*, owes as much to modernist techniques of montage as it does to socialist realism. For this reason it reads as a more aesthetically radical text and one that is probably more in keeping with a contemporary sense of what a radical, working class novel might look like. Set in the shadow of the Jumbuck Mills in post-war Sydney, it is a relentlessly urban novel that is also quite decentered in its use of a range of characters all loosely implicated in the same relations of production and exploitation. As Stephen Knight writes in an essay accompanying the text, Hewett "avoids the restricted authority of the traditional novel and resists writing a women's novel which replicates the certainties, authorial and architectonic, of the closed form of the novel" (225). The radicality of the novel's form enables it to deal with the issue of totality and collectivity more efficiently than *Sugar Heaven*. More than anything else it reminded me of Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a novel in which a decentered focus on the life of a city also brings into sharp relief the delusions that circulate through the ephemeral, commercial cultural forms so articulately captured in the novel's detail. Hewett does something very similar. Her evocations of the grimy, everyday life of Sydney also explore the ways in which mass cultural forms have permeated the everyday and created a new level of mass delusion crucially implicated in the dialectical processes the socialist novel attempts to clarify: "Oxford Street lapped them around with promises, lured them with impossible dreams [. . .] the whirl of lights, the purr of cars, the distant, velvety roar of the city, haloed with gold" (23). The junk of capitalism seems to speak to the characters directly, whispering through interior monologues in a way that recreates the addled everyday consciousness of the beguiled consumer: "Streamlined refrigerators, laminex kitchen suites, delux washing machines, double beds in polished maples, TV sets [. . .] a Hollywood Fairytale [. . .] carpet your home from wall to wall and trade in your furniture, no deposit and easy terms" (23). Hewett's downtrodden world is every bit as vivid as Stead's in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, reminding us that the Australian urban novel remains the genre most consistently neglected by the limp, middle-brow pastoralism of so much contemporary Australian writing.

Both novels come to us as scholarly editions accompanied by critical essays and author statements that usefully discuss the works in terms of their relationships to activist possibilities and working-class readerships. Essays by Stephen Knight and Nathan Hollier accompany *Bobbin Up*, and *Sugar Heaven* comes with a detailed introduction by Nicole Moore and essays by Carol Ferrier and Amanda Lohrey. This makes them ideal texts to teach, but also ensures that they are read with something of their history and critical heritage around them. How much more viable a university course on "Australian Modernism" becomes with Hewett's novel included alongside works by Patrick White and issues of *Angry Penguins*! If Australian critics are ever to have serious and ongoing debates about the relationship between aesthetics and politics, it is imperative that we have key texts like Hewett's and Devanny's available and circulating.

Andrew McCann, University of Melbourne

"Unemployed at Last!":
Essays on Australian Literature to 2002 for Julian Croft
Ken Stewart and Shirley Walker (eds)
Centre for Australian Studies, University of New England, 2002

At the twilight of his official career, Julian Croft is transformed—through this collection of essays donated by his peers—from a gifted academic, writer and poet, to an ambassador for and embodiment of Australian literature at large. At the centre of this *festschrift* is the figure of Croft, from whom concentric circles of literary influence emanate, until eventually this figure simultaneously *stands for* Australian literature as he is *represented and engulfed* by it. Croft's opening autobiographical essay "*Such is/was Life"* sets an appropriate tone for this *festschrift*, alighting as it does so compellingly on the figure of the writer and, more importantly, on the shifting distances between writer and text, and writer and history. It is apt that this collection of essays begins with an autobiography of sorts, as a distinct fascination for the biographical and also a sense of writerly fidelity pulses throughout this text.

Often functioning like an archaeological dig of the Australian literary landscape, this endeavour by various academics unearths the skeletons of myth and history that any sense of our national literature is necessarily founded on. Imbued with (at times synchronized) doses of both scepticism and reverence, the artefacts of this collection of essays include forgotten Australian plays (and those that stole the limelight); colonial and gold rush fictions; recent female autobiography; urban theatre and rural pastorals infected with dystopia; as well as various accounts of the figure of the Australian writer in transition between the personal and the public.

History (as "faction") wallpapers this collection of essays, providing the backdrop from which distances of identity and politics are often measured. Projects such as Frances Devlin-Glass' alignment of the Irish Revivalist movement with the contemporary virtual preservation of Yanyuwa language and culture and Alan Sandison's defence of tragedy in the literature of AIDS foreground a particularly *literary* negotiation with history, where the canon is engaged with in both respectful and insistent ways. Alongside these uneasy marriages of past and present are related and often anxious interrogations of nationalism in literature, which predominantly cast Australia as a lost (or elusive) land where utopic gestures are met with dystopic realities.

In this text, the projected pathways towards any kind of national allegory or myth-making are principally those of language and spatiality. Robert Dingley, in his essay on the nineteenth century fiction of Anthony Trollope, situates (albeit unintentionally perhaps) the inherited difficulty of a national literature in both of these fields, initially suggesting that " [. . .] a colonial context necessitates a redefinition of terms" (38) and then redeploying this problem onto the Australian landscape, where he locates " [. . .] the problem of a colonial space which resists domestication and which can so easily reduce imperial enterprise to ironic failure and words to emptiness" (43). John McCallum makes a similar progression from text to landscape, charting " [. . .] the great nationalist quest of forging a new drama that would represent Australian life on the stage" (86) in which he overwhelmingly discovers "the yearning to belong and to put roots down [. . .] " (96).

With varying degrees of intention and effect, the contributors to this *festschrift* deal with the national imaginary in its literary manifestations. In many essays, such Australia-dreaming is problematised to the point of near impossibility, or at least exposed for its myriad contradictions. For Anthony Hassall, this manifests itself as the ironically powerful rural mythology in an essentially urbanised country and the parallel motif of escape which this engenders. In her review of recent Australian fiction, Elizabeth Webby forces the issue of nationalism in literature to be considered in its political guise, pointing to:

> [. . .] the continuing reluctance of writers, at least those at the more literary end of the spectrum, to deal with the many pressing issues now confronting contemporary Australians, except at one remove. (176)

Despite a recognition of the difficulty of establishing an "Australian" literature (no more punctuated than in Devlin-Glass' attention to the inequities of cultural representation in Australia) what emerges from this *festschrift* is a deliberate effort to challenge such difficulties through scholarly analysis. Nowhere is the figure of

Croft more evident that in this harmonious synthesis between otherwise distinctly individual essays.

Whether in a spirit of celebration such as that of J.S. Ryan in his figuring of Thomas Browne's gold rush fiction as a " [. . .] prelude to [. . .] the birth of a new nation" (45), or in the scepticism of T.G.A Nelson's prescription of a dénouement in the (theatrical promotion of an) "Australian ethos," these essays nevertheless answer Croft's call for a dedication to Australian literary studies. Here, his testimony that:

> After my experience in Africa I found it distinctly odd that in the field of Australian literature hardly any co-ordinated academic energy was being put into conferences, interacting with publishing, editing texts, recuperating forgotten works, and encouraging scholarly research. (14)

becomes an unavoidable undercurrent of this *festschrift*, a subtext that springs from behind (and within) the syntax of every essay.

As the figure of Croft travels through the subterranean landscapes of this text, cloaked in an inspiring allegiance to Australian literature, this figure also loses the gleam of individuality and becomes instead simply the figure of the writer. In a curious way, this *festschrift* embraces a distinct denial of the "death of the author" in its relentless valorisation of the author and in the innumerable links here between author and truth. There is no allowance for any complete disappearance of the author in this text—indeed this figure surges with life (and with history and influence) throughout these essays. Stepping outside of the postmodern, many of the contributors elevate the practice of writing to a platform of fidelity, which is by turns reinforced and scrutinised by these critics.

In the essays of J.S. Ryan and Dennis Haskell (which deal with Thomas Browne's and David Malouf's colonially-inspired fiction), the author is transmogrified into an authoritative text. Using biography as evidence, Ryan punctuates his analysis of Browne's gold rush stories with accounts of the author's life, from which causal links are methodically drawn to his fiction. In yet another manifestation of the author, Haskell uses Malouf as analyst/interpreter, turning grabs from his interviews into analyses of his work. Such a reference to the *wider* writings of Malouf reinforces the already strong link between writers and texts in this *festschrift*.

Complementing the purposeful mix of the personal, the literary and the political in Croft's autobiographical essay, other contributors measure the distance between writer and text in highly interrogative ways. The impressively annotated, archival account of Mary Gilmore's life and work provided by Jennifer Strauss, pays great respect to the value of biography. However, Strauss also demonstrates that she is not satisfied to leave such a genre unchallenged. The effect of the dense

and immediately captivating biographical detail is arrested by Strauss, as she problematises the divide between Gilmore's life and work within a broader analysis of the secular/non-secular polarity. Underpinning this project is a quest for truth (and its erasure).

Such deconstruction is wholeheartedly embraced in Felicity Plunkett's fascinated investigation into Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* and the literary criticism surrounding it. In this essay, the figure of the writer is multiplied into its creative *and* critical guises, neither of which is left undisturbed. Plunkett's essay becomes a project of unearthing the ferociously insistent motifs of lack, loss and excision from Finola Moorhead's review of Porter's book and also from Porter's work itself. Moorhead's critique is made *almost* defunct but simultaneously vital in terms of its relationship to *The Monkey's Mask* and to literary criticism, which takes on a ruthlessly psychoanalytic edge in Plunkett's engaging analysis.

Separating the writer from the text becomes a constant test of these essays. Ken Stewart, in his evaluation of female autobiography, wrestles with verisimilitude in allegiance with Alan Sandison, who finds that "Biography has lost confidence in its own objectivity as well as in the definable subjectivity of its object, and openly lives in sin with fiction" (190). In some ways, such fusions of writer and text, of fact and fiction, are happily celebrated in this *festschrift*. In tension with its other impulse towards elevating the author, this book also obscures the distinction of the writer—replacing this authority with the feisty and committed analyses of these critics.

Ultimately, this tribute to Julian Croft (this tribute to Australian literature) generates a literary and academic sense of a self-reflexive tribe. To read this *festschrift* is to be challenged by a national literary heritage and to witness the symbolic exchange of man and work. It is refreshing to see the potential for insular competitiveness in the academy so successfully replaced with a thoroughly interesting collective project, where the sum of one man's work becomes also the sum of that of his peers.

Bridie McCarthy, Deakin University

ode ode
Michael Farrell
Salt Publishing, 2002

Michael Farrell's first collection of poetry, *ode ode*, is erudite chic. The disjunctive front cover photograph with two white plastic forks on (roll out the) red carpet is revisited in poems which nod to lyrics by Tammy Wynette and *Guns and Roses,* intertwined with references to Genet, Darwin and Duchamp. The permutations

and combinations of pop culture, high-art and philosophical ruminations ricochet across urban landscapes, lives, and relationships in ways that intersect with the objectives of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. Charles Bernstein and other poets of that school claim that "reference, like the body itself, is one of the horizons of language, whose value is to be found in the writing (the world) before which we find ourselves at any moment" (Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (eds). *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1984. ix.). Farrell seems to share this preoccupation with exploring the ways in which meaning is realized so that his deliberately artful poems, scanning across art objects and subjects, have poetic outcomes that are more than the sum of their intertexts. The almost compulsive references shape the vision of the poetic consciousness, and because Farrell's slices of life are cut mandolin fine, the poems are translucent, fragmentary, often devoid of narrative and always without the luxury (or the cobwebs) of grammar.

These devices indicate "a provo/cative way with the medium" (3). Provocations include not only the lack of grammar, but highly disjunctive and often obscure use of line breaks which abandon denotative and connotative functions of words in favour of half swallowed or choked sounds. The use of equally a-grammatical French, Italian and invention move language beyond meaning and toward texture. The stylistics are invitations to readerly involvement. Engagement with art operates both within and without, being central to the poems' construction as well as a crucial tool in the reading process. Besides throwing down this intellectual gauntlet, the failure of (traditional forms of) language to encapsulate experiences becomes a fascination with type-set symbolism and audible dissonance. These poetics of alterity are exceeded by fixated games with language that consistently mark Farrell's work. Obsessions worthy of Walwicz manifest themselves in stutters, beginning with the doubled title, *ode ode*, which signals the self-reflexive notion of an ode on an ode, and is mirrored by the front cover's doubled forks that imply the conspicuous absence of the knife.

Such resistance to the logic of expectations is part of the disjunctive montage but also readable as a stammer, an obsessive repetition. It is unsurprising then that many of these poems glitch like a Yasunao Tone record. In "Pretty Pennies" line endings like: "more obedient than desira/desirable a woman cuts grass," break words to stall the flow of reading. Such scratches in the record impose temporary cognitive set-backs and repetitions. This is particularly apt because, in audio terms, glitches are caused by reading errors (technology reading the sound recording incorrectly) and poems like "track listing" extend that metaphor. But the insecurity of the stutter evolves in Farrell's poems into a more confident demand that the reader decode the other possibilities of the slippage before continuing.

Despite this confidence there remains a suggestion of the return of the repressed. In "Pretty Pennies" this seems to pivot on anxieties associated with long

term relationships. The fault-lines that cause tremors are at: "de/decade," "mar/married," "be/began," "e/eventually" and "desira/desirable." The failure of love punctuates much of the intellectual cleverness of Farrell's works. The poems are most often cerebrally emotive and, in works like "living at the z," examined through the lens of popular culture. This poem takes the conceit of a shared video library membership card as emblematic of relationship cohesion and breakdown in a gesture that is almost comic. Numerous like moments of jocularity heighten the stutter's sense of imperfect camouflage for deeper feeling. The opening line of the second prelude, "far from ok," is the smirking: "I was born ok and raised there." Equally, titles like "the tortoise who mistook a pickaxe for love" seem to seek some comic separation from painful experiences.

But this humour is equally an invitation to play, a reading that can also be applied to the word breakages as a private mode of cryptology. Such stylistics require re-associations in ways that are arguably political. Sapir says that the "real world" is unconsciously produced by the language habits of the group. It seems that Farrell both recognizes and resists this logic by refusing well-worn habits in order to speak anew the conditions for contemporary existence. The anagrams and un-grammar are only one level of this impulse. Another is that the collection takes the contradictory starting point of five codas.

Classical music codas produce the anticipation of resolution, they commonly play out an extended dissonance that increases in intensity until subsumed into the consonance of closure. Farrell's codas are thus displaced. Beginning with multiple endings, the challenges to grammar are, at this point in the collection, literally brought to the fore in the form of titles. The five codas are each assigned a punctuation mark and the grammatical symbol marks the poem by a subtle suggestion to readers to replace that symbol's absence in each work. In the first poem, the apostrophe (and its absence) shifts in and out of various manifestations including the genitive (ownership, possession or belonging), and substitution. The apostrophe is also a form of separation, a sense that is compounded by the visually indistinguishable (when the symbol stands alone without text as it does in this title) comma.

Ellipsis inflects the second work as pauses, elisions, while the dash which names the third poem is an absent hyphen from words cleft at line ends. It is also the dash that creates the pausing Emily Dickinson trademark, and perhaps the underscore that indicates emphasis. These codas ostensibly describe films in a festival and their intersection with the filmic grammar of editing is equivalent to splices and montage. But the first line of the first coda, "this is cinema made by people," is also an invitation to view this collection of poems as collaborative films, a metaphor that serves them exceptionally well. The poem with a question mark title asks about both filmic and poetic ways of seeing in the same question:

some people are deaf to imagery
i include black & white screens
in this punctuation & imagery
piety & sanctity youve got to
hate to make a movie show it
dont say it art can be an is
land or asteroid even a milk
delivery if it backs through a
delicate situation glass isn't glass
its whats distorted through it
the beauty of metaphors lie
lie lie silence can be hard to
watch quote me quote me oh

The quotes are hard to stop because the voice, like the relentless movie reel, does not pause for breath.

Despite references to Hollywood stars like Julia Roberts and Bogart in these codas, Farrell's schematics are closer to avant garde experimental filmmakers like Jan Svenkmejer and Shinya Tsukamoto. Farrell says "the divines become an apostrophe/in the mainstream in the arthouse" and in terms of his own poetry, each sense of apostrophe refigures this claim.

For all this complexity, in rare places the poems are equally compelling for their simplicity. The title poem is as bare as the sadness it annunciates and somehow transcends the cliché of "breaking hearts." In place of five lines there are long dashes during which the reader waits for the next break on the beach. When they come they are repetitions like the title and the cheap plastic forks, but, as Minimalists discovered, repetitions are never the same, the context of the repetition relentlessly recodifies the second (and third and fourth) impressions in multifarious ways. Yet the poem is not minimalist. The back cover of this collection calls Farrell a new stylist, but just how to categorize his style is less obvious. Experimental, intellectual, referential, the adjectives jostle, unsettling each other. The final poem says "my audience is smaller than his monarchs" and perhaps the privilege of such a select group, well read and conscious of experimental and avant garde precursors, will necessarily delineate the market for this artful new book.

Liz Parsons, Deakin University

Post-colonial Transformations
Bill Ashcroft
Routledge, 2001

Following the appearance of *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989, there was a double-edged phenomenon of the proliferation of "postcolonial" through many disciplines and several countries (notably the US) and a concerted critique of the concept and its uses. Some of the at times aggressive attacks came from worries from the faithful few that their field was being corporatised by First World interests, others from people new to the field bringing different understandings of what the term meant and what the critical game was about. Books and papers still spend time locating a set of postcolonial practices and seeking a label appropriate to them. A good example of this is the Blackwell *Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2000) edited by Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray, which declares its US base, deletes the hyphen to get away from the too obvious temporal marker, and specifies its various disciplinary approaches to the topic. Given its site of origin, it is surprising how many chapters adopt a Marxist-liberationist position from which to discuss matters.

This is of relevance here, since a lot of the criticism of what was an Australian-Canadian line of thinking with its origins in English Literature has come from non-literary, non-Commonwealth regions. Its weakness has been often a wilful blindness to the frame within which *The Empire Writes Back* was operating (sometimes a refusal to see any virtue in any model that didn't speak directly to US concerns), but its strength lies in its seeing in the 1989 work its strategic rejection of a master-slave/colony-independent nation binary and of essentialist notions of resistance and difference, and attacking that (and the Said-Foucault model of discursive mastery) for its diluting of oppositional agency. It is also justified in its challenge to the "writing back" binary that remains as perpetuating the centripetal structure of empires against which the book purports to work, noting (with Aijaz Ahmed, for example) that most ex-colonies, especially in their vernacular literatures, have other things to worry about than continually engaging with a country and its culture now distanced in time and space.

It is to defend the broad base of *The Empire Writes Back* that Ashcroft has developed his own blend of Wittgenstein, Barthes, deCerteau and Bourdieu, amongst others, to posit a theory of "interpolation" (against Althusser's "interpellation") and mutual transformation akin to Homi Bhabha's uncanny "Third space." In this there is an awareness of the brute force and ideological power surrounding resistance (so that, notwithstanding the objections of Fourth World critics, oppressed minorities and subaltern countries have no choice but to "write back" to centres of national or global power if they want to retain any local identity and self-determination), but an insistence on the possibility of subversive actions that

use the power of dominant structures against itself or turn the application of that power into effects quite different than those intended and more related to local aspirations. (In the author's own words, "Modernity itself is the expansive and persuasive signifier of the dominance of Western culture since the Renaissance. Yet new conceptions of modernity lie at the heart of the process of transformation itself, for the modern can be 'used' and 'resisted' at the same time" 23.) The book goes on to chart the possibilities of such ambivalent resistances across language use, allegorical disruption of the "grand narrative" of History, reconstructing place, transforming habitation and resisting globalisation. Its major additions to earlier work are the inclusion of Latin America in discussions of the postcolonial dynamic, the move from purely literary to more cultural studies frameworks, and the extension of debate from writing back to empires to writing forward to neo-imperialist forms of power.

At times somewhat long-winded (the space-place-horizon sequence could have been boiled down with no loss of clarity), and often more eclectic than single-mindedly rigorous, the book does present a clear and sustained overall argument that commands respect. It has the knack of throwing out illustrative details and rhetorical flourishes that cause instant questioning in the reader (to what exent and from whose perspective is Indian cinema any kind of textual resistance? 32; compromised though it may have been, without the kind of oppositional resistance against which the interpolation model operates, would there be any nations today to fuel debate about postcoloniality and globalisation?; would an Italo-Australian or an Aboriginal be accepting of or comforted by a claim that "All language is marginal"? 67). Nonetheless, it does offer a theoretical model to counter the apparently disabling theoretical answer to Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" (46). Seeing the production of meaning as a site of exchange and struggle in which all participants are engaged, albeit unequally, is a way out of exclusivist positions of either domination or resistance that leave no theoretical ground for transformation. The proposal overall is a modest one, and that is its virtue; anything more grandiose would be counter to the small-scale interventions the book argues for as a basis of resistance in the complex systems of postcolonial experience.

Ashcroft does a good job of illustrating the imperialist implications of Western knowledge (ocular-centric discourse, surveillance, perspective, horizons, mapping, borders) and looks at the complexity of linguistic, imperial and global power systems to argue that the "rhizomic" looseness that gives them flexibility and reach also allows interstitial leverage. Local communities and marginal minorities can make use of the "cultural capital" of the dominant system, reinterpreting it to meet specific needs and to some exent turning it back on the hegemonic structures to effect change. Ashcroft rejects a totally postmodern relativism, seeing the deconstruction of history down to a set of narratives as offering potential agency

to minor narratives (89) and properly notes the need of postcolonial resistance to recognise systems like "history" in order to generate corrective counter-narratives while also seeking to reconceive the system itself (98, 191). The concluding chapter on globalisation provides some interesting examples of local appropriation of global consumer items to illustrate the idea of parodic subversion in order to confirm local identities.

Sometimes words like "rhizomic" and "metonymic" are made to do too much work, and seem jargonistic (unless the reader has followed the author's previous writings). There's a curious willingness to make large claims for a unified traditionalised Aboriginal culture that could attract hostile attention from some readers (the model itself seems at odds with the complex interactions of tradition and modernity accorded other cultures and there seems to be a relative lack of citations by contrast to the many Euro-theoretical references—a small impressionistic detail, but it did stick out). Readers who have followed the writings closely will also find a lot that has appeared in essays already and might expect the whole to have cohered into more than the sum of the parts, though the parts do hang together well, and it is useful to have the material together in one volume.

If there is a criticism to be made of this book, it is the ease with which its author slides everything into questions of written textuality, reading and language. Some of the discussion of language, in fact, seems to be at a tangent to the real issue of the book, and too much of it still circles around the particular problematic of using the language of the coloniser. (Is the messy site of resistance of the same kind for speaker and writer, for Anglophone and Bangla or Swahili or Lakota speaker?; indeed, is language much of an issue at all if you are a bomb thrower?) The bulk of examples and case studies are literary, and, although it is appropriate to the writer's disciplinary background, the claims being made are wider ones. Does the conceptual play around ideas of boundary and horizon, quite possible in the social spaces of many of the writers cited, have the same validity to the Palestinian family whose home is being cut off from their school or olive orchard by a ten-foot concrete wall? Certainly control of representation both validates the operation to the Israeli state and questions it in international courts, but it is doubtful how much that family can interpolate into the process or whether they would be much interested in the proposition "Rather than rejecting boundaries, perceiving their provisionality may be the key to a more subtle dismantling" (181). The longer literary view has its place, but it is a particular and limited one. To the extent that the book recognises this, the thesis is useful and cogent.

To do Ashcroft's ideas justice, as I'm sure the guerrillas of FRETILIN and the fighters for Al Qua'eda would acknowledge, at least half the battle is capturing the means of representing your cause, even (and perhaps especially) if those means are largely in the hands of a global capitalism supporting your enemies. (In keeping with Ashcroft's argument, the world could grant East Timor its liberation

because it could be seen as a small-scale tactical move by "freedom fighters" to gain a state that could be contained within the norms of world systems. A transnational jihad, however, is more of a threat as a potential all-out opposition to the world system and will have much more trouble getting support from states, the UN and business. The scandal of course is that the world system has produced a massive underclass of ignorant and disaffected, and an amoral weapons industry from which jihadis will garner support. And they will do so via satellite TV and mobile phones and control of access to simple-minded and warped interpretations of only a few texts.) That said, the swallowing of everything into a theory of textual practice fails to sufficiently acknowledge at times the fact that without material resources, or the consent of significant power groups, no revolution can succeed. People power worked in the Philippines because there was a system that gave it space and a military sufficiently alienated from the ruling clique to tolerate it; people power in Tienanmen was crushed, international media coverage notwithstanding.

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