JASAL 23:1 Introduction

Welcome to issue 1 of *JASAL* for 2023. While this is a "general" issue, as fate would have it our selections—articles and reviews—all intersect around the theme of revisioning: revisioning Australian poetry, theatre, fiction, as well as literary criticism. And with the inauguration of two new sections, showcasing creative writing and the teaching of Australian literature, we are also pleased to present a revisioning of *JASAL* itself.

Our first article, Trevor Donovan's "(Re)considering Australian Geography with First Nations Literature—Jeanine Leane's *Walk Back Over*," argues that Leane's poetry calls for a revisioning of Australian geography as much as Australian literature. *Walk Back Over*, by Wiradjuri poet and academic Leane, is a collection of poems that, in her own words, "explores the body where memories are stored as an archive; anchored and etched. Writing is an act of remembering a dismembered past." Donovan finds in Leane's work a challenge to the reader to "revision" the relationship between vision and visuality and the production/transmission of geographical knowledge. Donovan argues that reading Leane's work "requires the reader to look beyond the text, beyond colonial-settler geography in order to see another geography of Australia. . . . Through her poetry, Jeanine Leane brings into the light another geography and, therefore, another history of the land."

Mylène Charon's article "Decolonising Categories: Learning from 'Water' by Ellen van Neerven," resonates with Donovan's piece insofar as it reacts to the challenge of First Nations writing, aesthetics, and epistemologies to Eurocentric regimes of taste and knowledge. Charon offers a "decolonial" close reading of Yugambeh writer Ellen van Neerven's short story "Water" and considers how van Neerven's story provokes a revisioning of Eurocentric literary critical categories and modes. Far from simply asking what happens to First Nations works, and the worldviews embedded in them, when categories are imposed onto them, Charon explores the way van Neerven's story calls for a revisioning of these concepts in light of First Nations knowledges and experiences.

Viewing Australian literature through the prism of regionalism has been a long-established and venerable tradition within Australian literary studies, yet one that is often overlooked for the supposedly grander visions afforded from nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives. Yet the insights and vitality afforded by regionalist perspectives has been recently showcased at the 2023 annual conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, held jointly with the ASLEC-ANZ (Association for the Study of Literature, Environment and Culture, Australia and New Zealand). Held in Melbourne in early July, the Recentring the Region conference turned attention to "the region" in Australian literary studies and environmentally oriented critical and creative practice. All of the conference convenors are to be congratulated for hosting a wonderful event. And we are pleased to present here a transcript of a panel organised by two of this year's conference convenors, Brigid Magner and Emily Potter, for the 2021 Texts and Their Limits conference. In this panel discussion, Brigid Magner, Emily Potter, Tony Hughes-d'Aeth, and Jo Jones reflect on their experiences researching and writing regional literary history. Their discussion is intended to generate dialogue about how to *do* regional literary history and provokes thinking around the sub-field of Australian regional literary studies as a collaborative space of diverse practices, texts, sites, and communities.

As promised in our previous issue, we are pleased to welcome Dr Jessica White and Dr Claire Jones as sub-editors for new sections in the journal focusing on "Writing Australian

Literature" and "Teaching Australian Literature," respectively. For this issue, Jess has provided two new pieces of creative writing from Dr Catherine Noske and David Wright. In "Writing with the Australian Archive: Digital Posthuman Approaches to Australian Literature," Wright finds in the image of the camel an unexpected though "suitable emblem with which to navigate and push the limits of the Australian archive." Kate Noske's poem "Apeiron" considers the boundary-dissolving experiences of childbirth and child rearing, and of walking on unceded land: both experiences provoke reflections on sovereignty and identity. Kate's poem, among other things, is an explicit response to the call from First Nations voices to non-First Nations artists for greater self-awareness of their situatedness in time and place.

In "Parochial Canons: Teaching Australian Literature in Western Australia," Claire Jones and Trish Dowsett examine the way works of Australian literature are selected for study in secondary school English classrooms in Western Australia, and in so doing, provide intriguing insights on questions of taste and canonicity in Australian English classrooms. For Jones and Dowsett a parochial canon is one that prioritises "a regionally formed, locally focused selection of texts that is narrow in scope." Noting the popularity of the works of Tim Winton, Craig Silvey, and Jack Davis on Western Australian secondary school English reading lists, they observe that "even with extensive text lists and, in some cases, with virtually unlimited text choice, teachers select works with a distinct role or utility within the school system" and that this consequently "creates a narrowing effect on text choices." Such decisions relating to text choice are explained in ways that make sense for the purposes of the curriculum priorities, but they also point to a narrowing and potentially ossifying influence on text selection. Set alongside other studies of Australian literary curricula that have critiqued the influence of the British and North American canon in Australian literary education and argued for greater diversity in the range of texts and authors in English education, Jones and Dowsett raise new concerns about how Australian literature is taught in secondary schools.

Along with our article contributors, we have a swag of reviews of fascinating new works on Australian literary criticism. Stephen Carleton finds in Chris Mead's *Wondrous Strange: Seven Brief Thoughts on New Plays* (Currency Press) a series of stimulating essays that distil personal experience and professional wisdom garnered from a career in theatre production, dramaturgy, and festival direction. Jessica Gildersleeve reviews Melinda Cooper's Alvie Egan Award-winning *Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark's Interwar Fiction* (Sydney Studies in Australian Literature) as offering "a welcome and long overdue focus on one of Australia's most important writers of the twentieth century" that contributes to a small but growing body of book-length scholarship on Eleanor Dark. Cooper focuses on the way Dark "blended the radical experiments of literary modernism with the more accessible modes of popular fiction," resulting in a form that Cooper characterises as "middlebrow modernism." In Ann-Marie Priest's *My Tongue Is My Own: A Life of Gwen Harwood* (Black Inc.), the first major biography of one the most significant figures in modern Australian literature, and which has just won the National Biography Award, Nathan Hobby finds a work that will not only enrich our understanding of Harwood's poetry, but which also chronicles "a moving story of a significant life." Julieanne Lamond's *Lohrey* (MUP) mixes criticism with biography and promises to provoke a re-appraisal of a major figure in modern Australian writing. Joint winner of the 2023 Walter McRae Russell award for literary scholarship, *Lohrey* is a work that is at once scholarly and personal. Lamond is a dedicated, intelligent, and accessible guide to the works of Amanda Lohrey, and she succeeds in convincing her readers of the significance and power of her subject.

This month we also include two long review articles. Richard Fotheringham surveys two new major works of Australian theatre criticism: Julian Meyrick's *Australia in 50 Plays* (Currency), and Chris Hay and Stephen Carleton's *Contemporary Australian Playwriting: Re-visioning the Nation on the Mainstage* (Routledge). As one of our most respected theatre studies scholars, Fotheringham brings to his review of these works a formidable command of the field's histories and traditions, and an appreciation of the challenges of the future. While Meyrick's book looks back over more than a century of theatre-making in this country—from Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* and Louis Esson's *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* to Glace Chase's *Triple* X—Hay' and Carleton's work focuses on the period from 2006/7–2020. And while both works differ in breadth and approach, the power of Australian theatre to en-vision and re-vision the nation is at the heart of each. Engaging with the insights and claims of both books, Fotheringham's review opens up a broader discussion of the challenges facing "Australian" theatre, and theatre studies, now and into the future.

In Philip Mead's review of Linda Weste's *The Verse Novel: Australia & New Zealand* (Australian Scholarly Publishing), Mead finds a work that opens up more questions than it answers. The book comprises thirty-five interviews with Australian and New Zealand authors. Each interview addresses the same set questions, such as "What ideas or influences did you have in mind when creating this work?" And "What are your thoughts on the first novel as a form?" Missing from the list of questions are any that pertain to "national identity," suggesting that emphasis on the value of the form (or Australian literature, more generally) to considerations of national identity are not at the forefront of the interviewee's minds. Indeed, Mead observes that "[this] question about the tensions or contradictions at the heart of the verse novel is in fact the meta-subject of this volume." If there is anything peculiarly antipodean in these works of the verse novelists, then it perhaps lies in the "the local anti-generic establishment elements of the verse novel." Mead quotes Lorraine Marwood who states, "there is a freshness in the verse novel format . . . breathing space, anticipation, and using words to flesh out characters and emotions in a sparing way." And Brian Castro echoes the suspicions of "generic fixations" voiced by other interviewees. For Castro, the verse novel's great strength is that "it returns the reader to rhythms and presences, and to the archaeology of words. It slows down time through compression and storage. It brings back enrichment to a literature which seems to have been degraded by Story." For Castro, and other contributors to Weste's book, the verse novel is a vehicle for returning to and revisioning the ambitions of literature *per se*.

As always, we thank the careful efforts of our colleagues Cheryl Taylor and Lianda Burrows who oversee the book review editing.

As the Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, we pay our respects to Elizabeth Webby as we go live with this issue so close to her passing. For many and for a long time, the late Professor Webby led the field of Australian literary studies, and Liz set the tone for the AustLit community that lives on: a community of scholarly breadth, depth, kindness, and generosity. We are all in her debt.

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