

Undulating Separate / Locality and Nation in the Poetries of John Anderson and Lisa Bellear

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There has been an enormous investment in American poetics of various sorts that has detracted attention to what the construction of a local poetics is all about.
(Harrison n.p.)

Bbrrr can you feel change
(Bellear, *Dreaming in Urban Areas* 10)

Change

While writing this I moved out of the Brunswick area of Melbourne's inner north. The suburb is captured in Cassie Lewis's poem, 'A Dole Diary':

Summer in Brunswick in 1993: five dollar stores,
the undulating, separate concrete lawns, Turkish bread.
A migratory sense of urgency. (13)

Lewis's description remains familiar; its affect is climatic as well as visual. But her 'sense of urgency' is not mine. In 2016 the Greens enjoyed a ten percent swing in the seat of Wills, but in 1993 in Brunswick the political changes were differently coloured. Since its boundaries were drawn in 1949, Wills has been held almost consistently by Labor. Bob Hawke represented the seat for twelve years, eight of them as Prime Minister, until he retired from Parliament in 1992. For a brief hiatus, its representation defaulted to Independent Phil Cleary, coinciding with Paul Keating's ascent to Prime Minister. This ended in 1996 when John Howard rose to the federal leadership, and Wills retreated to Labor.

Lewis's poem shunts us out of the Hawke era, and into the bravado of Keating's term as Prime Minister. As Troy Bramston writes, 'By the end of 1992, Keating had asked Australians to think about their history and their long-term future more than any other prime minister had. He was giving voice to a new nationalism for Australia at home and abroad.' Politically speaking, this national 'reorientation' away from supposed cultural ties to Europe was partly reliant upon a strengthened relationship with North America as well as Asia (437); but the concomitant change of cultural direction was highlighted in 1997 by Martin Harrison, whose remark opens this essay. For some, however, Labor's 1993 election victory declared 'the unity and constitutional stability of the country . . . now under threat' (David Kemp, qtd in Brett 5). One way in which that sense of 'threat' was demonstrated, was through public resistance to the Mabo decision and the ensuing *Native Title Act 1993*, and to the ideas of constructive empathy put forward in Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern Speech:

The starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.
It begins, I think, with that act of recognition.
Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.
 We brought the diseases. The alcohol.
 We committed the murders.
 We took the children from their mothers.
 We practised discrimination and exclusion.
 It was our ignorance and our prejudice.
 And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. (Keating n.p.)

A ‘new nationalism’ was being activated in the culture: what Anne Brewster terms a ‘new political imaginary’ that, ‘positions indigenous and non-indigenous people in a space of co-existence and co-habitation, where hierarchy is replaced with a sense of the coevalness of contemporary indigenous and non-indigenous modernisms’ (‘Brokering Cross-racial Feminism’ 218). A significant example of this is John Anderson’s long poem, *the forest set out like the night*. It was published in 1995, the year before Keating’s defeat as Prime Minister, and like Lewis’s poem the book is set in Melbourne’s inner north. Ella O’Keefe suggests that Anderson’s text desires ‘the possibility of a bi-cultural mapping,’ a poetic vision that seems to explore the new political imaginary (n.p.).

It was the threat posed by this cultural shift that John Howard was able to exploit at the national level in 1996, when he launched a federal leadership campaign that claimed to speak ‘For All of Us’ (Bramston 513). I wasn’t quite old enough to vote, but was aware of Howard’s victorious campaign that ‘promised a change in the national mood from the divisiveness and aggression’ associated with Keating’s leadership and, perhaps more broadly, with a post-Vietnam, post-Land Rights Australia. Again, the national mood was demonstrated through race relations. Judith Brett explains Howard’s nationalism:

From this perspective, there are only individual Australians, some of whom happen to be Aboriginal, and many of the most difficult political problems about relations between Aboriginal and settler Australians simply disappear. (28–29)

Between the terms of Keating and Howard there emerged a constant public discourse about cultural identity. Alongside Anderson’s long poem, Lisa Bellear’s collection of poems, *Dreaming in Urban Areas* stands out as a voice of its moment. Published the year of Howard’s election win and also partly written from the seat of Wills, Bellear’s urgent lyric seems to writhe against the white construct of the page. Anne Brewster comments on this dynamic as a, ‘process of denaturalising or defamiliarising whiteness,’ an effect that begs comparison with Anderson’s postcolonial outlook (‘Fractured conversations’ n.p.).

Anderson and Bellear moved to Melbourne from vastly different childhoods in regional Victoria. Anderson’s book came out shortly before his death, while Bellear would pass away a decade later; both poets died in their forties. They both studied at the University of Melbourne, and were deeply interested in the relationship between visual expression and poetry. These are inviting biographical coincidences, but they also posit the limitations that a comparative discussion of the poets’ work must admit—and, ideally, treat as a constructive tension. Anticipating Harrison’s attention to a local poetics, in 1993 Philip Mead argued that: ‘Discussion of poetry’s relative cultural significance can and should be localised; however much we might want to follow the overseas debates, national and specific cultural orientations are at least half the story here’ (3). My argument implies that these collections are historical artefacts, but I am more compelled by how they try to act upon local and national culture through language. In light of growing commentary on, and contribution to decolonised poetics, that tension between the two

books takes on a new, timely significance. More than ever before, the Australian public is conscious and expressive of the fact that its nationhood is troubled, and that consensus on national identity is confected. Like a suburb you used to live in that enters the stuff of your imagination, the events of Anderson and Bellear's political and cultural moment are woven into our own, and their responses to it suggest poetic legacies worth examining. In this way, their work participates in something broader—a sense of urgency that blows through the streets and parks and trees of our neighbourhood.

Place

The Merri Creek cuts through the northern suburbs of Melbourne; part of an exposed plain ringed by water courses that lower me to the city. Southward are the staggering Dights Falls, not so much awesome in scale as unexpectedly powerful, cleanly surging the Merri into the Yarra River. Upstream, the Creek's weedy banks climb through suburban backblocks, remnant grasslands. It's a hybrid ecology—native duckings and fat carp, bluestone masonry tumbled into the water, a drain as tall as a teenager. At the busy Blyth Street bridge that connects Brunswick and Northcote, bellbirds displace the air between the two banks, as carrybags weft among reeds.

For Anderson, to dream in this hybrid space is to find a mythos for the modern Australian settler. O'Keefe notes that the title of *the forest set out like the night* can be read two ways. Firstly, 'the book can be thought of as the document of someone who has "set out" into the countryside'; an act of seeking (n.p.). The serial form of Anderson's long poem completes this concept. In its eponymous first part, Anderson moves from 'the dream' of the Merri Creek, only to circle back to its setting. The poem's cyclic structure is reiterated in its second part, 'love, the cartographer's way,' which repeats 'the dream' passage, seeking to reinterpret its imaginary journey through a new image—a group of tortoises on a rock in the Merri, at noon. Through its fixed yet fragmentary constellations of imagery, the poem uses observation of the Merri's ecology as the ground for knowing other places, including the Grampians-Gariwerd: 'It is in such places that one might expect to find / clues to the continent . . . a laboratory of Australia's essential forms' (43–44). Michael Farrell calls this, 'a Merri geopoetics' (n.p.). As an act of knowing as well as seeking, the poem's essential forms are extensions of the local; and so the poem sets out to make an ambivalent song of oneself, of origins.

The poem makes a 'bi-cultural' claim to a tradition of verbal mapping, in which the text is an empowerment of its speaker to knowledge, and a reinforcement of its locality, both materially and spiritually. Most fundamentally, the Aboriginal song cycle is a key formal tradition from which Anderson draws. Is this 'borrowing' knowing or naive? At points the poem explicitly echoes the repeated refrain structure of central Australian and Top End song cycles found in the translations of T.G.H. Strehlow and the Berndts, and which Anderson loved (Black Pepper Publishing n.p.):

The Merri gathered all that palava in the first place from up North, Mt Fraser, and
chucked it against the sandstone hills, Kew. Chucked it there. Chucked it right
across the Yarra.

So the Yarra collected itself, grew and grew into a great lake and laid down the
flats of Ivanhoe and Heidelberg.
Laid them down.
Laid down those flats.

Bayrayrung the Yarra thought and thought. Thought out how to cut around the lava tongue, through the softer sandstone, making the Yarra cliffs.

Making those cliffs
Making them nice

The Merri and Yarra
Together they made this place. (Anderson 5)

It alludes to a history of cultural appropriation in Australian settler poetry such as elements of the Jindyworobak movement and Les Murray's 'Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle.' I agree with O'Keefe that 'Anderson does not necessarily escape these questions of speaking and authority or voicing the other either in his work' (n.p.). At other times, his searching for a language of animism pushes Anderson into twee metaphor, recalling John Shaw Neilson's lesser moments: 'some gums forsook the role of hero, empire, for / that of the inner way . . . The red flowering gum. / A villager sedentary in its habits' (Anderson 31). I can hear Anderson searching for a novel form of expression to match his purposes but falling back upon colonial traditions.

While the poem 'sets out' in a narrative sense, however, this journey also yields images of how its essential forms are 'set out' or arranged. This meaning is inextricable from the first interpretation of the book's title. Anderson's understanding of geology and topography is not only communicated through the structure of his poem—the fractured litany, the iterative motif—but also via his return to location in the body, particularly dreaming but also optics and the perceptual apparatus. This conceptual aspect of Anderson's poetics invites comparisons with the poetry of Martin Harrison himself. Anderson sharpens rapid, momentary observation into metaphysical hypothesis:

the three lizards of the dream represent the image of the tree within the earth, the tree itself and a greater tree of stars

The lizards point to the inspiration of all forms in heaven

The tortoise show their realization on earth

The lizards represent the movement from stones to tortoise to leaves

A continuation of the same form into space along a smooth connecting thread (80)

The body in Anderson's poem moves laterally across the earth, almost sucking in what it perceives; at other times, influenced heavily by Jennifer Rankin's and Grace Perry's primitivist refrains and totemic treatment of imagery, Anderson's speaker drifts aurally over patterns and topographies, as 'the dreamer looks down from a starry vantage' (82) to see 'tethered domes' (87). Like Rankin and Perry, what Anderson sees from that optics is a linear network of comparison—'diverse' not singular (101).

'The forest' is an essential form of the poem, which guides us to understand how the forest's arrangement is linked to that of the night sky—a connection that reveals a cosmic narrative of local ecology. Most obviously, Anderson includes drawn constellation-like images on the

book's title page and within the text, and mentions in a foreword his influential 'father's [interest] in trees and stars' (vii). His way of 'setting out' is a map, inherited. For Anderson 'the dream' refers to a set of personal symbols or totems that recur as motifs in his poetic map; called 'dreamlines' by Gary Catalano (n.p.). These motifs— rocks, turtles, leaves, stars, forests—are used as touchstones for Anderson's metaphysical interpretations of his locality. Black ducks also hold personal significance and are associated with the Merri Creek. (Interestingly, Lisa Bellear once referred to herself as a 'black poetical duck' ['A Matter of Poetry' 49]. In the context of the poets' comparison, I think of the symbolism of the duck moving amphibiously between elements, that is, cultural histories and traditions, as well as across country and littoral borders.) Alongside Anderson's aerial drawings of tree crowns/constellations, he includes drawings of turtles, lizards and leaf shapes, stylised in the manner of Aboriginal symbolic and abstracted representations of Country.

The bi-cultural influences and vision of *the forest* reflect the poem's wider cultural moment, in which 'hierarchy is replaced with a sense of the coevalness of contemporary indigenous and non-indigenous modernisms.' Anderson's non-Indigenous modernism claims identity in a deeply localised way, one that nativises the settler. In doing so, it creates an elegy, realising that at the moment in which settler culture achieves some self-awareness about its place in the local ecology, that ecology is being destroyed by the very same culture. Anderson idealises ducks in a dream because they 'were in possession of their dreaming / their dreaming sustained the world.' This is a condition of 'harmony,' according to Anderson, 'inner stillness' that makes the world continuous with itself (18). What he is really talking about is Australia's own cultural 'inner stillness.'

Farrell has discussed the poetics of mourning in Anderson's poem. If, as he points out, Anderson believes that 'Knowledge is reposed in the land,' then the poem figures industrialised agriculture as the ultimate impoverishment of tradition and culture (Farrell n.p.). In Anderson's Blakean vision, destruction of habitat is comparable to forgetting a dream. The loss of this level of knowledge is enabled by machines that separate the body from the earth, or parts of the earth from others. Fences and lots, farming vehicles and aeroplanes, are all enemy or 'hell-like contraption[s]' to the 'still' voice that Anderson is trying to forge in the poem (53). He sees modern habitat destruction on a continuum with colonial dispossession. This is equally a problem for Indigenous and settler cultures 'on the brink of losing an earth dreaming' (16).

Originating in the constituency of Bob Hawke and especially arriving at the peak of Keating's term as Prime Minister, it seems to me that the poem's vision is energised and shaped by the attitude of Keating's Redfern Speech. It attempts to record the poet's own local knowledge in a form that elevates its status. Its flaw lies in the clumsiness of its 'setting out' for a native voice. And yet, as it unfolds, the poem assumes a self-aware performance of creating an authentic narrative of location. This dimension enters the text at the end of the poem's first part, which draws 'the dream' back into the embodied voice. Undercutting its ego whilst asserting its poetic right: 'he, claims he can, / singing / sings for all of us' (Anderson 70). This note of doubt returns in the epilogue to the book's second part, 'love, the cartographer's way,' in which Anderson admits that his pleasure in mapping 'could have begun anywhere,' including Europe where 'my language comes from.' The explanatory register of the epilogue deflates the heightened tone and language of the song cycle:

If in the pages I have written I seemed to suggest that the mystery of the elm was vanquished by the mystery of the eucalypt I was caught in my rhetoric. It was

economical to do so, to make of myself a creature swayed by the eucalypt by a partisan and superior humour. (101)

In the book's final part, 'the logs like silver reliquaries, like bones long persisting in the grass,' Anderson adopts the second person and a new, more essayistic set of prose fragments. 'You' are implicated in your place and time. The title of this part points to Anderson's cognisance of the forest as a real site of unmarked martyrdom. So 'long persisting,' it seems the bones must be Aboriginal—the warriors of frontier war, or of deaths longer past and bodies properly integrated into Country. Here, Anderson is both undoing the localised coherence of the mythology created in his poem, and also questioning his ability to create such coherence from a settler's voice. O'Keefe has also noticed this tension in the poem, particularly between its formal identification of organisms and its lyric naming of them. As she argues:

Anderson, unlike the Jindyworobaks, does not have a nationalist agenda in mind, he is not staking a claim of ownership on the territory of his poem. He is also aware of his status as a European and the problems this poses for attempts at fashioning an 'Australian' literature. In referring to both European and Aboriginal traditions he is perhaps gesturing towards the possibility of a kind of bi-cultural mapping of the Australian landscape, whilst also indicating the complexities of such a proposition. It is for me, in the work, a question left open, the beginning of 'something different.' (n.p.)

The coincidence of Anderson's lines—'he, claims he can, / singing / sings for all of us'—with John Howard's 1996 campaign slogan, 'For All of Us'—draws attention to Anderson's ironic complication of his own romantic vision. As the grammar of these lines breaks down, Anderson's poem understands the importance of empathy, and the uselessness and destructiveness of assuming a collective settler identity.

Time

While thinking over the work of Anderson and Bellel, I took some long summer walks around the Merri Creek; noticing the stark contrast between the exposed, molten bitumen of roads and glaringly white pavements, and the deep shade of magnolias in bloom, the blue umbrella light of a jacaranda, the unctuous green scent of native herbs in the sun.

Unlike the northern suburbs of Melbourne, urban areas are able to ignore the possibility of their own fringes and what 'dreams' come from them; they are able to establish their own cultural surface and limits, and in that they are perhaps the most deeply colonial space. Anderson must have felt this, too: Kris Hemensley reflects that, 'Through the years John often spoke as if hamstrung between witness and activism' (n.p.). Anderson's sense of urgency about impending ecological crisis reflected its growth as the primary political issue of his and our own times. Yet Anderson's access to conserved ecologies was, in contrast to Lisa Bellel's experience, a colonial privilege. Their contrasting rural childhoods are a meet place to mark the distinction between the origins of these books.

By friends' accounts, Anderson as a child enjoyed access to the place of his birth and of his family's property at Kyabram (Catalano n.p.). As an adult living in Northcote, he was at liberty to adopt the Merri Creek, by choice, as another place of origin and mythopoeisis. In the third and final part of *the forest*, Anderson makes a moving account of Aboriginal children's paintings—likely children of the Stolen Generation (109–10). As Farrell notes, Anderson 'is very

careful here, not wanting to take over this local pain himself' (n.p.). The local pain was Belleair's. A Stolen Child, Belleair grew up in the Western District of Victoria, dislocated far from her Country and sexually abused by her adoptive settler father. While Anderson's poem yearns for 'a time when each creature, if not scientifically known, was fondly known as part of the bib and bub, the closer social and anecdotal river' (116), Belleair stated at the publication of *Dreaming in Urban Areas*: 'I want to leave this country. I'm on the home run now. Soon I will get away' (qtd in Demsey 21).

In Belleair's poems, urban areas lend a necessarily superficial identity. A great example of this is her neologism, 'reebans,' combining Reeboks and RayBans, which she 'love[s] wearing.' The poem in which it appears, 'Urbanised Reebocks' expresses the trauma that her outfit barely covers up. In her 'reebocks / of sadness' and 'loneliness / behind broken reebans' Belleair seeks a reality and history that represent a different, stolen dreaming (*Dreaming* 15). As does Anderson, Belleair emblematises that reality in the eucalypts of Melbourne. In 'Beautiful Yuroke River Red Gum' she documents the river red gums of the Melbourne region, which once 'rustled' in the presence of dancing Wurundjeri, Bunnerong, Wauthuring. The red gum is the 'Yarra Yarra tribe's blood' and—like blackberries from Aboriginal women's tears in Anderson's poem, which Farrell has discussed at length—it morphs into a new form, 'the river's rich red clay.' These forms are 'the survivors' of colonisation, interrupting the urban space (Belleair, *Dreaming* 28).

As Lyn McCredden points out, Belleair's poetry is of 'urgency and justice' in a way that does not represent a tension between 'witness and activism.' The urgency of her work comes more explicitly through register, than consistent subject matter (x). Like many of her antecedents, including her Noonuccal ancestor Oodgeroo, Belleair's poetics is driven by the necessity of presenting witnessing *as* activism. One mode of this combination is what Estelle Castro highlights as the 'memorial' quality in Belleair's poems. In 'Beautiful Yuroke River Red Gum' Belleair uses the poem as a site of public memory, a linguistic and imaginary marker of 'forgotten war' (See Reynolds, *Forgotten War*). Thus, Castro writes, Belleair 'plants the seed of a more meaningful present to lead onto the future' (101). Cultural and ecological destruction and loss can be allayed by the signposting of absent or unwritten history, and in this way Belleair's voice illuminates the activist ambition in Anderson's poem.

While the identity of Anderson's and Belleair's poetic voices are different, both are seeking a poetics that melds 'individual and communal pain' (McCredden x). Their poetries absorb the influences of their political moment, and release these voices from conservative representations of nationhood. Belleair tells us in the opening poem of *Dreaming* that, 'This is about me / my life, my grief my / need to maintain / the capacity to love' ('Grief' 3); yet she frequently speaks from a place beyond the first person or even the collective pronoun. 'Historical Journals,' for example, implicitly speaks back to historian Keith Windschuttle. The poem anticipates the era's so-called history wars, reflecting the onset of a nationalist discourse in which the full extent of colonisation was to 'simply disappear' from the historical vision of the prevailing Liberalism. This debate, Belleair writes, was to 'historicise / constructs of deception' such that deception, theft and massacre were to be rendered 'neutral / safe' in language as well as account (*Dreaming* 9). Howard's slogan, 'For All of Us,' clearly asserts this illusion of a mainstream consensus on the past. The impact of this discourse on historical discussion has been ongoing; as Henry Reynolds wrote in 2006, questions about frontier wars were 'often discussed during the 1990s, the decade of the Reconciliation movement, but they seem to have disappeared from public discourse' (*The Other Side* 10–11).

If, as O’Keefe suggests, Anderson’s poem dreams of ‘something different’ in the cultural expression of settler colonial Australia, Belleair’s poetry insists upon a movement from the fringes into the centre. To put it another way: Anderson’s poetics can be compared with the paintings of John Wolseley (upset pastoral), whereas Belleair’s voice may be aligned with Aboriginal coevals such as Destiny Deacon (whose work gave Belleair the title for her collection) and Tracey Moffatt. The latter group’s direct interventions into narrative-making, image-making and language-making are radical. In ‘Historical Journals,’ for instance, Belleair intervenes in a list of ‘safe’ historical words, inserting a mischievous glitch that undoes the accepted narrative: ‘settler • explorer • coloniser • drovers • dyke’; and reminds the reader that the ‘frameworks’ of colonial history as told by the victors are being surveyed and shaken by Indigenous agents (*Dreaming* 9). In the context of the collection, this poem is an example of how Belleair works with sequencing so that one poem speaks to the next: the following poem, ‘To the Palawa,’ takes up the scrutiny of colonial history-writing and extends a searching, haunting question from Palawa country in Tasmania, across the Bass Strait: ‘Mt Bulla / Mt Bogong / Mt Kosciusko / Mt Hotham / and Mt Donna Buang / *What happened* / to our Koori Brothers/Sisters / whose land is / Snow Country’ (*Dreaming* 10)? In this short poem Belleair repeats the italicised question, as though asking Windschuttle and Howard to explain the missing parts of their apparently responsible accounts.

For Belleair, the local cannot be separated from the colonial-national. In ‘Woman of the Dreaming,’ she laments, ‘The gum trees are whispering / The Yarra Yarra is polluted / Koalas on Philip Island are / So stressed that they too will / Be another victim of the / Invasion’ (*Dreaming* 11). But perhaps, where Anderson represents a material continuum of ecologies and elements, Belleair is more concerned with how the present cannot be extricated from the past; after all, ‘the Invasion’ is an ongoing reality, not limited to a colonial event. Belleair’s work dwells in this reality in order to make a ‘more meaningful present’; this is its activism. Indeed, most of the poems in *Dreaming* are dated with the month and year (presumably of their composition), which adds not so much a sense of confessional diaristic account, but rather, one of journalism or documentation—the poet as a record-keeper, writing into history. (Lionel Fogarty uses the same technique to similar effect.) The final poem of the collection’s first half, ‘A Peaceable Existence’ signals change. ‘A Peaceable Existence’ sees over the urgent and present issues of social inequality, to a time beyond. In this poem, the ‘dream’ is inventive—it portends a place not yet seen, but imagined, ‘above the clouds’ (*Dreaming* 36). Read against the backdrop of the contemporaneous Wik judgement, Belleair’s poem might take its hopeful note from the possibility that justice can run perpendicular to the state. Reynolds writes of the ‘hostile reaction’ to Wik, much of it dog-whistled by Howard from 1996 onwards. ‘Underlying much of the opposition to the recognition of Aboriginal property rights,’ Reynolds explains, ‘there appeared to be a powerful, if rarely expressed, feeling that the Aborigines didn’t deserve such recognition and that the change of status brought about by Mabo and Wik threatened long accustomed patterns of hierarchy and subordination’ (*Why Weren’t We Told?* 223–24).

The emotive, melancholy poems of Part I, ‘Come Dancin,’ are followed by Part II, ‘White Man Approval,’ which sets out the cultural and political limits to Indigenous equality and identity. With the national political picture in mind, the structure of Belleair’s book reflects Keating’s description of Howard’s retrograde vision for Australian identity and history: ‘Back down the time tunnel to the future’ (Parliament of Australia 373). In fact, the poems in the second half of the book often predate the first half by some five years. There we are returned to the moment in Australian culture in which Indigenous identity begins to become a consumable commodity, rather than a legitimate cultural expression. The poems ‘Souled Out’ and ‘Artist Unknown’ are two of the strongest in the collection. In both poems Aboriginal identity is shown through the

white gaze as having receded into a lost past ‘all those / Dreamtimes ago’ (‘Souled Out,’ *Dreaming* 43). The book’s second half arises out of a confused moment in settler culture that simultaneously lauds, empowers and loudly oppresses the Indigenous subject. As Bellel writes in ‘Bureaucrats’ Battleground’: ‘Yes you can! / No you can’t!’ (*Dreaming* 44); and, in ‘White Man Approval’: ‘Your hair’s too curly / Your nose doesn’t go splat / Freckles, blue green eyes / Urbanised’ (*Dreaming* 46). ‘Breathalyser’ narrates a chilling scenario that alludes to Indigenous deaths in custody, and which now also invokes reports from juvenile detention centres. Indeed, Bellel writes of stolen children as a present policy; and this voice feels as contemporary to a reader who has witnessed the NT Intervention and Don Dale scandal as it does to Bellel’s own Stolen Generation: ‘Black child dies alone / And still / We are removed’ (*Dreaming* 57).

By moving backward in time, *Dreaming* remains vigilantly challenging towards a self-congratulatory postcolonial Australia. As a recent essay in *Overland* reminds us:

The Keating years, with their pivot to Asia and emphasis on multiculturalism, had established a rhetorical consensus about what could and could not be said about nation and race. The Howard government, with Hanson as its attack dog, turned this consensus on its head. We had entered a new era.’ (Kenway 10)

The book retains some of the hope of Keating’s term, just as Bellel herself expressed an interest in joining politics, inspired by Susan Ryan (‘Keep Fighting’ 60). In the book’s first half, Bellel writes Keating an epistolary poem dated June 1993. ‘Mr Prime Minister (of Australia)’ is written from Varuna, in which Bellel (signed ‘Noonuccal’) suggests that the Republican movement will be made less ‘immature’ if built upon treaty. In this poem, however, Bellel suggests that Mabo is the tip of that iceberg but not the main issue: ‘actually Mr Keating, you will need the spirit and energy from a 100,000 year history’ (*Dreaming* 27).

It is important to note the intersectional identity politics encompassed by Bellel’s voice, and which Aidee Watego aligns with the cultural and philosophical legacy of the eighties:

a watershed era for many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, a period also when Indigenous women’s authorship was called upon to negotiate the rarely-placid waters of being accountable to an Indigenous community at the height of political activism for Land Rights and social justice, while being accounted for by a white mainstream, for whom the properties and boundaries of language (as figured in literary expression and critique) had been in varying stages of redefinition (collapse and/or recuperation) since the 1970s. (142)

Watego invokes the textural, daily level of social change that ripples from the 1970s through to the 1990s. ‘Virtually every community in Australia had been touched by these waves of social change that had been sweeping through, in particular the high-density population areas,’ he writes. The result was that, ‘new striking images became etched into the Australian and the Indigenous psyche’ (146). Rising together, a family of ducks cuts up the shallow waters of the Merri and sprints over the city, their forms refracted in windshields and Ray-Bans.

Voice

Rather than collective representation, Bellel expresses ‘collective responsibility.’ Livio Dobrez asserts that here ‘black writing surpasses white gestural politics (walks across the bridge,

torch-lighting, etc) and white gestural art (the notion of an aesthetic artefact). It has a real political job to do and it does it' (276). I find this reductive pressure too great for either Indigenous or settler writing to bear, or bear out. In structure and language Belleair's collection sustains itself as an aesthetic as well as a political act; while Anderson's long poem offers a more nuanced attempt to reconcile lyric inheritance with cultural dialogue.

Ultimately, then, it is voice—its identity, its control and its tone—that differentiates their representations of time and place. In *the forest set out like the night* Anderson utters shreds (remnants) of the romantic, first-person voice whilst grasping at the anonymity (dream) of third-person mythic expression. If both these modes are in danger of reinscribing 'mythic whiteness,' it is worth placing special emphasis upon the poem's final parts (Brewster, 'Brokering Cross-racial Feminism' 216). Anderson begins the book in mid-flight, but closes it with an elegy to the 1920s as the last moment that Australian settler culture held itself open to environmental influence:

. . . its diversity of responses to the bush together with its common assumption of that birthright.

The writing's robustness echoing the surviving richness and immediacy of the forest

When people's description of their community as 'the bush' still implied a large measure of affection for it, even while most of them were clearing it in obedience to what were understood as the stronger claims of progress . . . and the sense of bush community hadn't been swept away by the more recent economic rationalism of agri business,

the new ravening economics of forestry practice,

the promotion, by the forces responsible, of a polarising city country dialectic. (114–15).

Anderson's elegy should not be confused with the nostalgia that underpinned Howard's myth of a collective history. Anderson's sense of loss finds more sympathy in Keating's criticism of Australia's descent into cultural mediocrity, in which the environment is controlled and pushed to the periphery of urbanised settlement: 'That was the golden age when vast numbers of Australians never got a look in; when women did not get a look in and had no equal rights and no equal pay; when migrants were factory fodder; when Aborigines were excluded from the system' (Parliament of Australia 373). By ultimately puncturing the authority of his own voice—the project of drawing upon poetic traditions that speak from communal and metamorphic positions—Anderson withdraws the cohesive ambition of the poem.

Brett points out that Howard's slogan, 'For All of Us,' 'evokes a stronger sense of collective identity, and it collapses the distance between government and governed' (31). By contrast, Anderson's complication of his authorial voice creates a distance between his intentions, the text, and the reader. It opens gaps, or rather, points to the ones that are already there. This can be considered with regard to the collective 'we' used by Keating in his Redfern Speech, because there the collective pronoun represents something different than the 'us' of Australian Liberalism. In Noel Pearson's words, '[Keating] had of course not claimed the individual responsibility

of Australians for the actions of the past, but rather a collective owning up to the truth of that past and to its legacies in the present' (n.p.).

In Bellel's 'Hanover Street, Brunswick 3056,' a modern Aboriginal warrior walks home, wondering if she can be seen, heard or remembered by a new settler generation. Meanwhile, a white poet attempts to sing up the nearby creek, wondering how to create a legitimate voice for a colonial landscape. Anderson's poem must wrestle with the implications of vocal representation; whereas Bellel, through a collective experience of Indigenous inequality, is able to clearly assert 'me' as well as to refer to specific issues of social justice and intersectional politics. In 'Women's Liberation,' for example, she takes on the voice of a 'gubba middle class' woman who is both a figure of satire as well as pathos (*Dreaming* 7). Bellel's voice may seem more self-forgiving, more gentle, than Anderson's probing tone; on the other hand, she shows herself to be vulnerable to inconsistency and humour all the way through her collection. In 'Writer's Block' there is the 'ideologically unsound / coffee' (an observation that is still of crucial concern in Melbourne's inner north) and the dream of another climate in order to write (*Dreaming* 5). This confessional vulnerability also makes her collection more hopeful, at times, because the 'dream' persists in her poems; even when it ebbs or burns, it is followed by the will to realise something other than 'I-don't-want-it-like-it-is' ('The Dream,' *Dreaming* 26).

Anderson and Bellel meet at the construction of a local poetics. Staring down the time tunnel, they are neither "comfortable and relaxed about the present" nor "comfortable and relaxed about the future" (Howard n.p.). Whereas Anderson comes to his elegy at the end of his poem, for Bellel, the 'grief' has already taken place at the opening of her book—it is the title of the first poem. This draws their voices together as witnesses of change, but also agents of it. Moving around the same areas yet carrying such different and equally personal motivations to culture and poetry, Anderson's and Bellel's commitments within a post-terra nullius and post-Keating Australia are in some ways irreconcilable. When listened to together, however, they create a braided expression of place and time in which difference is illuminating and progressive. The tension and friction between their voices is not just critically productive; it is politically constructive. After all, as Philip Mead notes: 'Poetry proceeds according to its own traditions and extensions; it has its own relations to language, history and politics, and it develops by orthogenesis, rather than by any even-fronted evolution' (3).

Ultimately, Anderson's and Bellel's poems are sites of social change; they exceed the banality of political leadership. As readers and writers we inherit them, and they lead us into the present.

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