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Introduction: Currents, Cross-Currents, Undercurrents

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Introduction: Currents, Cross-Currents, Undercurrents

The similarities in an issue such as this one are often purely serendipitous; *JASAL 10* brings together work submitted to a general, non-thematic issue and it should not surprise that the range of material is very diverse. Yet on occasion there are obvious points of contact between the various pieces and that is certainly the case here. The subtitle we have given to this brief Introduction seeks to capture some of the ways in which the essays interrelate, both complementing (and supplementing) each other and complicating particular readings. Essays included here range from critical examinations of well-known works, as is the case with Odette Kelada's reading of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, David Fonteyn's and Kerry Leves' respective engagement with Randolph Stow's work, and Michael Farrell's energetic take on A.B. Banjo Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda,' to Ian Herbertson's discussion of lesser known work such as Crienda Rohan's *The Delinquents* and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* and Paul Sharrad's comprehensive survey of Aust Lit.'s expansion into cultural and political spaces broadly defined as 'Asia'.

Both of the essays in this edition of *JASAL* on Randolph Stow arrived before his death; if there ever was a reason not to defer publishing one of them, his death confirmed the need to publish both in this Stow-rich issue. Both papers deal with cultural intersections, something that Stow as a kiap and anthropologist continued to explore throughout his distinguished literary career. The essays are very different from one another, and indeed a good illustration of how different methodologies can lead to interpretations of a novel that each essayist might find contestable. Such, though, is the poetry and literary ambitiousness of Stow's fiction that we hope readers will agree that works like *Tourmaline* and *To the Islands* will sustain readings that are radically different one from another. Kerry Leves looks to the trope of theatre, used by Stow himself in his metafictional writing, to explain the workings of his playful reflexivity, and finds his framing techniques even more telling when read in conjunction with his European intertexts, especially Baudelaire. David Fonteyn's highly original article on Stow revisits an old form, allegory, and shows how it can cast light on *Tourmaline*'s ecological metaphysics. This is an essay that mobilises not only theories of allegory and allegoresis, but also draws on post-colonial theory and Freya Mathew's philosophy of ecology, and it casts new light on Stow's arguably most poetic fiction.

The essays are neatly complemented by a small but richly evocative collection of photographs that detail Stow's visit to Australia in 1974 and his stay with his family at 'Sand Springs', as well as images associated with his other life, in the English village of Harwick, Essex. The photographs provide an apt portrait of Stow's complex personality split between places and times, and whose work was profoundly influenced by this flux. William Grono and Dennis Haskell wrote recently, on the occasion of Stow's death: 'Randolph Stow was a kind of Australian Camus: an existentialist who saw human life as fundamentally solitary. Landscape in his work—particularly in *To the Islands*, and less obviously in *The Merry-go-round in the Sea*—is never just landscape but a site for metaphysical exploration, a means of exploring the purpose of human existence.' ('Solitary writer Randolph Stow chose silence', *The Australian*, 1 June 2010). Part of Graeme Kinross-Smith's collection, now in the State Library of Victoria, the images attest to Stow's deep link with place but also to a clear enjoyment of his family. They show a man deeply imbricated in his family, in the day-to-day activities of living on the land, and at his typewriter, posing as the reflexive and self-conscious writer that he was. Kinross-Smith's evocative framing of him in this portrait in his sun-exposed and peeling window is its own eloquent tribute to a different art-form, that of photography.

Nathaniel O'Reilly takes up issues to do with Indigeneity and movement across and between cultures, and his essay focuses on urbanised landscapes, that may be thought of as retaining their Indigenous identity, in his analysis of a largely critically neglected and controversial novel by Melissa Lucashenko, *Steam Pigs*. The novel, in his treatment of it, deals with a highly volatile and sensitive issue: what sustains and nourishes Lucashenko's main character's acquisition of Aboriginal pride through a middle class education, and translation to the hot-bed of Aboriginal urban identity in Brisbane, West End?

Odette Kelada too concerns herself with understanding Kate Grenville's foray into the transcultural zone by examining *The Secret River's* attempt, in the interests of reconciliation, to set the record straight about nineteenth century Aboriginal massacres on the Hawkesbury, perpetrated by her antecedents. Using Toni Morrison's pivotal long essay, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) as her guide and the work of Maryrose Casey, she demonstrates the distinction between well-meaning declarative acts and performative ones. Moving between the expositional *Searching for the Secret River* and the novel, Kelada shows how Grenville's attempts to represent nineteenth-century language and sensibilities, despite her best intentions to create an ordinary 'Joe-blow' central character, can find it difficult to avoid orientalisng stereotypes of indigeneity, and moral ambiguities.

Working class youth subcultures, of the '50s and '60s, including bodgies and widgies, is Ian Herbertson's territory and his chosen texts are Ciena Rohan's *The Delinquents*, a rather neglected text, and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling*. These are accounts from the underground, and like Grenville's novel, they enact uncertainties, ambivalences about power and hopes of evading its effects.

Paul Sharrad has made a career studying and writing about Indian literature but also dealing the various currents and undercurrents in the relationship between Australia, and Australians, and India and its people. Sharrad's essay in this issue draws on this background to undertake a wide-ranging survey of the way 'Aust. Lit.' has developed in India and more broadly in South Asia, and with work produced by Australian writers about India and Asia. As the essay shows, India and Asia have come to mean very differently in the Australian imaginary in the last one hundred years, even if at times quite unsurprisingly confirming in the 21st century the same perceptions of the Other as observed in early 20th century. Central to his discussion are questions about 'what happens when [a] national literature is turned inside out and becomes transnational' (1), in an echo of an earlier essay by C.A. Cranston published in the Special issue of *JASAL* in 2009.

Michael Farrell reads A.B. Banjo Paterson's poem 'through the presence of the common and iconic object of the billycan' (1), in the process performing a provocative and stimulating argument that draws on psychoanalysis, semiotics and good old fashioned close textual analysis. In a densely allusive and frequently playful discussion, Farrell 'argue[s] for a poetics of the billy, that it be noticed, that its iconicity...be noticed' (13).

In the first of 7 reviews included in this issue of *JASAL*, Ken Gelder takes issue with the methodologies behind Peter Pierce's *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (2009), and proposes that it is haunted by an older way of 'doing' Australian literary studies, as it were. Gelder's views are bound to cause some polemic, and as editors we invite responses to be published in a later issue of the journal. Other works reviewed in this issue include Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden's *Intimate Horizons: The Post-Colonial Sacred in Australian Literature*; Annette Stewart's *Barbara Hanrahan: A Biography*; Gerry Turcotte's *Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian*

Fiction; Remembering Patrick White: Contemporary Critical Essays, edited by Elizabeth McMahon and Brigitta Olubas; and Fiona Capp's *My Blood's Country: a journey through the landscapes that inspired Judith Wright's poetry*. Thank you for the continued support of JASAL and we hope that you enjoy the issue.

Frances Devlin-Glass and Tony Simoes da Silva

Works Cited

Grono, William and Dennis Haskell. 'Solitary writer Randolph Stow chose silence'. *The Australian*, June 1 2010 (http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/solitary-writer-randolph-stow-chose-silence/story-e6frg8n6-1225873725761?from=public_rss).