

**Liang Zhongxian. *Between Margin and Center—Semiological Significance in Elizabeth Jolley's Fiction*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2009.**

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Professor Liang Zhongxiang's *Between Margin and Center* is the first semiological study of Jolley's work anywhere and the first monograph on her and her fiction to be published in China. It was undertaken from what might seem an unlikely source. Liang, an established Australianist, is Vice President of Mudanjiang University in north-eastern China, 200 kilometres north-east of Vladivostok which stands at the end of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. She is about as far removed from Jolley's suburban Perth as could be imagined, although it should be said that she was a Visiting Scholar in Asian Studies at La Trobe University in 2004.

Nevertheless, she has produced a capable and at times enlightening survey of Jolley's major fiction, at least some of the value of which resides in the different socio-cultural perspective it presents. Developed from Liang's PhD thesis, her intention is to use 'the semiological method to analyze Jolley's fiction,' declaring at the outset that her conclusion will focus on Jolley's intention 'to break through the boundary of universal cultural ideology, which the Western world holds traditionally, and to endow with it with a more diversified cultural color in favor of the marginalized people' (9). In other words, the task she sets herself is an ambitious one of presenting a view of Jolley's fiction that breaks it free of the localised and suburban readings that have often been imposed on it.

In her attempt to do so, Professor Liang leaves no theoretical (or indeed ideological) stone unturned. As she announces in her Introduction, 'Jolley's themes are often interwoven with the feminist and postmodernist concerns: the Other, otherness, the self, identities, land, exile, migration, estrangement, alienation, loneliness, margin, displacement, nationalism, internationalism, and feminism' (7). Her thesis is that the joints of that long chain are 'marginalism and displacement' (7). Liang locates the source of Jolley's preoccupation with the marginalisation in her difficult childhood that left her suspended between the worlds of her aspirational atheistic Austrian mother and her pacifist-preacher-teacher father. It was always likely to be a volatile mix, but in the political maelstrom of mid-20th century Europe it left the young Jolley bereft of a secure identity.

Liang brings a different theoretical perspective to the fore in each chapter. There are several advantages to this approach in that, firstly, it introduces readers to critical perspectives they might not be well acquainted with; and, secondly, it effectively demonstrates how Jolley and her work can be scrutinised from various theoretical positions. This technique can be commended as one that other doctoral students might want to employ when doing author-focused research. If this approach could put at risk the unity of vision or argumentation, Liang nonetheless manages not to lose sight of her emphasis on marginalisation, and she returns consistently to her theme with the benefit that the reader can understand the extent to which this focus is enriched by both Jolley's fiction and the various theoretical positions. On the whole, the readings provided of Jolley's key texts are clear, focused and engaging, and both new and long-time readers of Jolley will be rewarded from reading the book. Liang's success can be measured by the extent to which she achieved her goal of broadening our

understanding of Jolley's work in a way that reveals her interest in marginalisation to be relevant, and indeed important, to a global audience.

A further virtue of *Between Margin and Center* is that it introduces a substantial Australian writer to a new audience—China—that is infinitely larger than her Australian one at a time when Jolley's prominence is in danger of fading. In that regard, we can see in retrospect how assiduous and successful Jolley was in promoting herself and her work and how her profile has suffered since her illness and death in 2007. Few authors have attended to their audiences as carefully as Jolley, spending a great amount of time speaking at conferences, visiting schools and corresponding with readers and fellow writers. It is the reality of modern Australian literary fiction, however, that publishers have little interest in maintaining back lists of the works of deceased authors who aren't available to assist in promotion: Jolley is one of the many who have all-too-quickly been consigned to the vagaries of school and university curricula to retain readership.

Professor Liang does Jolley, and indeed Australian literature more generally, a great service by taking her name and her fiction to places that were even beyond Jolley's self-promotional reach. With this in mind, it should be noted that Liang's written English is more than equal to the task, and the clarity and expression are only rarely inflected by her use of a second language.

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