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Reading and Writing Australian Literature: Introduction

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This issue of JASAL publishes essays first presented at ASAL2020 Virtual, an online conference that replaced a conference at James Cook University, Cairns, after COVID-19 restrictions necessitated a reimagining of the face-to-face program. At the time of writing this introduction, twelve months after ASAL2020, many of those who attended the conference are again in lockdown as new strains of COVID-19 test the capacities of health and civic authorities, and the patience of a population seeking to comprehend this ‘new normal.’ Many of those who attended ASAL2020 also logged on again in July 2021 to join the Australian Literary Studies Convention, hosted by Victoria University, confirming the value of virtual communion to the development of the work we do as literary scholars and the spirit in which we do that work.

Gathering these essays for the ASAL2020 conference issue is further evidence of this spirit as much fine work in our field is being done under precarious working conditions. I wish to acknowledge, in particular, the editorial work of Dr Ellen Smith and Dr Joseph Cummins, who have been editing JASAL without secure employment, but doing so with a degree of

professionalism and grace that is a credit to them and a gift to all those who have benefitted from their editorial guidance, including me.

This issue opens with revised and expanded versions of the Dorothy Green Lecture, delivered in 2020 by Professor Nicole Moore, and the ECR Keynote, delivered by Dr Kate Noske. Nicole Moore reflects on the challenges of writing a biography of Dorothy Hewett in the years after Hewett's daughters, Kate Lilley and Rosanna Lilley, revealed their parents' complicity in their sexual abuse as teenagers in the 1970s. Through a sensitive reading of Hewett's poetry alongside the poetry and prose of Hewett's daughters, Moore asserts a freedom to speak for these texts in the spirit of the #MeToo movement, marking a significant moment in the re-evaluation of literary feminism in Australia. In her paper on the work of Randolph Stow, Kate Noske draws on archival evidence to investigate how Stow's literary and literal mapping of the Forrest River Mission can be read against the representations of space in Stow's *To the Islands*. Engaging with these acts of mapping, Noske draws attention to the author's own consciousness of his colonial subjectivity.

Following these keynote presentations, the next essay in the issue is the winner of the A. D. Hope Award for best postgraduate paper delivered at the conference. Annelise Roberts, the winner of the award for 2020, examines the impact of British nuclear testing on the lives and cultures of central desert Aboriginal peoples through the work of Jessie Lennon's *I'm the One that Know this Country!* Roberts argues that Jessie Lennon's book unsettles state-derived narratives that have silenced the experience of the Anangu people, and presents this subversion to foreground the ongoing impact of the colonial enterprise on Aboriginal territories. The A. D. Hope judges also commended Karl Ricker's paper on Mathew Condon's *The Trout Opera*. Ricker investigates the trope of genealogy in Condon's work, revealing the persistence of white patriarchal myths-of-origin in Australian fiction. In Condon's work, Ricker argues, 'genealogy continues to function as a quasi-biological metanarrative that naturalises white heteropatriarchal orders of descent for a story of national becoming.'

Following these A. D. Hope papers, Nataša Kampmark looks at Andrew McGahan's last novel, *The Rich Man's House*, investigating McGahan's enduring interest in the opposition between nature and man-made constructions, particularly as these tensions play out within the conventions of the epic genre. Continuing the discussion of representations of nature, Rachel Fetherston draws on ecocriticism to investigate the ways in which human violence and the destruction of native habitats reflect the relationship between humans and the natural world. By pursuing this question through an analysis of contemporary crime fiction, Fetherston breaks new ground, demonstrating the value of genre fiction in discussions of the impact of climate change on humans and the natural world.

With a concern for the relationship between humans and the environment in which they live, Elizabeth Smyth examines the representation of farms and farming in the fiction of the tropical north, deploying the Georgic mode to interrogate the imaginary of fiction devoted to the cane fields of North Queensland, paying particular attention to John Naish's *The Cruel Fields*. Also concerned with agricultural practices, Priyanka Shivadas adopts a trans-Indigenous approach to investigate the intersections between Indigenous literature in Australia and India. Comparing Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* with Naryan's *Kocharethi*, Shivadas argues that the texts are grounded in descriptions of Indigenous farming practice and technologies that challenge colonial narratives that depict such practices as non-productive.

Bringing the issue back to urban settings, Jane Scerri looks into the representation of single motherhood in Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* and *Other People's Children*, especially the ways in which the characters in these works of fiction navigate the private and political expectations of the role while also expressing maternal and erotic desire. And, returning to questions of biographical practice, Chrystopher Spicer reflects on the challenges of writing a new biography of Louis Becke that both acknowledges and deploys the nineteenth century author's own constructions of self in fiction and non-fiction.

In an issue drawn from a conference devoted to the intersections of reading and writing Australian literature, Penny Holliday's interview with Roanna Gonsalves provides a superlative view of the author's writing process in the production of *The Permanent Resident*. Conducted with students of creative writing, literary studies and education, the interview presents a useful resource for the study of Gonsalves's work, but also guidance for students in creative writing.