

Introduction

ELLEN SMITH and JOSEPH CUMMINS

The first issue of *JASAL* for 2021 forges a number of valuable critical pathways into some of the under-researched spaces of the broad field of Australian literary studies. This issue also offers a strong collection of reviews of recently published essay collections, critical studies and poetry.

As co-editors both working without secure employment in universities and without any research support we would like to mark the occasion of this issue by noting the unsustainable reality that the appearance of this fine collection of critical writing obscures.

The issue opens with Kasia Kwapisz Williams and Mary Besemere's essay on the history of literature in Polish produced in Australia. As Michael Jacklin has argued, despite the 'transnational turn' in Australian literary studies, writing in Languages Other than English has received very little scholarly attention. These authors have answered Jacklin's challenge with an immensely useful, detailed and comprehensive report on the 'hidden history' of Polish language writing produced in Australia. The essay focuses on writing by authors who came to Australia in the two main waves of Polish immigration—in the decade after WWII and in the 1980s and 90s following General Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law. The authors track the shifts of theme, tone and identity in writings from across these two periods. Strikingly original, this essay will not only introduce readers to a rich tradition of writing in Australia that has received almost no scholarly attention, but it also offers a powerful challenge to the received boundaries of the field of Australian literary studies.

After the crucial critical work of uncovering writing on the margins, our next essay focuses on one of the best-known and most often examined literary authors working today, Christos Tsiolkas. Mark Azzopardi's essay begins with the observation that 'literary style' is the one thing Tsiolkas is deemed to lack by both literary critics and reviewers. Then, through a close formalist reading of *The Slap*, Azzopardi challenges this assessment in order to argue that Tsiolkas works, quite deliberately, with 'inarticulate style: a style that does not always use the right word at the right moment, that employs language for narrative utility rather than its own sake, and that sporadically departs from standard usage and correctness in ways that do not appear artistically motivated.' Azzopardi links this 'inarticulate style' to Tsiolkas as a writer of the body who wants to gesture at what is inexpressible about physical experience. The essay is unique for combining a reception history of one of Australia's most important contemporary novelists with traditional formalist analysis. This approach allows Azzopardi valuable insight into the terms of literary judgement in Australia: what critics and reviewers value in a writer like Christos Tsiolkas but also what they mischaracterise or simply miss.

Following Azzopardi's analysis of one of our leading contemporary novelists, we step back in time to a comparative exploration of the pre-WWII concerns of two names synonymous with that literary period—George Orwell and Kylie Tennant. Ella Mudie's essay creates a rich dialogue between Orwell and Tennant, two writers seldom considered together. Mudie traces their publishing histories, as well as the role of key figure Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club. Examining the way both writers explored issues of poverty through documentary realism, Mudie offers a critique of the 'participant observer' mode favoured by Orwell as

exemplified in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), and by Tennant in *Foveaux* (1939). Mudie argues that for both Orwell and Tennant, ‘in order to *know* the poverty of working-class life in any meaningful way, the writer of middle-class origins was obliged to overcome through experience the chasm of ignorance, bias and class prejudice that he or she inherits from birth.’ In placing Tennant into an international literary context, the essay offers a nuanced—and badly needed—portrait of the context and contradictions bound up in the work of both writers.

No less concerned with uncovering the unique contexts of a novelist’s work and desire, the final essay of this issue sees Cheryl Taylor dig deep into the archive to uncover the complex and diverse sources behind Thea Astley’s penultimate novel, *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* (1996). A fictionalised account of several events that occurred in the 1930s on or near Palm Island, Queensland (Doebin in the novel), *Multiple Effects* is an important contribution to and reflection of the debates that raged as part of the History Wars, and is a highlight in the *oeuvre* of one of Australia’s finest novelists. Reflecting on Astley’s creative process and her extensive use and transformation of a range of primary sources—including newspaper articles, autobiographies, and the oral histories of Indigenous survivors—Taylor argues that *Multiple Effects* ‘gives full *authority* to black memories as the basis for an unconditional endorsement of Aboriginal and Islander responses to oppression,’ but at the same time it ‘allots more *space* to nuanced portraits of Doebin’s white staff.’ As Taylor argues, *Multiple Effects* ultimately ‘maintains Astley’s broad pessimism about Australia’s ability to deal adequately with past and present injustices inflicted on its Indigenous peoples,’ but in mapping Astley’s use and transformation of historical sources the essay highlights the unique literary contribution to national reckoning performed by the novel.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *JASAL*.