Editors' Note

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"There is no word or image that is not haunted by history"
Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light* (xvi).

This special issue of *JASAL*, entitled *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors*, stages captromancy of sorts. Divinations by mirrors may not be as fashionable today as they were in centuries past, but resisting Jorge Borges' assessment of the mirror in an age of scientific rationalism as simply a "mute surface" (121), this volume of essays excavates such phantasms of the imagination as it looks to new directions in Australian literary, screen and cultural studies. At the same time, the collection might be thought of as a mirrored funhouse. It is a multiplicity of gazes and fragments insisting on the relativity of points of view and promising in good humour and earnest seriousness to decentre any presumption that the present is a privileged position from which to comment authoritatively on the haunted future and the haunting past.

Of course, mirrors and "literature", or more accurately, their shared vocabularies, have a vexed, complicated history. It is true that Johannes Gutenberg was skilled in metallurgy, producing mirrors for European pilgrims before turning his prodigious talents to the development of the printing press and thus revolutionising the word and its distribution. Yet, the idea that literature, or any cultural text for that matter, "reflects"—mirror-like—the world in which it is made and read has been routinely debunked, with the constructedness of written texts consistently underlined. This neat (if suggestive) dismissal of the metaphoric link between mirrors and texts overlooks, however, the ways in which mirrors, like texts, have been seen not only as magical and manipulative, presenting viewers with shadows and dreams, but also highly mediated reversals of the ordinary.

The essays in this volume jointly negotiate these fantastical and material interpretations of the Australian mirror-text: they recognise the capacities of

literature and other cultural forms both to witness and to envision. And it is these qualities that take on a sense of urgency for many contributing authors as they single out the creative and substantial demands the past makes on the present, particularly the legacies of settler colonialism that continue to ghost in various ways contemporary Australian life.

The volume opens with Lyn McCredden's piece on the future of "Aust. Lit." This article sets the scene for the collection, petitioning those interested in the past and future of Australian literary studies to reflect critically on the frameworks currently available by which to read Australian literature. It enquires into the ways in which these critical supports significantly determine how and why Australian literature is interpreted. And it offers alternatives, with a specific interest in the political, ethical and aesthetic charge of the sacred for keeping alive past stories and histories, particularly those tales of settler colonialism in Australia, and for shaping possible postcolonial futures of "Australia". For McCredden, this "Australia" is not necessarily the parochial concept or space founded on nostalgia, essentialism and exclusion, but rather recognises the ongoing importance of place, of ideas of "home", for thinking about self and society and the manner in which these identity-vectors are played out in the cultural realm.

Bernadette Brennan's article on Brian Castro's novel, *The Garden Book*, usefully complicates the idea of "the nation-home" that McCredden discusses by emphasising the excursive, cosmopolitan features of Castro's writing, which detours through diverse literary histories. More than identifying this aesthetic interest, though, the piece skilfully opens itself and Castro's book to what Bruce Robbins and Jacques Derrida have termed "cosmo*politics*" (*Cosmopolitics* 9, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* 5), the ethics of hospitality, by reading Castro's work as a subtle but forceful critique of the pervasive "politics of fear" (Lawrence) currently characterising dominant political and social attitudes towards those who seek asylum and refuge in Australia.

Maria Takolander's piece, "Coetzee's Haunting of Australian Literature", shares Brennan's interest in the capacity of literature to move its audience to ethical contemplation, if not deed. Taking its cue from the all-too-familiar idea that popular culture has a dulling effect on its consumers, Takolander sets out to turn the trope, as it were, by focusing instead on how literature, and in particular the recent works by J.M. Coetzee, might come to haunt its readers in ways that compel them to rethink the politics of writing and living in a postcolonial world.

Catherine Padmore's article on Christos Tsiolkas' controversial novel, *Dead Europe*, extends Takolander's observations on the haunting capacity of literature. Narratively, Padmore's piece oscillates between personal reflection and critical interpretation, blurring the boundaries between the two in a way commended by McCredden in her article. And for Padmore, this formal response to the text is necessary because *Dead Europe* is a compulsive read in the sense that it proves irresistible in its dizzying, narcotic detail, and urges its readers to action, to question both the novel itself and the European history it imagines, perhaps problematically.

The following two essays, one by Margaret Merrilees on Michael Meehan's novel, *The Salt of Broken Tears*, and one by Susan K. Martin on Joseph Furphy's turn of the century novel, *Such is Life*, return us from Europe to identifiable Australian contexts, but ask us to view them anew. Merrilees leads the reader through the "meandering, spiralling journey" of Meehan's text, highlighting the novel's quest motif and allegorical function in order to demonstrate the narrative's emphasis on personal redemption. In doing so Merrilees foregrounds the lingering presence in Meehan's novel of some of the nation's most deep-seated spectres in the form of resistant landscape, troubled masculinity, and shifting rural mythology. Martin's essay shares Merrilees' interest in landscape: for Martin, lost children haunt the Australian landscape depicted in Furphy's novel and the narrative enacts the circuitous route of the (oftentimes fruitless) searches their absences set in motion. Moreover, Martin makes perspicacious claims about these lost children, reading Furphy's text through the pressing concerns of the indigenous Stolen Generations that defy any effort to bracket off the past from the present.

David Crouch's article, "National Hauntings: The Architecture of Australian Ghost Stories", similarly insists that the past is not easily separable from the present. Crouch couples Hume Nisbet's late nineteenth-century short story, "The Haunted Station", with Tim Winton's late twentieth-century novel, *Cloudstreet*. And he argues that what these texts have in common, apart from their explicit representations of haunted architectural spaces, is their conviction that in Australia, and Australian literary texts, "the presence of ghosts can be read as traces of historical traumas, fears which are often exposed in expressions of apprehensive (un)settlement". Crouch forwards the idea that these texts, separated by a century, nevertheless offer uncannily resonant takes on those spooky, gothic spectres that speak directly to antipodean colonial and postcolonial concerns.

The next two essays in the volume continue the interests of the preceding pieces with their turn to poetry. In the spirit of Brennan's piece, which

situates Castro's work within wide-reaching literary traditions, Lachlan Brown reads Kevin Hart's poetry through biblical and philosophical prisms. Taking "shadows" as his metaphoric cue, Brown explores the manner in which Hart's poetry invokes questions relating to the nature of reality and the manifestations of absence that are paradoxically represented in "the darkness, void or shadow". Sue King-Smith's article on Judith Wright convincingly demonstrates the affective, aesthetic and political force of colonial history on personal memory and poetic production. Through a biographical lens, King-Smith makes the case that Wright's work is shadowed by the poet's awareness of her complicity, unintentional and otherwise, in colonial projects. She further suggests that the poetry itself is recognition of, and a site for grappling with, what this collusion might mean, of how it might, or might not, be confronted and compensated.

David Mesher's article on John Scott's novel, *Warra Warra*, is also motivated by an awareness of colonialism's legacies in Australia, and extends the reach of the genres discussed in the volume to include music. Mesher reads the novel as a contemporary ghost story, one which raises the spectres that adhere to both the colonisers and the colonised, and explores the ways in which these categories can transpose over time. Mobilising some deft inter-textuality Mesher sources the novel's concerns to Laurie Duggan's *Ghost Nation*, supplemented by traces of 1960s recordings by British musical-comedy duo Michael Flanders and Donald Swann.

The concluding two essays of this volume are similarly committed to conjoining written texts with other cultural forms, in these instances Australian screen cultures and the archive. The two articles are also linked by their shared focus on the constitution of racial identity and whiteness. Benjamin Miller looks at the issue of racial representation and stereotyping through the theatrical device of "blackface". By briefly tracing the incomplete history of blackface in Australia, Miller contextualises one of its most (in)famous manifestations in Charles Chauvel's film *Jedda*. Miller's article asks us to recognise the various strategies of power and privilege that are inherent in the use of blackface, and therefore to read the practice as a reflection of whiteness which inflicts additional violence on indigenous identity.

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's article, "Some Whites Are Whiter than Others", examines the troubled (and troubling) relationship between Xavier Herbert and his friend Dr Cecil Cook, one-time Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Probyn-Rapsey finds in the unsupported rumours of Cook's albinism a window through which to view the deeply conflicted

attitude held by both men towards matters of race and "colour". The article amply demonstrates the manner in which the politics of indigineity are mirrored in personal relationships.

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