

Editorial

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Working with the archives of the North American frontier, non-Indigenous historian Richard White noted in 1997: ‘A large chunk of our early documents ... are conversations between people who do not completely understand each other. We are connoisseurs of misreadings’ (93). White’s couching remains provocative for literary scholars and writers working in settler cultures—what does it mean to be skilled at misreading? What misreadings does a culture rely on, perpetuate? Is this a way to describe the mechanisms of denial at work in settler overwriting, re-interpreting and rhetoricising of Indigenous points of view and testimony, in so far as they are acknowledged in settler culture? Who is the ‘we’ here, more precisely; who is collected in White’s use of ‘our’?

The 2016 annual conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL), held at University of New South Wales in Canberra, split into two effective streams: the first reflected the determining interests of two powerful Indigenous keynote speakers; the second followed more explicitly the interests articulated in the call for papers, for a conference titled Capital-Empire-Print-Dissent, with a focus on urban space and literary occupation. This collection of articles developed from the conference echoes that division but coheres in a concern to link ‘empire’ and ‘dissent’ as words through which to examine the public work of Australian literature. The careful thought each paper brings to the question of reading itself, including various forms of acute or generic misreading, reflects more broadly on the role of literary scholarship in our contemporary world.

Multi-award-winning novelist and essayist Melissa Lucashenko gave ASAL’s annual Barry Andrews address. Her moving essay in this issue honours the association with an extended Aboriginal literary analysis of iconic works by David Malouf and Tim Winton, drawing on Lucashenko’s wide understanding of indigenous knowledges as a Goorie woman of Bundjalung and European heritage. Her most minimal point is to insist on the continuing presence of Indigenous Australians in and on their own country, still fighting the ‘dying race’ trope, while the implications of her argument are grand and far reaching – she is speaking to a reading and writing nation about cultural sovereignty. A skilled and experienced Aboriginal reader of settler Australian literature, Lucashenko exposes some canonical examples of ‘misreading’ and calls for a new model from non-Indigenous Australia, of deeper familiarity and more profound respect, more direct knowledge and much greater, even immediate, action.

Chadwick Allen was overdue to have been invited to speak to ASAL, as the author of 2012’s *Transindigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* and a prominent scholar with Chickasaw heritage who has had a notable interest in Australian and New Zealand literature: his over-subscribed postgraduate workshop on comparative indigenous frames at the conference testified to this. A comparative frame also structures his essay’s address to Kath Walker’s (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) iconic collection *We Are Going*, the 1964 publication date of which is shared by the first book of poems written by a Maori author in Aotearoa New Zealand, *No Ordinary Sun* by Hone Tuwhare, and the first book of poems written by a contemporary Native American author in the United States, *Raising the Moon Vines: Original Haiku in English* by Gerald Vizenor: a highly revealing collocation, as Allen elaborates. As did all three

reminds us. I again acknowledge and pay my respects to the Ngambri and Ngunnawal peoples, on whose land we met for the conference and where this issue was prepared.

Thanks to Jayne Regan for her assistance in preparing this issue, to the library at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for help in sourcing the cover image, and to Marion Boyars Publishing for permission to reproduce Kath Walker's "Aboriginal Charter of Rights" (1964) to end Allen's essay.

WORKS CITED

White, Richard. 'Indian Peoples and the Natural World: Asking the Right Questions.' In *Rethinking American Indian History*, edited by Donald L. Fixico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.