

Introduction: The Colonies

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Before there was ‘Australia and New Zealand’ there were the colonies: New South Wales (1788); Van Diemen’s Land (1832); South Australia (1836); New Zealand (1840); Western Australia (1849); Victoria (1851); and Queensland (1859). In 2013 what we have is a series of competing nationalisms operating across both national terrains, including internally (whose is the indigenous nation of Aotearoa?); nonetheless countless filiations continue to span the Tasman, connecting people, language, politics, sentiment, ecology, history, art and literature. The first ASAL conference to be held outside Australia, in Wellington in July 2012, considered the long and tangled histories of our two literatures. The call for papers took its starting point from Grace Karskens’s history of Sydney, *The Colony*, praised for its outstanding sense of place, and contributors were invited to disaggregate contemporary national binaries in ways that would allow us to see the many continuities as well as the divergences with which we generate our sense of place. The conference asked contributors to revisit the literary history of our two nations and uncover the ways in which the ‘Tasman World,’ as James Belich terms it, continues into the twenty-first century. Contributors were also asked to consider if the old postcolonial verities and paradigms become less important as critical writing shifts focus and gear—to eco-criticism, transnationalism, or indeed, to invoke the title of the 2011 ASAL Conference, to ‘field’, curriculum and emotion. There was a great range of papers and those selected for publication in this issue of *JASAL* reflect the diverse and imaginative ways in which the history and literatures of our two countries might be reconsidered in terms of their competing nationalisms, as well as of the cross currents, shared interests and people which connect them.

Keynote Essays

Three keynote essays are included here: the 2012 Barry Andrews Address ‘The Village’ presented by Martin Edmond; the 2012 Dorothy Green Lecture ‘Archipelagic space and the uncertain future of national literatures’ by Elizabeth McMahon; and Grace Karsken’s ‘The Colony.’ All three of these keynote contributors have taken up the question of dialogue and hiatus between Australia and New Zealand quite directly, suggesting something of the possibilities opened up by a move to think of alternatives to an imagined clear division between the two landmasses, nationally conceived. ‘The Village’ goes to the heart of the complicated trans-Tasman nexus by unfolding the many threads spreading out from a little-known Australian sojourn of New Zealand’s major twentieth-century artist, Colin McCahon. In 1951 McCahon visited Australia for the first time and took lessons from Mary Cockburn Mercer, a Melbourne artist who had known Chagall and Picasso. McCahon said she taught him how to be a painter, and Edmond remarks that it seems typical of our antipodean relationships that this important history of cross fertilisation has not been told. McCahon’s trip to Melbourne was funded by Charles Brasch, founder and editor of *Landfall*, a New Zealand literary equivalent of *Meanjin*, and his visit was facilitated by Brasch’s cousin Lina Bryans. Both Brasch and his cousins were descended from Hallenstein brothers and this leads Edmond to an analysis of what he calls ‘the ‘Village’—a ‘cosmopolitan community, with roots in old Europe, and...the Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora as well, which, transplanted to the Antipodes, included as a matter of course

both New Zealand and Australia in its ambit.’ It is Edmond’s casual ‘matter of course’ that makes the cogent point. *Of course* our countries, literatures, histories, artistic networks, family and social filiations are repeatedly intersected and crosscut by cosmopolitan and other communities. Edmond’s paper, full of rich research detail, starts with the trans-Tasman divagations of a particular family but expands this into a broad view of our two countries historically as a ‘shared enterprise,’ with the Tasman not a sea but a lake. He illustrates his argument with examples of socialists, writers, artists, soldiers, politicians, writers, filmmakers and teachers who have crisscrossed the ditch, showing that this is not a new phenomenon, nor a one-way move. Our antipodean cosmopolitanism is, to some extent, mutually generated by both nations.

Elizabeth McMahon draws on her expansive work on islands and archipelagos to apply models of spatial relations and cartography to the ‘uncertain future of national literatures,’ arguing that both islands and national literatures are similarly productive sites of thoughtful labour about imagining a better society. Traversing a wide theoretical and conceptual field, McMahon links island utopias to islands as figures for states of being (such as Janet Frame’s *To the Is-Land*) as well as figures for nations and scholarly disciplines. The colony itself, she argues ‘is a chronotope of the pre-modern, of emergence.’ More broadly, the ‘constellation of concerns—origins, literatures, colonies, nations and islands’ that configure archipelagic space also underpin, she argues, accounts of disciplinary futures in literary studies and cultural nationalisms. Driving to the conceptual heart of the conference theme, McMahon asks how the intellectual project of literary studies—itsself an ‘island’ project which is always remaking the conundrums and connections of nation—can be sustained while maintaining self-critique and not being captured by the institutions which enable it. As she notes, the discipline’s capacity for self-critique and change must be supported by its practitioners, whose diverse habitations of the Island Continent and the Shaky Isles provide for an archipelagic exchange.

Grace Karskens’ essay, based on her research into the early colonies that came to make up Australia and New Zealand, works to reconstruct the particularity of the settlement in terms of the lives lived there, reframing the convict experience away from the familiar paradigms of ‘slavery, torture, tyranny and depravity’ which have dominated ‘the popular imagination of convict Australia,’ in order to consider how the early colonies were ‘actually made as human places.’ Karskens focuses primarily on the colonial experience in Australia, in particular Sydney, but draws connections with the experience in New Zealand as well. Her essays aims to replace the ‘gothic tales of horror’ so familiar to readers of colonial history with an account based on ‘memoirs and reminiscences’ which ‘revolved fundamentally around places.’ This shift in source and perspective challenges ‘the imagined shift from “gaol” to “free” colony [which] was the ordering principle of many a book, article and report, despite the fact that such a shift never occurred,’ and proposes that ‘the early convict period ought to be symbolised by the hoe, the cradle, or the colonially-built ship’ rather than the ball and chain. More particularly, Karskens argues for an understanding of the early colonies as sites of ‘pre-industrial’ culture, driven by a distinctive ‘unruly energy ... not silent subservience, endless toil and brutal punishments,’ and marked by ‘localised contacts, negotiation, familiarity, friendships, shared enjoyment’ between convicts and Aboriginal people rather than ‘instant transformations of black into white space.’

Modernity

Three essays address the problematics of modernity in their engagement with the rubric of Australia-New Zealand cultural traffic. Fiona Morrison takes a trans-Tasman pair of iconic modernist writers, Christina Stead and Katherine Mansfield, to examine how Stead's iconic novel of Sydney *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and Mansfield's story 'Woman at the Store' both reconfigure colonial modernity, by meshing a pungent vernacular idiom with 'registers of the strange, the alienated and sometimes the marvellous.' Both writers, Morrison argues, were engaged in the representation of their colonialities and connected vernacular speech to 'the surreal moment,' refusing to be fodder for the European appetite for quasi-primitivism, and both offer readers original and forward-looking experiments in modernism from the outskirts of empire. Lucy Treep's essay links Australian and New Zealand literary history through the figure of Eve Langley, who while resident in Auckland described her domestic spaces metonymically, and as a form of self-portrait. Treep compares Langley's archive of 'unfinished novels on brown paper and blurred jotting on Weeties boxes' to the 'unofficial constructions' of 'outsider architecture,' *ad hoc* shelters that are, in their turn, like the spaces Langley describes herself or her characters feeling at home in, such as the 'gaunt milking shed' of *The Pea Pickers*. Treep proposes that these casual and spare structures are metonyms for the place Langley occupies in the literary history of both countries, occupying a found shelter outside the mainstream. The focus on the centrality of film for Patrick White in the essay by Elizabeth Webby and Margaret Harris contributes to our understanding of White as a modernist figure and moreover as a figure complexly engaged with his own contemporary culture. Webby and Harris draw extensively on the Patrick White archive in the National Library of Australia to set his familiarity and engagement with film alongside his interest and participation in theatre. The essay includes a consideration of White's unpublished screenplay 'Monkey Puzzle,' and draws attention firstly to 'his knowledge of as well as his dislike of the prevailing approach and effects found in many of the most popular Australian films made during his lifetime,' as well as to 'the strong visual imagination and love of satire and parody.'

Aboriginal literature and ethnography

The complex topologies of Australian literature can be traced through three essays in this issue directly addressing Aboriginal literature. Michael Farrell's reading of Bill Neidje's *Story about Feeling* proposes that it constitutes 'a theory of affect in Australian poetry: specifically a theory which participates most evidently in a paradigm of land writing.' Farrell unpacks the ethic of sentimentality at its heart through the poetic response to beauty and affect alongside the striking specificity of place at work in Neidje's writing. Thus 'feeling' for Neidje takes on added breadth 'as knowledge,' a knowledge which is 'not purely visible (legible), but also involves listening and physical feeling' and which is embedded in the complex relationality of the pronoun 'e' 'which at times is the pronoun of the story itself.' Jane Gleeson-White begins her eco-critical reading of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* at the point of differentiation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal accounts of Country, proposing that the reconsideration of 'the relation of human and non-human' offered by eco-poetics '[contests] our prevailing economic models and their role in the ecological crisis.' For Gleeson-White, 'these novels not only contest the logic of the settler's capitalistic enterprise, which abstracts its endeavour from place, ... but through this they challenge the idea of a ... settler Australian literature which apprehends the land as other.' Richard Martin's essay,

‘The Politics of the Voice: Ethnographic fetishism and Australian literary studies,’ starts from the premise not so much of the land but rather of what constitutes Aboriginal self-expression in the wake of decades of colonial and, more particularly, anthropological appropriation. Beginning with ‘the importance attached to the idea of ‘voice’ in discussions of the politics of representing Aboriginality in Australia,’ the essay examines two texts widely separated in time, produced under the rubric of collaboration between anthropologists and Aboriginal people: Bill Harney and A. P. Elkin’s mid-twentieth century *Songs of the Songmen* and John Bradley’s recent collaboration with Yanyuwa Families *Singing Saltwater Country: Journey to the Songlines of Carpentaria*. The shared properties as well as the distinctions between these two works form the basis for Martin’s interrogation of the nature and practice of collaboration, based in William Pietz’s account of border-fetishism—‘a concept-thing ... that arises in the gap that comes about at the moment of contact between two cultures/languages,’ which he uses to ‘[problematize] the praxis of making,’ to ‘call attention to the fetish powers of ethnography.’

Place

A focus on the specifics of colonial place connects the next four essays by Jessica White, Martin Staniforth, Catherine Noske and Joseph Cummins. Jessica White’s essay frames the history of Georgiana Molloy, botanist, colonial wife and mother, through Elizabeth Webby’s essay ‘The Grave in the Bush’ and through her own experience of the grave of her young brother. She reads the rectangle of enclosed ground in which a body lies through its cultural significance and through Molloy’s diaries and letters, as in Webby’s words, a desire to conquer the land and a fear of being conquered by it. Molloy’s growing and professional attention to Australian flora is registered by her changing descriptions of her first baby’s grave and the later grave of her son, showing the development of her botanic knowledge from ‘prolonged and intimate contact with their local ecosystems.’ This work was conducted in all British colonies, including New Zealand and was one of preeminent discursive and territorial acts of possession that colonialism enabled. White’s inclusion of her own experience and the rich archival sources brings depth to her analysis of place. Martin Staniforth argues that Kate Grenville’s representation of the domestic in *The Secret River* and its sequel *Sarah Thornhill* undermines her intention to contribute to the process of reconciliation in Australia by writing these texts. Locating Grenville’s narratives in the context of Gillian Whitlock’s argument that the ‘carceral cell’ has been a defining characteristic of the national literature, Staniforth argues that the various dwellings built by the Thornhills express not only their alienation from the land they inhabit—their ‘self-created prison’—but are also metonyms for the silencing of stories that no one wants to hear, or tell again. Grenville’s focus on the domestic, especially the bark hut, helps to reinforce rather than undermine settler narratives by representing these structures as Australian buildings that belong to the land. In that way, he argues, they retreat from a legacy of violence and reinscribe narratives of white legitimacy.

Catherine Noske’s ficto-critical ‘In/On/Of – The Mixed Poetics of Australian Spaces; or how I Found the Cubby,’ (winner of the 2013 AD Hope Prize for best postgraduate paper presented at the annual ASAL conference), on the theorisation of Australian space as heterotopia—a space ‘which functions above and beyond the everyday, combining internal (emotional) and external (physical) constructions of space to create sites of importance to society’—draws together a discussion of the figuration of dwelling in fictional and theoretical writings about Australian place, with her own

memories of an iconic childhood cubby. Noske's meditation on the ways her perception of the landscape altered sharply according to different locations—from *in* or *on* the land to an apprehension of being *of* it—moves toward an understanding of how discontinuities persist across particular sites, and the ways that these heterotopic spaces 'can become strongly referential of postcolonial confusion.' Joseph Cummins takes up the relation to the land in two novels by Alex Miller, *Journey to the Stone Country* and *Landscape of Farewell*, through the rubric of sound, arguing that 'the complexity of thematic strata, issues of cultural difference, land rights, and historical trauma can be better understood through close attention to sound, a listening practice that reorients the landscapes of the novels.' Cummins makes use of Jean-Luc Nancy's theorisation of listening and sound, which, he argues 'reverberates within the complex relations between Indigenous and settler' staged in Miller's work.

Contemporary writing

Finally, this issue includes two essays addressing contemporary writing. Brigid Rooney examines the 'reinvention of suburbia' in the four Glenroy novels of Steven Carroll through a consideration of what she calls 'suburbia's fictional topography; that is, the ways in which novels may be simultaneously oriented towards ... the "real" and the "imagined."' Drawing on the theorisation of the 'relation of fiction to terrain' pursued by J. Hillis-Miller's *Topographies*, Rooney's essay pays careful attention not only to Carroll's rich novels but to the question of Australian suburbia, which she notes is 'a topos ...[which] paradoxically folds within it extra-national or transnational perspectives.' Jaimee Edwards focuses on the representation of traumatic effects of the Vietnam War in two plays, *The Seed* by Australian Kate Mulvaney and *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* by New Zealander Helen Pearse-Otene. Edwards' readings are framed by trauma theory and object-relations theory, and in looking across the shared historical experience of the two countries their cultural differences are articulated in how the protagonists of these plays transmit affect and display 'radically different attachments to family legacy,' including the difference it makes to exist within the complex structures of whakapapa. Edwards' essay, as she says, endeavours to 'identify an alternative response to trauma,' and explores the desire for connections which persists in the condition of trauma experienced by war veterans and their descendants.

Collectively the essays in this issue of *JASAL* illustrate the proposition of the conference as a whole—that our two countries can be cross-cut in as many ways as there are differences and similarities, and together they constitute what historians have referred to as the 'Tasman World,' a world of sea and islands and peoples and expressive arts which speak to each other. Close critical attention to the places we inhabit, and the ways in which we imagine and think about them, produces a richly various but conjunctive geography.