

Editorial

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Working with the archives of the North American frontier, non-Indigenous historian Richard White noted in 1997: ‘A large chunk of our early documents ... are conversations between people who do not completely understand each other. We are connoisseurs of misreadings’ (93). White’s couching remains provocative for literary scholars and writers working in settler cultures—what does it mean to be skilled at misreading? What misreadings does a culture rely on, perpetuate? Is this a way to describe the mechanisms of denial at work in settler overwriting, re-interpreting and rhetoricising of Indigenous points of view and testimony, in so far as they are acknowledged in settler culture? Who is the ‘we’ here, more precisely; who is collected in White’s use of ‘our’?

The 2016 annual conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL), held at University of New South Wales in Canberra, split into two effective streams: the first reflected the determining interests of two powerful Indigenous keynote speakers; the second followed more explicitly the interests articulated in the call for papers, for a conference titled Capital-Empire-Print-Dissent, with a focus on urban space and literary occupation. This collection of articles developed from the conference echoes that division but coheres in a concern to link ‘empire’ and ‘dissent’ as words through which to examine the public work of Australian literature. The careful thought each paper brings to the question of reading itself, including various forms of acute or generic misreading, reflects more broadly on the role of literary scholarship in our contemporary world.

Multi-award-winning novelist and essayist Melissa Lucashenko gave ASAL’s annual Barry Andrews address. Her moving essay in this issue honours the association with an extended Aboriginal literary analysis of iconic works by David Malouf and Tim Winton, drawing on Lucashenko’s wide understanding of indigenous knowledges as a Goorie woman of Bundjalung and European heritage. Her most minimal point is to insist on the continuing presence of Indigenous Australians in and on their own country, still fighting the ‘dying race’ trope, while the implications of her argument are grand and far reaching – she is speaking to a reading and writing nation about cultural sovereignty. A skilled and experienced Aboriginal reader of settler Australian literature, Lucashenko exposes some canonical examples of ‘misreading’ and calls for a new model from non-Indigenous Australia, of deeper familiarity and more profound respect, more direct knowledge and much greater, even immediate, action.

Chadwick Allen was overdue to have been invited to speak to ASAL, as the author of 2012’s *Transindigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* and a prominent scholar with Chickasaw heritage who has had a notable interest in Australian and New Zealand literature: his over-subscribed postgraduate workshop on comparative indigenous frames at the conference testified to this. A comparative frame also structures his essay’s address to Kath Walker’s (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) iconic collection *We Are Going*, the 1964 publication date of which is shared by the first book of poems written by a Maori author in Aotearoa New Zealand, *No Ordinary Sun* by Hone Tuwhare, and the first book of poems written by a contemporary Native American author in the United States, *Raising the Moon Vines: Original Haiku in English* by Gerald Vizenor: a highly revealing collocation, as Allen elaborates. As did all three

keynotes, Allen's presentation had a compelling performative dimension, grounded in personal experience, which I hope is preserved in this essay.

The third of the keynotes, the 2016 ASAL Dorothy Green lecture, was given by Lyn McCredden, and is a generously direct address to key concerns of the discipline – authority, value and meaning-making. McCredden is concerned to pursue exactly what literary scholars mean by these concepts in the seeming wake of theory and identity politics, and as the institutional discourses of 'significance' and 'impact' gain more substantive power over the ability of the discipline to define its own aims. Invoking Rita Felski's diagnosis of a current 'legitimation crisis' in literary studies, McCredden cites Australian models for defending the humanities, voicing pointed concern about what has been lost or ceded in those that emphasise economic and instrumental measures.

The remaining essays form three sets of pairs. Jessica White and Jonathan Dunk are both engaged in rereading the mid-nineteenth-century colonial archive to amplify Aboriginal voices, and their essays expose some dramatic examples of deliberated misreadings, not mere misunderstandings, through which settler violence and racism have been removed from history. White unpicks a trail of active silencing of massacre memories in colonial documents from Wardandi Nyungar country; Dunk is seeking the voice of a young, heroic Wonnarua man ventriloquised in great measure out of his own story, while addressing the limitations of settler Australian literary and historical scholarship in such a search.

Two essays about the same novel then form a tightly dialogic pair, pursuing the conference's second thread—literary urbanism. Examining Eleanor Dark's *Waterway* from 1938, both interrogate the novel's construction of interwar colonial modernity in its dynamic, closely inhabited portrait of Sydney, drawing on the work of Jessica Berman. Meg Brayshaw argues that the novel 'destabilises the colonial-capitalist city as the spatial, temporal and organisational principle of Australian modernity' and replaces it with a model of 'ethical interconnection' realised in spatial metaphors. Melinda Cooper tracks *Waterway's* interest in the world beyond the harbour, in which modernist internationalism is mediated by a complex localism that is clear-eyed about its liminality—her conclusion resonates productively with Lucashenko's reading of Winton's investment in coastal settler identity.

The final two essays are about poetry. Michael Farrell brings a new lens to a set of poems about animals—birds and kangaroos, specifically—from across the Australian literary archive. He makes a case for considering the work such figures do in poetry as *work*, or figural labour, with affect as their product, drawing on the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, among others, and continuing his exploration of poetry's role in literary (un)settlement and the making of national sentiment. Ameer Chasib Furaih finishes the issue with a piece that refracts Allen's, in detailing the intersections and influences of African American civil rights poetry with Indigenous Australian activist poetry, particularly the work of Murri writer Lionel Fogarty. In detailing Fogarty's activism and participation in the international circulation of ideas of black liberation in the 1960s and 1970s, Furaih recounts his collaborations with Australian Black Panthers Denis Walker and Sam Watson, drawing a circle for readers back to Walker's mother, Oodgeroo or Kath Walker.

As this issue goes to press, Indigenous Australia is mourning the death of Denis Walker, farewelling him at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, which he did much to sustain over many years. As a key site of resistance and refusal in Canberra, the nation's capital and where the 2016 conference was held, the Embassy remains a counter space to the vision of white settler modernity that city embodies, as this issue's cover photograph, sourced by Furiah,

reminds us. I again acknowledge and pay my respects to the Ngambri and Ngunnawal peoples, on whose land we met for the conference and where this issue was prepared.

Thanks to Jayne Regan for her assistance in preparing this issue, to the library at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for help in sourcing the cover image, and to Marion Boyars Publishing for permission to reproduce Kath Walker's "Aboriginal Charter of Rights" (1964) to end Allen's essay.

WORKS CITED

White, Richard. 'Indian Peoples and the Natural World: Asking the Right Questions.' In *Rethinking American Indian History*, edited by Donald L. Fixico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.