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In 2015, Robyn Rowland published two collections of her poetry. At first glance, *Line of Drift* appears to be very different from *This Intimate War*, in which all of the poems cohere around the horrific Gallipoli/Çanakkale conflict of 1915. In keeping with its title, *Line of Drift* is a freer vessel which is not moored to a single cataclysmic event. However, upon close reading – and this collection repays attention – shared features emerge. Both collections bridge the northern and southern hemispheres, albeit each in its own way. In doing so, both address life, love, death and renewal; or, to put it differently, both explore humanity in its essence.

In *Line of Drift*, Rowland’s path through life gives the work its cohesion. However, in evoking memories of a lifetime balanced between two homes in two continents, the one in her birthplace, Australia, and the other in her ancestral Ireland, Rowland is concerned not with chronology but with fluidity. Although the collection is divided into four sections, these are not temporally, geographically or thematically disparate or exclusive. In this respect, their titles are apt: ‘Here and There’ (I); ‘Changing Tides’ (III); and ‘Along the Drift’ (IV). The title of the second section is rather different and is eponymous with that of its single constituent poem: ‘Unbroken Stone in a Stubborn Sea’. This ‘Epic of Inishbofin’ (49), synthesises many of the poetic and thematic elements variously present in the shorter poems in the book, typifies Rowland’s powerful narrative and descriptive abilities, and symbolises the human capacity to endure through time in the face of uncertainty, cruelty and calamity: ‘Drowning, famine, cholera – TB, slavery and war / the harsh life of the fisherman, the struggles of his wife – / comfort is built out of these’ (53-54).

In this collection, Rowland unfolds before the eyes of the reader the natural landscapes of Australia and Ireland; she alludes to history and to tragedy, both public and private; she evokes ways of life, traditional, modern, nomadic and artistic; and, above all, she remembers people, the celebrated and the beloved. This is Rowland’s world, comprised of her experiences and her memories: ‘Poetry is not something we do but something we be’ (‘Research Statement for Creative Works to be Submitted for Peer Review’ 92).

The reader, on the other hand, may never have seen Australia or Ireland, or watched a lorikeet or a curlew. We may feel frustrated because we do not know the friends to whom Rowland dedicates so many of her poems (often in memoriam). Perhaps we have never heard of the immolation of Victoria by bushfire on ‘Black Saturday’ (18), or of the silting up of the ‘quartz-clear’ Birrarung, River of Mist in the ‘Yarrack Valley of the Wurundjeri People’ (42). We may never have chased rainbows to Cong on the N59 past ‘Joyce’s loughs’ (46), or braved the ‘capricious sea’ to the Isle of Inishbofin (49). It is of no matter. For what Rowland seeks to do, through her poetry, is to touch the reader at a deeper level of experience and to compel responses to this connection. Our personal ‘line of drift’ through life may be different, but we all know about belonging, friendship, shared pleasures, love, betrayal, sickness, ageing, loss, departure, separation, death, grief, nature and memories. *Line of Drift* appeals to the universalism of that experience. Rowland invites us to find something of ourselves in the poems and to recognise our place in a shared universe of the emotions, and to say: ‘Yes. I know this. It feels/ just like that’ (‘Research Statement for Creative Works to be Submitted for Peer Review’ 93).

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Thus, Rowland’s poems are multi-layered. The setting which shifts between Australia and Ireland, or the many poems which describe journeys or departures, not only recreate the real experiences of the poet but also, at another level, reveal her search for identity and for a sense of belonging:

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leavings are our habit – we can do them in the dark –
that returning is what we only half-know in the body,
carried in our genes like a tune often hummed
a part-recalled melody searching for its words
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At yet another level, such poems represent the trajectory which we all trace through life towards death and our human need to make sense of it. On occasion, Rowland addresses this quest for meaning explicitly, including when trying to come to terms with the death of a friend: ‘You feel so utterly gone from me, / how can I hold onto the light, belief in anything?’ (80). Consolation is found in the notion of renewal: ‘There is a resettling of all living things. / There is a sadness tucked into the hem of being. / There is certainly a beginning again’ (Beside the Glass Wall’ 77). In many of the poems, the cycle of life, death and renewal is implicit in or reinforced by Rowland’s choice of imagery, most often using natural phenomena such as the transition from day to night, the waxing and waning of the moon, and the ebb and flow of the tides. While none of these metaphors are original, their distillation into poetry is skilfully handled:

Air cannot hold onto the wave’s roar
Nor beach-sand remain the same,
imprint of current washed away.

Beyond the barrier of shore
ocean fills into waves that return to the unfettered sea.
And so much water, we reduce to dew,
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Is it then the true one within
becomes itself again infinite, irreducible,
suspended in a greater formlessness of soul? (‘Formlessness’ 81)

In summary, and in the light of an article which Rowland published in relation to lyric poetry,² it seems to me that by poeticising her own experience in *Line of Drift*, Rowland seeks to stimulate her reader to empathy at the level of fundamental human emotions, and, having established that connection, to share her own insights into the relationship between artistic endeavour, the natural world and the meaning of human existence: ‘Life is full of confusion, but holding onto beauty / in the

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Catherine Akca
**Mekong Review, Volume 1, Numbers 1 and 2, edited by Minh Bui Jones**

*Mekong Review*, edited by Minh Bui Jones, is a new magazine featuring, ‘Essays, reviews, fiction, poetry from Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam’. While published in Phnom Penh, it is also available for via an inexpensive download as a PDF. At this early stage, the magazine’s review essays – that is, short essays that use recently published books as a beginning point for further discussion – particularly resonate. Bui Jones appears to favour writers who are capable not merely of assessing a book’s strengths and weaknesses, but also willing and able to engage in erudite conversation, to argue back with genuine thought and care, and, at times, to shift the parameters of the discussion via new ideas and perspectives.

The opening essay in Issue 1 sets the tone, when Mario Del Pero critically assesses Niall Ferguson’s *Kissinger 1923-1968: the idealist*, the first volume of as Del Pero describes it, a ‘authorised, if not semi-official’ biography. Del Pero is hardly the only critic to query Ferguson’s distasteful and muddy defence of Kissinger’s actions and legacy. Still, in interrogating Ferguson’s sub-title – Kissinger as idealist – Del Poro brings deep thinking to his rather different perspective: ‘Henry Kissinger was in reality a fairly conventional Cold War intellectual, his bizarre and often deliberately opaque prose notwithstanding’ (3).

Other notably penetrating essays include separate treatments of Myanmar, by Sebastian Strangio and Kenneth Wong (both in Number 2). Both pieces push past outsider assumptions to offer genuinely nuanced and forthright analyses of a nation in transition. Wong’s examination of writers and censorship is particularly revealing, including this comment by poet and teacher Zeyar Lynn: ‘I can’t stop self-censoring. Other older poets find it very difficult to do … We were brainwashed by censorship. We can’t just change overnight’ (11).

However, despite their qualities, these pieces, and some others, seem abbreviated. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Penny Edwards’s discussion of Marguerite Duras (Number 2), focusing both on Duras’s mother and on the importance of Cambodia to Duras’s oeuvre. Edwards writes persuasively that ‘it is the landscape and language of Cambodia that most persistently permeate her novels and form which, like her mother’s iron grip, Duras never escapes’ (5). Edwards references various books, including Laure Adler’s 1998 biography of Duras and Luc Mogenet’s more recent *Marguerite Duras au Cambodge: Le premier émoi* (KAM Editions, 2015, currently no English translation). At the same time, she displays her own expert and nuanced understanding of Duras. It’s a fine piece of scholarship and writing, and yet Edwards covers such wide intellectual and historical ground that the essay has a persistently cramped feel: there is much more extended treatment of Duras bursting out of this short essay.

One of the most distinctive contributions is editor Minh Bui Jones’s interview of Victor Koppe, a Dutch lawyer who is serving as the international defence counsel for the now elderly Khmer Rouge leader Nuon Chea at the hybrid Cambodian/international Khmer Rouge tribunal (see Number 2). Koppe is blunt, colourful and self-serving; at times, he is unexpectedly personal. As he has done in the courtroom, he expresses his ‘strong professional contempt’ for Jean-Marc Lavergne, a French judge serving at the tribunal. But more importantly, he offers glimpses of the fascinating mindset of a lawyer in the midst of defending a reviled political figure. He speaks about Nuon Chea with fascination and some guarded admiration. He argues that the tribunal is not giving Nuon Chea the chance to tell his version of the Democratic Kampuchea story, while also making it clear that ‘I could never be the mouthpiece of a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist’ (10). On several levels, it’s a disquieting and genuinely startling interview.
While the second issue of Mekong Review is overall stronger than the first (as you might reasonably expect for a new publication), for me the highlight of both issues is the extract from Cambodian novelist Soth Polin’s l’Anarchiste, translated from the French by Penny Edwards (Number 1). Polin’s narrator’s voice leaps off the page – ‘You can’t imagine the itinerary of a life like mine’ – as he connects the years 1963 and 1974 in the tragedy of his life. Edwards’s accompanying brief discussion of Polin and l’Anarchiste only increases my anticipation of this novel in English translation.

Mekong Review is a welcome arrival, not least for its willingness to engage with, and sometimes interrogate, a diverse mix of writers, artists, thinkers and politicians who are interested in the region. Editor Minh Bui Jones has established an expansive and yet geographically contained focus, one that in turn breaks down distinctions between the political, the cultural and the literary.

Patrick Allington

The strength of this work lies in the ambitious scope of both its breadth and depth. The authors make assumptions that the reader is interested and motivated to work to fill the knowledge gaps that a critical work of this magnitude entails (382 pages not counting the glossary or extensive bibliography). Comic book creators, readers and critics will all find some, if not all, portions of this book a rewarding read. Having said that, the form of the book clearly signals that a primary audience is students (high school and early undergraduate. Three main units – History, Form, Culture – are broken into chapters. In turn, each chapter is bookended by objectives at the start and with discussion questions, activities, readings and scholarly sources at the end. While there is an early assumption that readers may be unfamiliar with media theory (in the introduction the word ‘medium’ is defined), the later chapters don’t shy away from more complex ideas such as the comprehension and creation of hermeneutic images. This traversal from basic foundations through to higher-level critical and practical considerations, and the variety of possible types of analyses introduced, creates an interesting trajectory that offers something new to readers both new and experienced.

Although they first appeared in the US in the early 1930s, there has been a resurgence of interest in the comic book (comic) form since the 1980s. Key works such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*; Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons and John Higgins’ influential collaboration on *The Watchmen*, and Frank Miller’s *A Dark Knight Returns* were on the shelves by late 1986. These works played a major part in sparking ongoing momentum in the creation, consumption, critical analysis and acceptance of comics as an interesting and serious medium. The simplicity of line in comics deftly disguises the complexity of combining word and image to create sophisticated messages. *The Power of Comics* is a very useful adjunct to existing texts exploring the practical creation and comprehension of works with intertwining textual and visual narratives within a largely US/western focus.

Unit 1 starts with a detailed three-part history of the comic form. Covering the history of the medium from multiple angles, the first chapters display provide useful grounding knowledge with sufficient depth to allow for the inclusion of details that many other critical books lack. The authors explore both large and independent publishing models, including their impact on both the content and form. They go on to put comics and comic publishing in their social and cultural contexts. Illustrations of the works under discussion underpin the written history. Graphic Novels and Manga are included in the final historical section, as their influence on visual storytelling practices continues to inform and expand in complexity. Webcomics and transmedia storytelling also get a brief introduction, as the history sections of the book propel the reader through time into Unit 2, which focuses on various aspects of the form of comics.

This broad term ‘form’ moves through Unit 2’s chapters on story creation and types of narrative interspersed with practical considerations such as the use of panels and gutters for encapsulation and flow. Basic semiotics, film theory and art theory are brought in as useful lenses for the enhancement of the comprehension and discussion of comics.

The application of these concepts lends itself to using this book as a tool not just for the examination of comics but also for any media where images are used consciously in a complex interplay between the symbolic and illustrative. I used a chapter for a university group that is focussing on the creation of 2D animation. The reading facilitated a lively discussion that bounced
between, on the one hand, intellectual and critical analysis, and, on the other hand, practical questions such as ‘how should I create this story beat’.

Unit 2 moves through story to discussions of genre and types of classification. Underpinning this is a discussion of audience and consumption in addition to the practicalities of production. These threads appear in all three units, and they are part of what tie together this work. Genre also allows for an expansion of history into the realm of pop culture and a focus on superheroes. Memoirs form the core of the final chapter in Unit 2. This discussion explores concepts of identity, depiction of historical events from a personal perspective and pictorial embodiment. The use of *Maus* to close this unit ties it back neatly to the early history section. In the memoir chapter, I was keenly aware that I was reading a textbook. Nonetheless, the form of the book allows the reader to move through, or skip sections, without damaging the enjoyment or understanding of the rest of the book. This flexibility demonstrates a very conscious structuring of the book.

Unit 3 offers a discussion of the business of current comic culture. Production, exhibition, market forces, publishing paradigms are all efficiently considered, albeit in a largely US context. Modern audience considerations such as fan and participatory cultures, the depiction of women, and a small section on comic culture in a more global context round out the unit and the book. Comic books are an American artform, and this book contextualises itself around the US and western history and markets. That said, there are some sections and references throughout the book to other forms and to international contexts, and the book concludes with a discussion of cultural imperialism and questions of identity. While international contextualization is not at the core of the content, the authors do not ignore it.

*The Power of Comics* is a text that lends itself to browsing; it is a useful addition to any shelf where visual narrative and comic theory are kept for quick reference.

Katie Cavanagh

The Sri Lankan diaspora has endured linguistic politics, internal insurgencies and the Civil War, generating creative responses by writers, painters, filmmakers and artists. Identity formation problems are often central to their work, which observes the challenges of ethnicity, exodus and displacement for Sri Lankans within Sri Lanka and in Sri Lankan diaspora locations, including Australia, England, Canada and the US. Alexandra Watkins’s *Problematic Identities in Women's Fiction of the Sri Lankan Diaspora* offers a sound critique of significant work by women writers of the Sri Lankan diaspora: Michelle de Kretser, Yasmine Gooneratne, Chandani Lokugé, Karen Roberts, Roma Tearne and V.V. Ganeshanathan. These writers, despite having been well received by the Western academia, have gained, suggests Watkins, ‘considerably less critical attention than their more prominent male counterparts – Michael Ondaatje, Romesh Gunesekera, A. Sivanandan, and Shyam Selvadurai’ (2). The book, containing five chapters plus introduction and conclusion, offers a ‘culturally extensive reading’ (2) through the lens of Watkins’s gender-specific approach.

The first chapter, ‘Mimicry and Detection: Dismantling Identity in Michelle de Kretser’s *The Hamilton Case*’, critically argues de Kretser’s novel through the theoretical contours of ‘mimicry’, inaugurated by V.S. Naipaul in his novel, *The Mimic Men* and in turn theoretically postulated by Homi K. Bhabha. Watkins also engages with Said, Fanon, and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. Subsequently, Watkins unravels ‘the phenomenon of British mimicry in the Indian subcontinent’ (4) through a rigorous review of Macaulay’s in/famous *Minute on Education* prior to analysing de Kretser’s text.

The next chapter, ‘In Fear of Monsters: Women’s Identities and the Cult of Domesticity in British Ceylon,’ compares de Kretser’s *The Hamilton Case* with Gooneratne’s *The Sweet and Simple Kind*, since both ‘focus on the spectacle of colonial domesticity’ (41). Watkins critically studies these novels in the light of ‘problematic identities’ of female characters and their families. The chapter not only covers ‘Victorian domesticity’ but also engages with the ‘competing ideology of Buddhist domesticity’ to analyze de Kretser’s text.

Chapter Three, ‘Combatting Myths: Racial and Cultural Identity in Postcolonial Sri Lanka,’ reconnoiters three novels: Gooneratne’s *The Sweet and Simple Kind*, as well as Tearne’s *Mosquito* and Roberts’s *July*. Watkins explores the multiple tinges of racial discrimination and their ‘strife in Sri Lanka during … the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict’ (81). She unfolds the contemporary issues in the context of the Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalistic-linguistic politic, the LTTE politic and the two groups conflictual catastrophes. Like critics before her, Watkins identifies the climatic anti-Tamil riots of 1983 as a ‘turning point in the trajectory of the crisis, as it drove thousands of Tamil survivors, who feared for their own lives, to support the fight for Tamil Elam’ (89-90). The chapter critically explores the historiography of Sri Lankan insurgencies through its representation in the three novels.

Chapter Four, ‘Chandani Lokugé and Yasmine Gooneratne: Deconstructing Postcolonial Tourism, Exoticism, and Colonial Simulacra’, examines the problematics of neocolonial identities and touristic predation in Lokugé’s *Turtle Nest* and Gooneratne’s *The Pleasures of Conquest*, both of which ‘are set in the coastal resort district of Sri Lanka’ (123). She analyses these novels to explore ‘the neocolonialist and exoticist problems that have been articulated [by] … Sri Lanka’s tourist economy’ (138). Before leaping into textual exploration, Watkins astutely proffers the theoretical postulations of Malcolm Crick, E.D.L. Mendis, Jonathan Culler, Daniel Boorstin and Graham
Huggan, and so on. She also takes into account the postmodernist theory of Jean Baudrillard to theorize the ‘concept of distorted social experiences … [and] the realms of tourism’ (134).

Chapter Five, ‘Diasporic Identities: Inscription of Celebration and Psychic Trauma in Western Locations’, surveys ‘the representation of the Sri Lankan diasporic experience’ in Gooneratne’s *A Change of Skies*, Lokugé’s *If the Moon Smiled* and Ganeshananthan’s *Love Marriage*. Identity formation and crises are perpetually connected with diaspora, ‘a slippery term’, according to Watkins (165). This chapter engages with the theories of Fanon, Bhabha and Lacan to ‘mimic’ the diaspora whilst also confabulating Vijay Mishra and Freud to explore ‘the diasporic imaginary’, ‘mourning’ and ‘melancholia’. The chapter studies Sri Lankan diaspora identities and compares the tragi-comic discourses of the authors to explore the subject.

‘Pretty Little Tales of Substance’, subtitled ‘a conclusion’, provides the book’s graceful close. *Problematic Identities in Women's Fiction of the Sri Lankan Diaspora* offers a timely analysis of the novels of five women writers, whose work is, as the book concludes, ‘valuable for its sophisticated rendering of … Sri Lankan identities’ – colonial, postcolonial and diasporic (210). This is perhaps the first treatise to compare and contrast the creative feats of prominent women writers of the Sri Lankan diaspora. It offers handy solutions to researchers of the field across the globe.

Ajay K. Chaubey
The Intervention: An Anthology, edited by Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss (Concerned Australians, 2015)

In 2009, an undergraduate student undertaking an Indigenous topic I was convening at a South Australian university mistakenly referred to the NT Intervention throughout her essay as ‘the interference’. Similar views were already surfacing about the NT Intervention, and the logic and rhetoric behind the legislation that brought the army to remote Indigenous communities to restore order and improve conditions. Fuelled by a story on the ABC’s Lateline, and by a comment the Queen made to then Prime Minister Howard on the occasion of her visit to Australia in March 2006 about Australia’s treatment of Indigenous Australians, the federal government declared an ‘emergency’ in May 2007. As police and army personnel moved in to restore safety to ‘dysfunctional’ Indigenous communities, concerns were quickly raised that the Northern Territory Emergency Response Act failed to mention the children it was designed to ‘protect’. Texts such as Coercive Reconciliation: Exit, Normalise, Stabilise (2009) appeared, charting the problems of the NTER, including the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), the quarantining of welfare payments, and the attempted acquisition of Aboriginal lands through lease arrangements in exchange for housing and health improvements.

The misrepresentation of the ‘problem’ in remote communities, and the ‘special measures’ hastily enacted in 2007 by the Howard government, are the subject of The Intervention: An Anthology, edited by writer and academic Rosie Scott and Wiradjuri writer and academic Anita Heiss. The anthology brings together twenty prominent non-Indigenous and Indigenous writers voicing opposition to the Intervention in essays, memoir, poetry and fiction, alongside communiqués issued by Elders in affected communities that have been largely ignored by mainstream media. Tellingly, The Intervention did not find an Australian publisher, despite its impressive list of contributors, which includes Pat Anderson (one of the authors of the 2007 ‘Little Children are Sacred’ report used by the Howard Government to justify the legislation), Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, whose electrifying speech on the television program Q and A is excerpted here), journalist Jeff McMullen, legal researcher Larissa Behrendt, social commentator Eva Cox, historian Bruce Pascoe, and acclaimed Indigenous fiction writers Melissa Lucashenko and Alexis Wright.

For many of the writers, critics and Elders whose voices resonate throughout The Intervention, the key question is this: how does the Intervention align with a policy framework of self-determination ushered in by the 1967 Referendum? What is being ‘protected’ in the communities the legislation was designed for? And who is listening to the affected communities? In her introduction, Rosie Scott points out that important Australian works opposed to the Intervention have attracted overseas and local recognition and acclaim. Yet, despite ‘eloquent protest’ by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and petitions to the United Nations by community leaders and Elders, the controversial Intervention continues in 2016 (3).

As Anita Heiss argues, Indigenous leaders opposed to the Intervention consider it a form of neo-assimilation reminiscent of the old mission days (9). Similarly, Brenda L. Croft argues the Intervention comprises a twenty-first century program of assimilation (178), a point reiterated in several essays in the collection. Prominent Arrente leader Rosalie Kunoth-Monks states that when the Intervention and its attendant military personnel arrived in Urapuntja/Utopia, the community thought they ‘were going to be rounded up and taken’ just as they had been under formal policies of segregation and assimilation that ended only in the 1970s (16). That these policy measures are
enacted ‘supposedly for the betterment of us Aboriginal people’ only underscores the parallels between the past and the present (23).

The opponents of the Intervention argue here that policy frameworks based in Indigenous self-determination are critical to ensure Indigenous human rights, address structural disadvantage, and redress historical injustice. As Larissa Behrendt explains, the ‘emergency’ in remote Indigenous communities had been neglected for thirty years by both Northern Territory and federal governments when the ‘Little Children are Sacred’ report was released in 2007 (64). However, the measures announced by the Howard government contained no reference to the report, nor to its recommendations, as Pat Anderson, the co-author of the report, testifies in her personal reflections on the Intervention (27–41). She points out that the federal response was ‘neither well-intentioned nor well evidenced’, and therefore was ‘unlikely to be helpful’ in resolving problems in Indigenous communities. Behrendt agrees, arguing that the ‘top-down, paternalistic’ policy approach is a ‘recipe for failure’ (66). Like many other writers here, she acknowledges that problems exist in Indigenous communities, but argues that it is poverty, disadvantage, and sustained under-funding that cause social breakdown.

Behrendt notes that the NTER’s focus on restoring order in ‘dysfunctional’ communities masks other policy objectives to ‘open up Aboriginal lands to non-Aboriginal interests’ (66). The Anthology resounds with stories from community leaders in prescribed areas forced to sign over their lands in exchange for health and housing improvements. Djiniyini Gondarra, spokesperson for the Yolngu Nations Assembly in Arnhem Land, travelled with Gurindji and Arrente Elders to the 2010 session of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Committee to seek international support to stop the NTER and restore Indigenous rights (Gondarra, 45–49). The Australian government had ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2009, following its National Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, suggesting progress in the vexed question of contemporary race relations. Tellingly, the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal lands directly contravenes Article 3 of the Declaration.

By 2009, as the potent images of tanks rolling in to restore law and order in remote Indigenous communities faded from the nightly news, the Intervention was rebranded as a Labor policy measure to ‘Close the Gap’, accompanied by the ‘Stronger Futures’ package passed in 2012. This policy platform has successive governments issuing annual reports detailing the improvements, or more precisely, the lack of them, in Indigenous health, education, employment and housing outcomes. A number of writers question the Labor approach, including journalist Jeff McMullin, whose essay charts the Intervention’s abuse of Indigenous rights from the launch of the NTER in 2007 to 2013, when Tony Abbott, the self-styled ‘Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs’, cut $500 million in federal funding to Aboriginal programs. This led to the 2014 campaign to close ‘unviable’ Indigenous communities in the NT, WA, and SA (115–138). McMullin argues the ‘Empowering Communities’ framework actively disempowers communities, redirecting the funding available to a ‘carefully controlled cabal of corporations’ poised to take over the administration of resource-rich Aboriginal lands (136). Historian Bruce Pascoe argues that the Intervention’s failure has been ‘absolute’, as almost all the money allocated to the problems in the NT has been spent on accommodation for fly-in fly-out workers, administrators and bureaucrats before a single house for Aboriginal people was ever built (152). Eva Cox’s article, ‘The Intervention—Bad Policy and Bad Politics’ is sobering reading: the evidence is that Indigenous communities targeted by the Intervention are now ‘worse off than before’, so the policy will further ‘widen the gap’ it is intended to close (196). Nicole Watson asks supporters of the Intervention to explain how the NTER measures ‘protect’ women and children from abuse and sexual assault when income management and the
refusal of crisis payments to women escaping domestic violence curtail women’s and children’s freedoms (100).

Stories, poems, statements and media releases from concerned leaders in other prescribed communities are interspersed with the academic articles, acting as a chorus of voices critical of the attempts to wrest control of Aboriginal lands in the name of ‘equality’. That equality should be statistical, a quantitative closing of the gap, is the focus of P.M. Newton’s story, ‘567,000 kms Driven’. Newton takes the point of view of an army officer, who in Uruzgan, built schools and clinics, put the power on, and built airfields. The traumatised narrator asks his therapist why the army is building police stations in the NT (55). Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and poets such as Arnold Zable, Ali Cobby Eckerman, Alexis Wright, Samuel Wagan-Watson, Lionel Fogarty and others offer keen insights into the failings of the Intervention, so that the anthology offers both creative and critical responses to this most expensive of policy failures.

As of early 2016, the special measures in Indigenous communities continue under a new Coalition government, with threats to close communities in WA and SA sparking widespread protest last year. Almost a decade since the legislation was announced, The Intervention: An Anthology offers a timely reminder to Australians that successive Australian governments continue to champion a suite of policy measures, many of them racially discriminatory at worst and ineffective at best, that underscored the Howard Government’s hastily enacted Northern Territory Emergency Response Act (C’1th 2007).

Laura Deane
Tourists visiting the Marshall Islands today, particularly the coral-studded ring of Bikini Atoll, encounter an eerie juxtaposition. Against the atoll’s cerulean shorelines and white sands linger the ghostly traces of US atomic operations: abandoned concrete bunkers, fading signage, and submerged military boats stand as the gaunt relics of American militarism in the Pacific. The year 1958 signaled the end of the US’s nuclear bomb experimentation on the Marshall Islands; 67 tests contaminated the environment, displaced thousands of Marshall Islanders, and established an entrenched ‘legacy of distrust’ between former inhabitants and US politicians.1 The cynosure of the atomic operations was the 15-megaton Bravo hydrogen bomb, detonated above Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954, during the US-Soviet nuclear arms race. Seven thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the explosion exposed thousands to radioactive fallout. US-funded cleanup programs proved largely feckless, causing those who returned to flee again in 1985 due to residual radiation. Subsequent exposure and contaminated soil dispersed Bikini Atoll’s community. Islanders and their descendants refuse to return to their homes, and their demands for further US compensation remain ignored.

That the Pacific Ocean and its communities continue to serve as a tabula rasa for foreign military operations numbers among the topical cultural and geopolitical issues broached in HuiHui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific. In part, this volume of essays, poetry and fiction is a broader, more inclusive extension of the University of Hawai‘i Press’s Varua Tupu: New Writing and Art from French Polynesia (2006), which examines the literary relationship between Hawai‘i and French Polynesia. HuiHui, however, gathers a larger collection of literary voices from the Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Tahiti, Guam, and others, offering a larger window into the contemporary literary ethos of the Pacific.

The eponymous term, huihui, translates from Hawaiian as ‘mixed, mingled, united, joined’ or, ‘anything mixed. … Cluster, collection, bunch’ (1). Indeed, the volume’s title aptly encapsulates the cultural variety and interconnectedness of Oceania. Huihui may remind readers of callaloo, a Caribbean leaf vegetable stew of West African origins that has come to vividly symbolize the African diaspora; the dish’s gallimaufry of ingredients has inspired literary parallels with displacement and racial-cultural hybridity.2 The huihui metaphor animates this collection of writings, emphasizing that cultural variety aside, the Pacific is a united homeland with a deeply shared (post)colonial history. Huihui presents new writing that engages erasure and revision. As the introduction says, the collection takes a rousing cue from Papua New Guinean writer-scholar Steven Winduo’s politico-literary urging that Pacific history must be ‘unwritten’. Stated differently, Pacific intellectuals and writers are called to write to unwrite the colonial discourses that have inscribed and subordinated cultures of Oceania, forging instead new rhetorics and aesthetics that will fill Oceania ‘with the cultural content that is of value to the Pacific people’ (4). This, in turn, will ‘allow the value of knowledge to transform the negative consciousness of the Pacific people to a positive one’ (4).

Responding to Winduo’s call to unwrite this history, Huihui’s contributors ‘interrogate and dismantle


disparaging colonial literary standards’, turning to rhetoric and aesthetic modalities of Pacific cultures to deconstruct the legacies of colonial hegemony (4).

*HuiHui* gathers fresh writing practicing this tumultuous literary process of unwriting Pacific history. Contributors contest, challenge and rewrite these colonial standards differently: some vandalize and subvert them through poetic verse; others take up academic scrutiny. Divided into four sections – Identity, Institutions, Community, and Word – this volume features topic ranging from Pacific feminism and the tourism industry, to Western militarism. Particularly poignant is Dan Taulapapa McMullin’s poem, ‘Tiki Manifesto’, a commentary on the global proliferation of tiki kitsch commodities. Ubiquitous examples of quotidian tiki kitsch abound: ‘Tiki mugs, tiki ashtrays, tiki trashcans […] / Tiki bars in Los Angeles, a tiki porn theatre, tiki stores / Tiki conventions’ (89). Tiki-inspired knickknacks distort the ancient spiritual significance of Polynesian sculpture and sustain pernicious stereotypes of Pacific aesthetics: ‘The difference is this, our sculpture is beautiful, tiki kitsch / sculpture is ugly / not because they look so very different but because their shit / is supposed to be ugly / because we are supposed to be ugly’ (90). The poem draws stark parallels, too, between the crass cultural misappropriation of tiki sculpture and the realities of Hawaiian poverty: ‘And American police drink mai tais in Honolulu bars from tiki mugs while / native Hawaiian people live homeless on the beaches’ (91). Simply put, tiki schlock symbolizes tourist insouciance for the islands’ social ills. For McMullin, these tourist gewgaws trivialize and obscure tiki sculpture’s spiritual importance, rendering Pacific peoples and their postcolonial realities invisible. McMullin’s final stanza poignantly confronts the rampant tourist materialism perpetuating this cultural effacement, asking: ‘Where? Where are we? / In the wallpaper, on the mugs?’ (92).

Issues of Pacific feminism figure prominently in Selina Tusitala Marsh’s essay, ‘Un/Civilized Girls, Unruly Poems: Jully Makini’, which critically examines the writings of Jully Makini, a Solomon Islands poet whose work explores the intersections of gender, feminism, globalization, and the atrophy of cultural traditions. The essay focuses on two poems, ‘Civilized Girl’ and ‘Roviana Girl’, which, read in parallel, starkly juxtapose the perspectives of an anonymous Westernized and traditional first-person woman narrator. The speaker in ‘Civilized Girl’ is styled in ‘Cheap perfume / six inch heels / skin-tight pants […] steel-wool hair / fuzzy and stiff / now soft as coconut husk / held by a dozen clips.’ While she replicates superficial Western beauty standards, the speaker of ‘Roviana Girl’ reflects, ‘Black and poor as I am / Don’t look down on me / My roots are bedded deep / on Roviana soil.’ She is economically disadvantaged, socially and racially conscious, and profoundly aware of her inextricable ancestral-cultural link with her homeland. The perplexed speaker of ‘Civilized Girl’ reflects internally on the vexed questions of liminal identity: ‘Who am I? / Melanesian Caucasian or / Half-caste? Make up your mind.’ She grapples, too, with Western forms of address. The Western aesthetic she labors to emulate baffles but leads to self-reflection. According to Marsh, ‘Makini problematizes the trope of the much-maligned civilized girl and offers an alternative lens through which to view the realization of Solomon Islands independence’ (48). For Makini, Marsh suggests, the civilized girl cannot be summarily characterized as a cultural misfit who has repudiated her ties with tradition and culture; rather, bombarded with competing cultural influences, she struggles to form a cohesive identity within the grey zones of liminality. Communication, Marsh rather vaguely concludes, is vital for bringing together women to maintain a collective Solomon Island identity: ‘These unruly civilized and traditional girls, urban and rural based, must talk to each other in order to realize meaningful personable and political independence’ (60). While Marsh’s conclusion fails to fully clarify what such ‘talk’ entails, by critically rethinking the civilized girl Marsh confronts postcolonial tropes that oversimplify the lived experiences of Solomon Islanders.
In addition to poetry, the collection includes several trenchant essays. Craig Santos Perez’s essay, “‘I Lina’la Tataotao Ta’lo’: The Rhetoric and Aesthetics of Militarism, Religiosity, and Commemoration”, memorably scrutinizes the political and historical legacies of US militarism in Guåhan (Guam) to illustrate how discourses of foreign patriotism perpetuate cycles of Guam’s entanglement in US military campaigns. Blending memoir and political commentary, Perez’s essay examines the role the US’s powerful military recruiting machine plays in shaping Guamanian life: ‘Despite the status of Guåhan as a colonial possession of the U.S., Chamorros [Guåhan natives] enlist in the U.S. armed forces at some of the highest rates in the nation’ (183). Perez carefully eschews anti-American censure, choosing rather to memorialize Chamorros killed abroad in US Afghanistan- and Iraq-based military operations, while drawing provocative connections between Guamanian cultural memory and military service. Interspersed throughout the essay are lists commemorating Chamorros soldiers killed overseas, detailing his or her name, circumstances of death, and age. Perez’s lists produce mid-text eruptions that effectively remind readers of the always abrupt and sudden loss of human life. For Perez, Guåhan is enveloped by foreign military presence, and he rightly laments the pending ‘mega-buildup’ of auxiliary US military infrastructure, which threatens to raze jungle, ancient burial grounds, and sacred ancestral sites. The chief achievement will be a deep-draft wharf — constructed at the incalculable loss of Guåhan’s treasured coral reefs — to station American nuclear aircrafts vessels. Importantly, Perez’s essay reads contemporary military bases as powerful postcolonial forces, and invites other writers to respond to the encroachment of foreign military influence.

Students and scholars of postcolonial literature (and history) will find this volume an indispensable resource for studying contemporary Pacific writing. The volume succeeds in representing the many voices of Oceania without being disproportionately attentive to one specific culture or topic. HuiHui’s strongpoint is that its chapters, while grappling with serious postcolonial issues, never devolve into outright polemics. Rather, each chapter offers a balanced, thought-provoking response to contemporary Pacific matters.

Sebastian Galbo

*Silver Lies, Golden Truths* is a biography written by Christine Ellis about her grandfather, Reinhold (Jack) Schuster, a German migrant who lived out World War I and World War II in Broken Hill. Jack was born in 1885 in Saxony, Germany. In 1912 he found work as a trimmer on a steamship bound for Australia. When the ship docked in Perth, Jack was fed up with being confined to the boat and jumped overboard to swim ashore in order to explore Perth. While it is not known whether Jack intended to stay put or if he simply missed the ship once it moved on, thereafter he built a life for himself in outback Australia. Ellis knew she wanted to write her grandfather’s story after hearing her mother’s stories about him. She chose a narrative form for the biography because she ‘wanted to write more than Jack’s biography – [she] wanted to tell his story’ (293).

It is Jack as a person, rather than the events of Jack’s life, that makes this biography an engaging read. Ellis highlights the fact that it is Jack’s disposition that enabled him to endure two World Wars as a German in Broken Hill, and she constructs the narrative around Jack’s demeanour: ‘The Broken Hill legend of Jack Schuster began with Duke’s account of his selflessness in helping the injured Italian and grew over the weeks with tales of the small man’s strength and dogged hard work’ (51). Jack lived in Broken Hill during a time when the community ‘was so unwilling to accept its emerging multiculturalism’ (57) and whose ‘perceived acceptance of foreigners – provided they could speak English – did not extend to the “Afghan” cameleers who lived on the edge of town’ (56).

Jack earned the respect of the community despite the community’s wariness towards foreigners and, during the wars, towards Germans in particular. The community was trapped between their love and respect of an individual and their hatred for that individual’s race as a whole. When Jack, as a foreign alien, obediently registers himself as required at the local police station, he is not imprisoned as other Germans in the community are. In addition, Jack ‘had quietly been given his job back at the British Mine, unlike many of the “aliens” along the line of lode’ (87). Ellis’s portrayal of how well-loved Jack was in the community suggests Jack’s qualities as a person saved him from much suffering during the wars.

Ellis tells the first half of the biography from Jack’s perspective, but then shifts the narrative focus from Jack to one of Jack’s beloved daughters, Maisie. In 1938, Jack returns home to Germany for a few months and Maisie is lost without him:

At school she was used to being without him, but whenever something different happened, such as the school dentist visiting or lining up for diphtheria shots, it would envelop her like a black cloud: her father was not home to tell of it and to praise her for her bravery. (223)

The narrative shift occurs so naturally within the story that the transition is hardly noticeable. Ellis recounts stories she heard first-hand from her mother about Jack, and these accounts are the most vivid sections in the biography. Maisie’s adoration for her father is unmistakable. In these sections the reader starts to form a more complete picture of Jack.

Ellis mostly achieves her aim to write in narrative form, yet at times she shifts away from the narrative to present the reader with background information. This disrupts the flow of the story and pulls the reader out of the narrative. In 1915, two German prisoners of war who escaped from the Torrens Island internment camp show up on Jack’s doorstep asking for help. The two men tell their story to Jack, and Jack agrees to help them. After this, Ellis details the history of the Torrens Island internment camp:

It is unknown whether Kurt was responsible for the series of events that followed- but, within a short time, Walter Emde’s long-lost letter to the American Consul General was found in a bureaucrat’s office and finally translated into English. It caused a ripple effect throughout the Australian military and the internment camps. (109)

The history continues on in detail and completely removes the reader from the core narrative. The information is relevant background information in the context of the story, but the way in which Ellis chooses to disseminate the information to the reader seems to stand in contrast to her original intention.

Despite the occasional disruption to the narrative through unnecessary blocks of information, in *Silver Lies, Golden Truths* Ellis paints a complete portrait of her grandfather and the events in his life. It is difficult to get to the end of the story without feeling like this is a man you know, or at the very least one you would like to meet.

Raelke Grimmer
Michael Farrell. *Writing Australian Unsettlement: Modes of Poetic Invention 1796-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan)

When Gladys Gilligan wrote ‘The Settlement’ in early 1930 — her “account” of life at the Moore River Native Settlement north of Perth — she was just fourteen years old. Gilligan was one of the 50,000 ‘half-caste’ children forcibly removed (stolen) from her family and placed on a mission between the 1890s and 1970s. As a child resident of the Settlement, and perhaps because of her flair for writing (in this case, in English), Gilligan was requested to write ‘The Settlement’ by the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville. There are traces of resistance: resistance both to the idea of settlement/and the Settlement itself, and resistance to the ventriloquism Gilligan must enact in order to write the document. Her text begins as follows: ‘The Settlement lies on the bank of a river which is called the Moore River, the hills surrounding it making it look quite a pleasant home’ (157). In these lines, the ‘slippage’ (157) between a pleasant home and something that ‘look[s] quite a pleasant home’ is resonant. While Gilligan was institutionalised and denied the right to basic freedoms, her voice in ‘The Settlement’ maintains her independence.

In *Writing Australian Unsettlement*, Gilligan’s ‘to [o]rder’ (153) document is just one of the exemplary dozen or so ‘unsettled’ Australian texts that poet-critic Michael Farrell reads from the ‘long colonial era’ (4) using a ‘counter-lens of “unsettlement”’ (10). As Farrell explains, ‘the word “unsettlement” is being used with increasing frequency in a range of Australian literary critical contexts’ (7). In Farrell’s case, it ‘refers to the text’s relation to settlement as such, and its material negation or resistance’ (7). He goes on to point out that unsettlement ‘is not guaranteed by antisettlement sentiment’ but is ‘effected through writing practice’ (7). This distinction is important because it emphasises that writing does something. And in *Writing Australian Unsettlement*, the texts under consideration unsettle notions of literariness, and what we might think of as colonial ‘settled’ writing.

Farrell’s work is influenced by Philip Mead’s seminal *Networked Language* (2008), in which Mead makes the case for the unsettlement of language in Australian poetry. Mead avers that the ‘breaking up’ of language is a key feature of contemporary poetics, and is a move towards an Australian literature that ‘comes to terms with the unsettling difference of Indigenous narratives of place and history and the plural knowledges of the multicultural present’. ¹ Mead considers poetic language in the ‘contemporary moment’ (2). Farrell, in contrast, retrieves historical texts such as Ned Kelly’s *The Jerilderie Letter* and Bennelong’s ‘Letter to Mr Philips, Lord Sydney’s Steward’ and reads them for their ‘poetic interest’ (195) rather than simply as historical by-products of colonisation.

Farrell is concerned with the agency these writers possess despite — or perhaps because of — their marginal positions, and also the marginal positions of their work. The collected texts here are ‘fugitive’ (32) texts, either falling outside the canon of Australian literature or unsettling the canon in a myriad of ways. As Farrell writes,

Australian literature … is not and never was, settled. From its beginning it was being made and remade by writers of different cultures, whether Indigenous, Chinese, convict Irish, or working or middle-class English settlers. These writers invented new material practices of lettering style, syntax, and punctuation usage, as well as new and networked affects, tones and ironies. (195)

In Farrell’s reading of these works, it is his particular focus on punctuation (or lack thereof) and ‘the space of the text’ (6) that is most instructive. He explains that in unsettled texts, the markings on the page ‘de-privilege the semantic and grammatical’ (6). And he demonstrates this conceit by taking us through a range of colonial writings that use punctuation, syntax, grammar, phrasing, spacing, and language in experimental ways.

The collection begins persuasively by pairing together the historically significant and much anthologised The Jerilderie Letter by Ned Kelly, and ‘Letter to Mr Philips, Lord Sydney’s Steward’ by Bennelong, reading them ‘through the practice of hunting’ (13). Kelly and Bennelong were both hunted writers. As hunted writers, their letters are written in order to emancipate (Kelly) and conciliate (Bennelong). Farrell argues that their position as hunted/hunter writers shows on the page. It does so for Kelly in his ‘sporadic’ use of punctuation, especially the full stop and its ‘misalignment with capitalization, suggest[ing] the sentence as a moving space, if not one that is out of control’ (45); it does so for Bennelong is his over-use of the colon in tandem with his ‘highly polite’ tone. Farrell notes that Bennelong’s use of the colon is ‘unusually sophisticated in a text by a not conventionally literate writer’ (27), and suggests that the colons may have been added in later by a scribe. But in any case, he suggests, they ‘are the punctuation of [Bennelong’s] English-speaking person’ (29) and show him to be a man, perhaps, proudly exhibiting his multilingualism. The poetic choices involved in the creation of these texts are significant because they highlight the agency of these two hunted (hunter) writers.

And it is in the structure of Writing Australian Unsettlement’s and the pairing together of the works in this collection that Farrell’s contribution is significant. What seem to be quite disparate texts are corralled together or counterpointed, using punctuation as the key, to give the effect of an eclectic but literarily revealing ensemble. Farrell does indeed demonstrate that Australian writing ‘is not and never was, settled’ (195). This is reiterated in the punctuation ‘inventive’ diary of Chinese goldminer, Jong Ah Sing’s The Case (1876?); in the ‘unconventional … misspellings’ (104) of Aboriginal activist Norman Harris’s ‘Letter to Jim Bassett’; in the secret, self-reflexive and experimental texts (outside of their anthologised oeuvres) of well-known colonial poets Dorothea Mackellar, Charles Harpur and Mary Fullerton; in the collaborative ‘translations of Ngarla oral texts into English’ (129) between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous editor in the Ngarla Songs; and finally in the ‘materially, structurally and grammatically’ (175) unsettled texts of the travelling diaries of settler women, drover bush texts, inscriptions on Wiradjuri Clubs, and the Baroque drawings of an Indigenous stockman, Charlie Finnigan (175). This last group represent perhaps the most unsettled of all the texts in the collection as they are literally carved into trees (drover texts) and wood (Waradjiri Clubs), or are written while on the run or homeless (travelling diaries). These unhoused texts ‘come directly out of the practice of settlement’ (183) but the writers themselves are not settled. Placed at the end of the collection, they serve as reminders of just how diverse and ‘fugitive’ Australian colonial writing can be.


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As Mead argues, poetic texts have ‘an after-life in subsequent and changing cultural contexts’. A poem’s after-life is significant in that it leaves a map, a poetic textual history, of what has been before and, just as importantly, what is coming into being. Farrell’s *Writing Australian Unsettlement* is a welcome addition to the growing body of Australian literary criticism that revisions how we read the texts of the past (and present) by reconfiguring the historical significance of those texts, or by shifting the angle of vision. While I’m sure demand for space would have ruled out the possibility, an appendix with primary reproductions of these extraordinary (handwritten) texts would have been a delightful addition — especially as their significant contribution to Australian literature is in their visual poetics (11) of the page.

Molly Murn

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2 Mead, p.1
Censorship and the limits of the literary: a global view, edited by Nicole Moore (Bloomsbury, 2015)

This volume of essays, edited by literary historian Nicole Moore, explores the dynamic between literature and censorship. Moore describes her collaborative scholarly project in these terms: ‘The essays … engage with more than twelve countries or nation states, placing into revealing contiguity a set of case studies examining national regimes, publishing industries, book trades, reading contexts or authorial circumstances’ (5).

Her introduction proposes two possible approaches to reading Censorship and the limits of the literary. First, through the four-part ‘chronologically-ordered’ structure, beginning in the Enlightenment with Simon Burrows’s essay on ‘French Censorship on the Eve of the Revolution’, through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the Cold War (Part III) and then ‘the final, contemporary section [which] has much to say about our world right now’ (7). Within this structure, the reader can also move easily across the book’s global perspective, selecting chapters on a range of countries, including South Africa, Quebec, East Germany, Australia, China and Iran.

The second approach recommended by Moore turns on ‘the volume’s reflect[ing] a moment of congruence, when new directions in a number of scholarly fields are converging’ (2). This approach would work well for the specialist reader, one who is willing to engage with Foucault’s theories relating to contemporary censorship scholarship and ‘the degree to which, rather than removed and antithetical opposites, literature and censorship have been dialectical forms of culture, each actively defining the other in ongoing, agonistic engagement’ (2). The ‘scholarly fields’ mentioned include various forms of literary studies, history, theatre, film, books and printing.

The contributors’ areas of expertise, and the accompanying case studies, focus on historical period and on place. For example, Peter McDonald’s excellent essay on ‘the Critic as Censor’ deals with Apartheid South Africa, where censorship was ‘always officially euphemized as “publications control”’. McDonald is also the author of The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences (2009); in his essay in Moore’s collection, he covers the white, university-educated, predominantly male censors who acted as ‘guardians of the literary’. These were men who allowed J.M. Coetzee into their ‘Republic of Letters … despite [his] obvious offensiveness towards the government’ while excluding Wilbur Smith, writer of ‘morally corrupting pulp fiction for the masses’ (124).

Christine Spittel’s rewarding essay, ‘Reading the Enemy’, deals with East German censorship during the 1990s. Here the state suppressed titles in the ‘national interest [and] sought to define moral reading’ (149); the censors’ intrusive enquiries extended to determining whether their writers were ‘good citizens’, requiring ‘bio-bibliographical details and an Afterword that identified each author’s political and aesthetic standpoint’ (155). This is unsurprising in a regime that routinely inserted listening devices in people’s homes and obsessively collected personal clothing to test and record body odours. Spittel’s essay is a fine example of Moore’s second ‘new direction’ in the field of contemporary censorship scholarship, made possible by ‘the opening up of the voluminous archives of censorship records from the former communist bloc’ (3). Spittel was able to examine the newly released files and manuscripts down to the ‘ ticks, crosses and question marks’ of the censor’s pen.

The more distant historical periods covered in the essays include France’s ancien régime and Regency Britain. One of the unintended consequences of censorship is, ironically, its tendency to draw attention to the very texts that are being suppressed. Clara Tuite’s analysis of the trials of
early nineteenth-century radical writer, William Hone, demonstrates this; charged with blasphemy and sedition, Hone ‘the political showman’ succeeded in publicly mocking the government and making a name for himself as a London celebrity. In ‘The Gender of Censorship’, Mary Spongborg details the circumstances of the Queen Caroline affair, when George IV’s efforts to suppress the work of caricaturists only had the effect of further damaging his ‘already tawdry reputation’.

I have singled out a few of the sixteen essays in *Censorship and the limits of the literary* in order to show the range of its scholarship and interests. Some of the chapters were developed from conference papers given at a themed conference of the Australasian Association of Literature; this explains the preponderance of eastern-state Australian university contributors (thirteen of the sixteen), mostly from the field of literary studies. Diversity comes from the different stages of the writers’ careers, from recently awarded PhD students to early career academics to established scholarly writers. There is also diversity in writing styles; many of the authors provide clear, lucid prose that is a pleasure to read, while a minority seem to have mistaken obfuscation and pretentiousness for scholarly rigour. Nonetheless, I would recommend Moore’s edited volume *as a whole* – interesting for the general, educated reader as well as the specialist, and valuable as a collection of contemporary literary censorship scholarship informed by the ‘global view’.

Jennifer Osborn

Welcome to hell. Imagine that you wake up, alone, in an unfamiliar room. You are dressed in someone else’s clothes. The door of the room is locked. You have no idea where you are, or why you are here. If you are a man, you will now have to imagine that you are a young woman. You are being punished for a crime that only a woman can commit.

Charlotte Wood’s fifth novel opens with this scenario, a scene from the nightmare world of dystopian fiction. This could be 1984, the landscape of George Orwell’s Oceania or the remote island of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. Margaret Atwood’s futuristic Republic of Gilead, home of Offred and the other female victims of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, also comes clearly to mind. Instead, Wood’s novel is set in an unmistakably Australian and contemporary society.

The ten prisoners in *The Natural Way of Things* are all young Australian women. They have attractive names – Yolanda, Verla, Leantha, Isobel, Joy – but they are also called ‘the minister’s-little-travel-tramp and that-Skype-slut and the yuck-ugly-dog from the cruise ship; they are pig-on-a-spit and big-red-box, moll-number-twelve and bogan-gold-digger-gangbang-slut’ (47).

These women are ‘what happens when you don’t keep your fucking fat slag’s mouth shut’ (47). Victims of sexual abuse who have refused to stay silent about their experiences, they have been ‘handed over’ (56) to a security firm (Hardings International: ‘Dignity & Respect in a Safe & Secure Environment’) and imprisoned on an isolated rural property.

Charlotte Wood’s powerful novel examines what happens to the young women as they come to terms with their terrible captivity. Essentially, they are dehumanized and treated like animals: put on leashes, herded around the compound, forced to sleep in dogboxes. ‘Exactly like sheep’ (17) – or female wartime collaborators – they are ‘shorn’, their hair shaved off by one of the male jailers. Animalistic references abound in the text: the women are compared to goats, dogs, horses, pigs, hens, rabbits and sheep. Locked in their ‘kennels’, they ‘breathe through their mouths like animals’ and ‘lunge at their dishes like dogs’ (46).

Hardings International has hired three people to guard the women: the ex-army man Boncer, an unemployed backpacker called Teddy and a ‘nurse’, Nancy. Like their prisoners, they seem to be unremarkable, ordinary young Australians. Boncer is the most vicious and abusive of the guards, but he is also a pitiable ‘mummy’s boy’ with pimples and an internet dating profile. Placed in a position of unchecked power, though, he is more than willing to physically abuse the ‘slags’ and ‘whores’ in his captivity. Teddy despises the women as ‘sloppy seconds’ (58) and complains bitterly about his ex-girlfriend Hannah, with her hairy legs and ‘unceasing bitching … like some harpy kindergarten teacher’ (129). Nancy treats the girls with ‘amused, disgusted pity’ and blames them for their plight: ‘So what have you done to yourself, you silly bitch?’ (81)

It is this everyday sexism, so carelessly expressed in this extreme environment, that makes Wood’s novel such a chilling and confronting text to read. Early in the book, Verla wonders at the extent of her companions’ compliance in their terrible and hopeless incarceration:

> What would happen if they refused? [Boncer] could beat one of them, but together they could overpower him. Why have they been so stupid as to follow him? Why this trailing, limping obedience? (34)
Perhaps, Wood’s female characters are so obedient because they have absorbed the inherent sexism of modern Australian culture, the belief that male dominance and female subservience are just ‘the natural way of things’.

This ‘natural’ way unfolds in the three seasons that structure the nine-month timeframe of the novel: summer, autumn and winter. In Part II, Autumn, the corporation ruthlessly abandons its staff as well as its ‘clients’. The jailers become as helpless as the jailed when the power is cut off, and food supplies start to run out. The eleven women and two men are left in a state of complete isolation, trapped on the derelict sheep station, surrounded by the ‘unknowable bush’.

This natural bushland, the vast outback is a distinctive trope in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australian literature and history. From Lawson’s drover’s wife to Baynton’s chosen vessel, from the terrified school-teacher in Wake in Fright to the protagonists of Michael Meehan’s The Salt of Broken Tears, the dead heart of the country has claimed its victims. This is the dark, gothic territory that Wood’s characters inhabit as they move from the desolation of Autumn to the grim end of Winter.

In her interview with Kerryn Goldsworthy during Adelaide Writers’ Week, Charlotte Wood confirmed that authors Margaret Atwood and William Golding were the ‘god-parents’ of her novel. Certainly the terrors of Atwood’s feminist dystopia segue into Golding’s primitive survival of the ‘fittest’ as Wood continues her examination of male-female power relations under extreme, life-threatening conditions. Initially, the established hierarchies of control and abuse remain in place; gradually, however, subtle shifts and changes alter the dynamics of the isolated ‘community’. While some of the women seek advantage by conforming to traditional stereotypes – the mother, the cook, the sexual slave – others create different roles for themselves as hunters, gatherers and protectors. An uneasy equilibrium is sustained for a time, but the end, when it comes, is sudden, violent and unexpected.

The Natural Way of Things has been shortlisted for several literary awards, and it won the 2016 Stella Prize. Judging by the warmth of its critical reception, it will be a strong contender for the Miles Franklin Literary Award – certainly it is a book ‘of the highest literary merit … presenting Australian life in any of its phases’. It also encompasses universal themes: our human versus our animal nature, the effects of nature and nurture, the performance of gender and sexuality, and the trauma of incarceration at the hands of political and economic power.

Charlotte Wood’s fifth novel is a memorable and remarkable text. Read it for the startling prose, the realistic characters and the compelling themes. Then ask yourself if you will ever feel the same about being a woman – or a man – again.

Jennifer Osborn

Michelle Leber, *The Yellow Emperor* (Five Islands Press, 2014)

A poet-friend of mine said to me last week that he doesn’t much like ‘project’ poetry collections, collections in which there’s no room for the haphazard or wayward poem because the author begins with an idea and then sticks to that idea until the book is complete, that is, until it is cohesive and succinct. There might be a narrative thread running from poem to poem to make it a ‘project’ collection (Claudia Rankin’s *Citizen*), or the poems might be linked through characters (Susan Hawthorne’s *Cow*). These two examples point to the ‘project’ collection as being easily associated with novels, although it might be that a collection holds together through adhering to a strict process (Barry Hill’s ekphrastic *Naked Clay: Drawing from Lucian Freud*). Whatever the connection, I told my poet-friend that I was a fan of ‘project’ poetry, and I’m going to stop calling it that now because the quotation marks and indeed the word itself seems to belittle what is ultimately a dedicated work of art. Michelle Leber’s new collection, *The Yellow Emperor*, is a solid example of what I’ll now refer to as a theme-driven collection (that’s better), skilfully engaging with all three of the examples I gave above: narrative, character and adherence to a strict process.

The narrative thread and character exploration work together as Leber uncovers some of the stories of the Yellow Emperor, who ruled China around the 27th century BCE when civilization was taking shape and chopsticks and the written word were coming into being. It’s difficult to discern how much China historically owes to a man who is also considered part cultural myth, but the emperor undoubtedly cuts an important figure. My acupuncturist showed me her ‘bible’ the other day and it’s attributed to him: *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*. It’s been around for two millennia. It’s here where Leber integrates a strict process into her collection, as many of the poems are interpretations of acupuncture points and some lines in the poems are taken directly from Debra Kaatz’s translation of *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*.

The opening poem, referred to as *proem* (or prelude), can be read from the point of view of the author as both poet and devotee of the Yellow Emperor, holding tight to the traditional Chinese aesthetics of nature: ‘One cold morning I will study the stones / in dark woods beside the river.’ So, too, does the collection end with the author’s point of view, in the single poem of the postscript. This bookending of the author’s voice shows great potency in structuring because it positions the Yellow Emperor as essential to Leber’s modern-day living (Leber works in Chinese medicine so her connection to the Yellow Emperor is more than personal; it’s professional and perhaps spiritual).

But it’s the bulk of the book, told in five parts through a myriad of characters, where we get a sense of what made the Yellow Emperor, and what he gave in return. His story begins with Fu Bao, his mother, who enters into a conception of the cosmos:

She collected only red
and white stars that night
threaded them loosely
around her waist
felt them reach up
for her breast, down
to the tiger grotto. (19)

There is no mention of a father. The following poem carries on with Fu Bao’s pregnancy in which nine ancient wives’ tales warrant good luck, one for each month of the pregnancy. Already
there is a strong feel for women in the Yellow Emperor’s making. Along with the moon goddess, other characters include his first, second, third and fourth wives and his mistress. None of these women seem to be part of the book only to hold up the heroic man. Rather, they are contributors to culture in their own right.

The Yellow Emperor’s ministers, though, are male (of medicine, writing and music) and so too is the fisherman, whose only reason, as far as I can tell, to be included in the book is to give space to the emperor’s childhood while simultaneously delving into mythology. The Fisherman’s is a big poem told simply, and the result is both unsentimental and poignant. It begins,

Always, no matter
the colour of season,
he scrambled a path
to the Ji River bank.

Carrying his feelings
away from the world
his thoughts like swift eels
darting the shallows.
Each day he visited
a fisherman
with the white-stick brow. (22)

When the old fisherman naps one afternoon and never wakes up, the poem ends with,

Rock spirits believed
the Yellow River
would burst one day,
wringing its bank
to capture the Ji River;
to feast on brine
from the emperor’s tears. (23)

The notes in the back read ‘Ji river: Purportedly no longer in existence.’ (83) Notes like these, kept far from the poem so as not to distract, colour the poems, vividly. My preference was reading the book once with a constant finger on the ‘Notes on Text’ pages so I could flip between the poem and its contextualisation and then reading it again as a flowing collection, but the poems are all standalones if you’re not into endnotes – quite a feat. The notes at the back of the book as well as the list of characters at the beginning seem to me a perfect way to contain such complexity.

To bring the third point of theme-driven collections, adherence to a strict process, into discussion, consider ‘Culmination Point of Deliberation’:

There are things to understand:

the nerve of the eagle
tumbling its appetite to earth,

the necessity of raising
fugitive birds for feasts.

That for each death
there is circumstance.

...

I am like a long-necked bird

formless as hunger
fishing the fat void

–listen to the glittering current
as it offers answers. (39)

The poem is very much a musing on death, using the traditional Chinese emphasis on nature to point to great life lessons. Here, the bird (woman- and mankind) is persistent but temporal, and the current (life itself) is powerful in its legacy. The poem’s notes reveal that the poem is written in the voice of Lei Zu, the emperor’s first wife, but also that the title is

a translation of the acupuncture point Shang Qui, Spleen 5. *The meaning conveyed is of a culmination or high point that provides perspective and from where we can see in all directions...to achieve an internal state of clarity.* (85)

Clever. And that’s exactly what my poet-friend said to me, that the ‘project’ collection is too clever for his liking. Well I like it for its cleverness, and not only that: the language drips with sensuality, leaving a clean image on every page. I’m buying the book for my acupuncturist.

**Heather Taylor Johnson**