

**Agnieszka Salska**

University of Łódź

## Tributes to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz

Semrau, Janusz, ed. *American Literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968–2008: A Selection of Articles*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009;

Kopcewicz, Andrzej. *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction*. Ed. Janusz Semrau. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009;

Semrau, Janusz, ed. "Will you tell me anything about yourself?" *Co-memorative Essays on Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009.

In the course of the past year there came out three intellectually stimulating and carefully edited books dedicated to the memory of Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz (1934–2007). For Polish Americanists, Professor Kopcewicz was the Founding Father. The first Polish professor whose research interest in American literature was formally recognized as a distinctive field of specialization, Andrzej Kopcewicz became the Head of the first Department of American Literature in Poland established at Adam Mickiewicz University. He taught there for many years, acting as academic adviser or external reader for at least two generations of Polish Americanists at practically all universities in the country. His doctoral students and younger colleagues, whose dissertations and habilitationsschriften he supervised or read as a member of their degree committees, have by now become chairs of American Departments at various Polish institutions of higher education and have, in turn, educated their own successors.

Professor Kopcewicz's patience and kindness as a reader and adviser were legendary. So was his erudition and his appetite for intellectually stimulating conversation spiced with a wonderful, sometimes subversively wicked sense of humor. He graciously set off his position of acknowledged intellectual authority with the humility of a scholar attentive to differing opinions and open to learning from his students and younger colleagues. A supportive and inspiring teacher, a generous friend, and a charming person, an academic enamored of his discipline, Professor Kopcewicz walked through the increasingly pragmatic groves of our academe in the otherworldly aura of a man of learning so preoccupied with pursuits of the mind that the practicalities of daily existence seemed but a nuisance. The three

books dedicated to his memory amply testify to the loving admiration and respect he commanded among his students, disciples, friends and colleagues. Together with their contributions, the books collect Professor Kopcewicz's late essays keeping up our conversation with him across the Great Divide.

Presenting the volumes in order of their appearance, let me start with selections from *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*. Intended to emphasize "the continued presence of American literature in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* since its founding in 1968" (editor's Preface), the book is dedicated to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz as "the longest serving member of the editorial board." Opposite the title page of the handsomely published volume, its editor placed a particularly warm portrait of Professor Kopcewicz taken by Jerzy Durczak, probably the best photographic artist among Polish Americanists. Today, the picture must seem unbearably poignant to all of us who had benefited from Andrzej's vast knowledge and unstinting collegial support. The collection features 24 essays by international and Polish authors arranged in order of their appearance in the successive issues of the yearbook. Andrzej Kopcewicz's "Poe's Philosophy of Composition," published in the first issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* opens the selection, especially strong on American poetry. Among the essays on a range of American poets from Dickinson (Magdalena Zapędowska) through the modernists like William Carlos Williams (Marta Sienicka), Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein (Paulina Ambroży-Lis) to contemporaries like David Waggoner (Joanna Durczak), I particularly enjoyed Joseph Kuhn's fine article dealing with the poetry of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, perhaps because, with the fading of New Criticism as the dominant critical approach, their work has undeservedly gone into eclipse as well. Pointing to the frequency with which titles such as "Pastoral," "Cold Pastoral," "Eclogue," or "Idyll" appear in the poetic volumes by Ransom and Tate, Kuhn's article ("Cold Pastoral: Irony and the Eclogue in the Poetry of Southern Fugitives") pays special attention to Tate's "The Swimmers." On the personal level the poem reveals for Kuhn "the terror in the Southern pastoral and its survival in the adult memory" (309) but the poem is also "a kind of historical pastoral" as it moves beyond the ironic yoking of the pastoral mode and the terrors of Southern racial history, "subduing the violence of nature to ritual without losing the rawness of naturalistic image" (310). The struggle of the late modernists (including, for instance, Elizabeth Bishop) to employ irony as a tool of asserting order, without diminishing its distancing and questioning power, seems to me a measure of the heroism of their project. Kuhn's article shows that effort very well indeed.

Among the articles dealing with American prose fiction, Andrzej Kopcewicz's "The Machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas

Pynchon. A Paradigmatic Reading” merits attention. Kopcewicz traces the circulation of the image of the machine in its different embodiments, from Adams’s dynamo through Stockton’s submarine to Pynchon’s rocket, as the ambivalent symbol of modernity and of the changes it brings about in the sphere of culture and morality. The most interesting aspect of Kopcewicz’s analysis is his acceptance of Stockton’s early science fiction novel as an “intertextual partner to both Adams and Pynchon” (191) on the basis of the symbolic merging in each variant of the machine image of sexual and technological energy. The three works differ widely in genre and the targeted audience. The essayistic, philosophical-autobiographical *Education* diagnoses the cultural shift to modernity; Stockton’s once popular short novel (first published in 1887) takes an imaginative leap to 1947 in a popular, simplified narrative form, while Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* attempts to represent the condition of western civilization following World War Two in an intricately fragmented, sprawling novel teeming with characters, subplots, shifts of location, and intertextual clues. In all three texts Kopcewicz uncovers a similar functioning of the machine metaphor which fuses (or displaces?) human re-productive with productive powers. The essay seems to me a significant contribution to the analysis of American cultural mythography.

Kopcewicz’s articles collected in *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction* are linked by the author’s fascination with intertextuality as a critical approach, as a method of virtually living inside the world of literature, for Kopcewicz calls himself a paranoiac of intertextuality. In his persistent tracings of textually incestuous relations in the twentieth century novel in English, *Finnegans Wake* appears as the Great Father Text. Ever so many paths lead back to Joyce and, especially, to *Finnegans Wake*. It is perhaps unsurprising to read Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) alongside *Finnegans Wake* (1939) but Kopcewicz extends the Joycean genealogy viewing Gilbert Sorrentino’s *Mulligan’s Stew* (1979) and Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1967) and *The Dead Father* (1975) as *Finnegans* progeny. It’s not, of course, a question of direct borrowings, rather—of transformations of *Finnegans* motifs and games. As a lover of Barthelme’s stories, I especially appreciated Kopcewicz’s analyses of the American writer’s affinities with Joyce. While we usually think of Joyce’s work as the apex of high modernist literary elitism, we tend to think of Barthelme as the most democratically accessible among the so called American post-modernists like John Barth or Thomas Pynchon. Kopcewicz’s essays linking *Finnegans Wake* and the two novels by Barthelme persuasively demonstrate the erudition and depth of philosophical insight underlying Barthelme’s playfulness and the seemingly unpremeditated lightness of his style. *Intertextual Transactions* opens with an essay on “The Intertextual

Paradigm” which I would like to recommend as introductory reading for graduate students interested in the methodology and practice of intertextual criticism. The essay contains a useful bibliography.

The third of the commemorative books is a collection of essays on Melville’s classic tale “Bartleby the Scrivener” by six Polish authors with Joseph Kuhn, who has taught at Adam Mickiewicz University for so long that one no longer thinks of him as a foreign scholar. The book opens with Andrzej Kopcewicz’s essay on “Dark Rooms and Bartleby. An Intertextual Reading,” an essay included also in the volume of *Intertextual Transactions*. Its author places “Bartleby” in the context of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*, Emerson’s “The Over Soul,” Borges’s story “God’s Script” and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* persuasively integrating Melville’s text into the literary discourse investigating and calling “into question the concept of transcendental self-reliance” across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides.

Among the essays collected in this book, I was particularly moved by Tadeusz Sławek’s meditation on “Bartleby” as an inconclusive consideration of the possible? practicable? desirable? wise? modes of the individual’s being in the world; of being there as an integral, solitary, immutable self but also as a participant in the contractual, changeable social reality. Is any kind of wise compromise between the two equally necessary modes of our being at all possible? What are the consequent dangers and ills of unhesitant commitment to either mode? To my mind, that is the central, agonizing dilemma not only of “Bartleby” but of Melville’s whole work; the most profound source of his creativity but also—of his long creative impotence and personal suffering. Keeping the lawyer in the center of his meditation, Sławek reads the story as a narrative of the essentially prudent, public man’s awakening to the painful imperative of at least acknowledging the reality of existence outside the safety of his smoothly managed, wall enclosed office/ial way of life. Focused at the beginning of the story on functional adjustment to diffuse the conflict, the lawyer appears, by the story’s end, as helplessly exposed to the enigma of being as “a creature,” stripped of protective barriers of possessive authority and pragmatic efficiency, stripped even of bodily appetites, yet paradoxically aware, in confrontation with death, of being as spiritual (in opposition to legal) bond. With his wide erudition and inclination to subtle philosophical reflection, the clean simplicity of Sławek’s style feels noble in its concern for the reader and in its emphasis on the primacy of meaning as opposed to delight in the brilliance of wording. The latter feature mars for me Janusz Semrau’s contribution “‘He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there?’ Domesticating Bartleby.” Seeing Bartleby as a figure “in between,” contesting borders and categorical divisions, Semrau seems to

be thinking along the lines somewhat similar to Sławek's but he appears more interested in displaying verbal virtuosity than in achieving clarity of insight and argument.

Altogether, "*Will you tell me anything about yourself?*" is a fine collection of essays (one would like to mention as well Joseph Kuhn on the functioning of Egyptian-like architecture and references to Egypt in "Bartleby") returning to a classic American text, perhaps as much puzzled over as James's notoriously enigmatic *The Turn of the Screw*. The book insists that, as Marek Wilczyński in his "Bartleby after Lacan" repeats after Derrida (and somewhat helplessly too?), "There is a great deal to be said about the immense text of Melville's." The idea of having several critical voices converge in one volume on a strong canonical text seems to me especially appealing at the time when the sense of the canon has been questioned and eroded and when reading literary classics, if still practiced at all, is not infrequently done with unseemly self-serving intentions.

Bringing the three collections of essays to the attention of the readers of the first issue of *Text Matters*, I also want to join their editor and contributors in remembering Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz, in paying tribute to Him as colleague, friend and role model for, by now, quite a sizable group of Polish scholars and lovers of American literature.

**Richard Profozich**

University of Łódź

## New Media Effects on Traditional News Sources: A Review of the State of American Newspapers

The internet is eating up newspapers. The New Media are having dramatic effects on all parts of American culture and on all types of Old Media, but newspapers seem to be suffering the most. Basically, the internet is taking away newspaper readers, lowering the value of information, and destroying the newspaper's traditional revenue source. The future looks rather grim if you are a newspaper editor, reporter, or reader.

Dave Barry, a respected long-time reporter for the *Washington Post*, stated the situation rather succinctly in a recent article which summarized major trends in 2009, saying, "The downward spiral of the newspaper industry continued, resulting in the firing of thousands of experienced reporters and an apparently permanent deterioration in the quality of American journalism." Referring to the technological trend that is at least partially responsible for the deterioration of American newspapers, he notes that more people are tweeting.

It was way back in 2000 that the number of U.S. households subscribing to internet access outnumbered those subscribing to daily newspapers (Dimitrova and Nezanski, 249). Since then news audience behaviors have changed dramatically. The number of Integrators, those who get their news from a variety of sources, and Net-Users, those who get their news primarily from the internet, have increased, comprising at least 40% of the American news audience ("Key News Audiences"). For those under 30 years of age, a full 64% get most of their national and international news from the internet ("Press Accuracy"). Peter Johnson reports that now "everyone is consuming their own kind of mix of media . . . [so that] most news consumers now get their news from four different types of media in a typical week," referring to a mix of broadcast TV, cable and satellite, radio, newspapers, and the internet. A 2009 Pew Center for the People and

the Press research study concludes that “audiences now consume news in new ways. They hunt and gather what they want when they want it, use search to comb among destinations and share what they find through a growing network of social media” (“The State of the News Media 2009”). It is difficult for traditional, hand-held newspapers to fit into this kind of consumption mix.

The result is a decrease in the scope and quality of newspaper reporting. Home town newspapers now focus more and more on local news, so that national and especially international news is disappearing from their pages. Another Pew study, “The Changing Newsroom: Gains and Losses in Today’s Papers,” explains that the typical paper contains fewer pages, shorter stories, less national and international news, and fewer articles about science, the arts, business or features. Recent studies show that local news has become the strong suit for newspapers. While television remains the main news source for all age groups and all types of news (national, international, and local), newspapers are a close second when it comes to local news, outstripping the internet: 64% get local news from TV, 41% from newspapers, and only 17% from the internet (“Press Accuracy”).

Trust is another area where newspapers, and TV, have an advantage over the internet. In fact, the internet rates lowest among American news audiences when it comes to issues of believability, accuracy, and validity. However, for the media as a whole, the picture is not good. “The public [has] a deep skepticism about what they see, hear and read in the media. No major news outlet—broadcast or cable, print or online—stood out as particularly credible”. On the whole, Americans think that “the news media are politically biased, that stories are often inaccurate, and that Journalists do not care about the people they report on.” Only about a quarter rated the honesty and ethical standards of journalists as high or very high (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

Yet most Americans rate traditional local news sources, local TV news, daily newspapers, and network television, as largely credible and trustworthy. The Pew center reports that 65% rated their daily newspaper as believable, while internet news sources rated only 13% and as low as 4 % (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

One of the biggest effects of the internet on the journalism industry is especially disturbing. It relates to the amount of information available and the way it is presented online. A study by the Associated Press, reported in the Columbia Journalism Review, shows that the information age produces far more information than people can manage or absorb. And it is presented in “a flood of unrelated snippets.” Internet sites contain many distractions, and they tend to compete for attention rather than for quality reporting. This atmosphere creates “news fatigue” and a “learned help-



lessness” where users show a tendency to passively receive news, rather than actively seek it. The result is that “the massive increase in information production and the negligible cost of distributing and storing information online have caused it to lose value.” And the problem is that the lowering of the desire to obtain news can spread to other outlets as well. The AP study concludes that “in order to preserve their vital public-service function—not to mention to survive—news organizations need to reevaluate their role in the information landscape and reinvent themselves to better serve their consumers. They need to raise the value of the information they present . . .”(Nordenson).

With all the changes and complexities in the journalism industry, and the challenges of the information age, of which the internet is a primary element, the bottom line for the industry as a whole, and especially for newspapers, may just be the bottom line. Technological advances have made the gathering and distribution of information easier than ever, but have created “financial pressures [that] sap [industry] strength and threaten its very survival,” so that newspapers face “steadily deteriorating advertising revenues and rising production costs” (“The Changing Newsroom”). The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism concludes that “it is now all but settled that advertising revenue—the model that financed journalism for the last century—will be inadequate to do so in this one. Growing by one third annually just two years ago, online ad revenue to news websites now appears to be flattening; in newspapers it is declining.” In fact, traditional newspaper ad revenue has fallen 23% in the last two years (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

Classified advertising, once the bread and butter of local newspapers, has shrunk by 50%, taken over by web sites such as Craig’s List. Traditional shopping ads are increasingly made unnecessary by online shopping sites. Newspapers, therefore, are especially vulnerable to the decreasing revenue flow and the competition for customers. It is in a race to find new ways to underwrite online news offerings while using the declining revenue from traditional publication practices to finance the transition.

With the issue of trust on their side, traditional Old Media news outlets have managed to hold on to most of their audience so far, even Integrators who use both traditional and internet media sources. Online sites of mainstream Old Media news sources, such as newspapers and television networks, have far larger internet audiences than do New Media sites. But will Old Media outlets, especially newspapers, be able to survive? Or will they be eaten up by the attractive, non-stop flow of flashy information on the web? The final conclusion of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism is: “The problem facing American journalism [and newspapers in particular] is not fundamentally an audience problem or a credibility



problem. It is a revenue problem—the decoupling . . . of advertising from news.” If newspapers can find a way to make money from online news offerings, or build alternative web-based revenue sources, they may stave off the technological mantis from eating them alive.

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**Grzegorz Kość**

University of Łódź

## Review of *The Body*, ed. by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow

After *Community and Nearness* (2007) came *The Body* (2009), the second volume of “Readings in English and American Literature and Culture” series from the University of Opole Press, edited by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow. In preparations for the third heave, the editors, I hear, are now hunting for contributions in American studies on dreamy visions, illusions, reveries, altered states of consciousness and suchlike. But first, teasingly, they feigned the need to map what was once considered the more solid vectors in American culture, those dictated by irreducible bodies, resistant skin and nonnegotiable bodily needs. Of course, their collection shows in so many ways that the old dichotomies—body vs. soul, nature vs. culture—no longer hold.

Gutorow’s elegant introduction lays out the setting for his contributors. Cartesian extrapolations, he says, have long since been replaced by the accounts of the body offered by the late Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The world we are given is always already embodied, our corporeality nothing less than a “medium for having the world.” This also means “the lived body” is not just inscribed but also in the position to negotiate.

After the introduction the reader is plunged into a welter of approaches, specializations and critical temperaments. First in the collection, Ilona Dobosiewicz’s essay is modestly conceived but lucidly written; her treatment of the male body in Victorianism makes the book seem comprehensive. She discusses Thomas Hughes’s Victorian novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* to only evoke the discourses of athleticism and character building as important elements of Great Britain’s imperialist ideology. In the next essay Alicja Piechucka finds traces of *écriture féminine* in little known poems by Hart Crane and Mina Loy. Very solidly and lucidly argued, the essay only left me wondering why *écriture féminine* in the first place, and whether the choice of the poems was not arbitrary and Cixous’ concept made to seem applicable without limits. If Hart Crane and “Stark Major” is in, why not Hemingway and “The Indian Camp,” with its recognition of birth trauma unacknowledged by conventional medicine? Isn’t the woman’s breathy silence behind the doctor’s noisy self-assurances pre-

cisely *écriture* “in white ink”? Or how about Addie Bundren from *As I Lay Dying*? Couldn’t one make, in fact, a similar case for all writing that is solidly modernist? And then, of course, all the studies of woman-identified writing first might have to grapple with the observation of Derrida, Cixous’ friend, that all *écriture* is *écriture féminine*, all writing lapses into the other of logos.

Jerzy Durczak, in a highly readable piece, gropes for the main thematic concerns of Lucy Grealy’s 2003 *autopathography*. The title of Grealy’s novel *Autobiography of the Face* could not have been more apt. Very memorably, Jean Stafford in “The Interior Castle” withdraws from her social face/interface to commune with her disembodied self, re-fleshed with hallucinated tissue but anatomically evasive and safely removed from the reach of the most zealous surgeon. Durczak shows how Lucy Grealy, by contrast, “*was her face, was ugliness.*” Appreciating pain as staring her in the face and therefore more honest than her high school friends, affectionate for hospitals as offering her some respite from the revulsed looks, flaunting her sex appeal to make up for years of neglect, she is thoroughly invested in her face. Warning the reader it will be a venture into an understudied and under-understood subgenre of American autobiography, Durczak gives a detailed review of its sentiments and interests, quotes profusely, but avoids offering any incisive reading.

Boguta-Marchel’s essay on the grotesque in *Blood Meridian* seems a bit uncertain of its purposes. First, it ambitiously sifts through disparate and often verbose theories of the grotesque but rests with the disarming admission the term is “anything but clear.” No wonder the subsequent inventory of the grotesque images in the novel does not add up to much. For instance, the author presents well W. V. O’Connor’s definition of the grotesque as manifesting internally conflicted racism but then drops it as useless for McCarthy’s novel. Similarly Boguta-Marchel finds the existentialist sentiments in the grotesque mode of little help either. The last section on—curiously—the “limitations of visibility” only aggravates the general impression of directionlessness.

We are used to seeing Lacan’s name crop up in the most unlikely places, but Pawel Stachura’s essay is truly imaginative. He finds traces of Lacan’s imagination in the 1950s science fiction by Cordwainer Smith, known among foreign policy scholars as Paul M.A. Linebarger. Lacan read the artistic representations and dreams of bodily disfigurement, evisceration and suchlike as ways of reliving the anxieties and desires involved in the process of ego-formation. We’re hard wired to envision it in terms of a body seeking to ascertain its integrity against the infinite space. Cordwainer Smith’s characters have bodies dislocated, strained to the breaking point to live up to the scale and extremities of space. More interestingly they are rooted in

the same sentiments as Paul M.A. Linebarger's ideas on the psychologies of the Cold War and America's body politic. Stachura's modest claims and imaginative association show that nations and their ambitions are projections of ego-formative anxieties and desires.

Monika Sosnowska argues that Mary Reilly in Valerie Martin's rewriting of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* remembers through her body—her scarred hands and wrists—her father's domestic violence. "The change of optics" in the story to focus on a figure invisible to Stevenson's narrator parallels the change of optics in the theory of the senses from the scopic masculinity to tactile femininity. She writes at great length about the new interest in the symbol of human skin and its various uses as if it was a major recent paradigm shift (Bergson). The reading it yields is sensible but slightly disappointing after this initial fanfare.

Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis's study of the transgressive nature of the spinsterly bodies in the stories by major Southerners is truly imaginative and inspiring. And so is Paweł Marcinkiewicz's analysis of what he calls "lyricism" in Ashbery's late volumes *Where Shall I Wander* and *Worldly Country*. Here the body figures as a mode of the structurally complex *Dasein*. Marcinkiewicz explores less the phenomenological "lived body" than the various ways in which, in a neo-Platonic/Christian fashion, the self inhabits his corporeal frame and often feels weighed down by it. He also explores how the self skeptically revises accumulated knowledge, negotiates alterity, retroactively organizes fantastic snapshots of the past and is headed toward the shrouded future. I can't judge how well he reads the poems but Ashbery's being in the world may be matched by the elaborate architecture of Marcinkiewicz's argument.

So much in the essays, even those which seemed to me less successful, warrants serious attention. They all show that in American studies the "body," after decades of post-dualist sociological and anthropological revisions, is still "alive and kicking." I miss the bios of the contributors to see how the essays sit in their long-term projects and careers, but it is clear that the collection is a major publication on the trope of the body produced by Polish Americanists of late.

# “Taste good iny?”: Images of and from Australian Indigenous Literature

Jared Thomas Speaks with  
Teresa Podemska-Abt

**TPA:** Hi Jared, thanks for dedicating this time.

**JT:** Not at all, a pleasure.

**TPA:** Tell me, have you ever met a Polish person?

**JT:** I’ve had the pleasure of meeting a few Polish people and each and every one of them is very impressive.

**TPA:** Would you tell me about your “meeting” with Polish culture, perhaps you have read some Polish literature?

**JT:** My engagement with Polish people and culture is minimal in comparison with my interaction with people of other cultures but very positive. I first became aware of the plight of Polish immigrants and their culture through a friendship with young Australian Polish theatre director Magdalena Grubski. Stories of Magdalena’s parents’ immigration to Australia and their efforts to carve out a positive life for their family in the face of adversity are remarkable. Magdalena’s parents’ key concern when arriving

to Australia was ensuring that their children become very skilled English communicators. Subsequently Magdalena is today a significant creative and cultural producer living and working in Tasmania. Most recent engagement with Polish people and culture is that of working with Australian Polish students. Similarly, stories of their parents’ immigration to Australia are fascinating and reveal much accomplishment. I enjoy speaking with these students about how they continue to practise Polish culture and how they envisage maintaining cultural practice into the future. In terms of Polish literature and culture, I am aware of its wealth and I hope to, one day, experience it.

**TPA:** What is your definition of literature, especially Aboriginal literature?

**JT:** I grew up in a very working class family with both parents being of Aboriginal ancestry. My maternal grandfather Jim Fitzpatrick was Aboriginal Irish and until his grandparents landed in Australia and demanded that my great grandfather

leave my great grandmother due to her Aboriginality, my grandfather experienced a privileged western education. He embedded in me a respect for the power of language, articulation, story and reading while many of the people I grew up with in the working class town of Port Augusta didn't seem to care much for these things. Due to this, I have always been interested in stories that transcend class and culture, and therefore I value not only the written word as a form of literature but oral stories. My paternal great uncles have been recorded singing stories that continue for weeks, as the stories told of land and legends between the expanses of the Southern and Northern poles of Australia.

In regard to a definition of Aboriginal Australian literature, it is stories written and told by Aboriginal people and stories that discuss any aspect of Aboriginal life, culture and imaginings. In fact, Dreaming stories are still the most important stories told by Aboriginal people because they impart so much valuable knowledge about the land and our culture. I love reading works of fiction where the writers incorporate elements of Dreaming stories, place names and culture. Many fiction writers such as Kim Scott, Terri Janke, Larrissa Behrendt and of course Alexis Wright are doing this so effectively. Wright's writing is infused with cultural knowledge and all narrative is framed by a world in which dreaming continues rather

than being portrayed as a thing of the past.

**TPA:** Where do you think runs the borderline between Australian and Aboriginal literatures, if there is any?

**JT:** The writings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are distinctly different to those authored by non-Indigenous authors because they draw on lived experience as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are many non-Indigenous writers that include Aboriginal characters and issues in their work but without being Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander I think it impossible to truly convey the voice of Indigenous people. And essentially we are speaking from two opposing positions of those who have benefited from colonisation and the dispossessed. The power held by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors to comment on the nature of colonial Australia is inequitable as non-Indigenous writers often write from a cultural standpoint that is valued by the dominating status quo. The role of Aboriginal writers is to challenge the status quo. I would like to see more non-Aboriginal Australian authors acknowledge and surrender their privilege when writing about us and shared experience.

There are works by non-Aboriginal authors that are important discussions of Aboriginal Australia

such as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* by Thomas Keneally. I also like Katherine Susannah Pritchard's *Coonardoo* and *Brumby Innes* as they provide a good description of the attitudes held by non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal Australia. To know of these attitudes is important when considering where barriers exist between people and how to overcome them. Even though Pritchard's representations are sometimes questionable, she was challenging commonly held notions about Aboriginal Australian and white Australian treatment of Aboriginal people. She must be commended for this.

It was unfortunate last year to hear Thomas Keneally say that he regrets writing *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. I think his regret stems primarily from public expression by Aboriginal people and communities that has built over the last ten or so years for people researching and writing about Aboriginal Australia to engage with them when doing so. There are some Aboriginal people that say outright that non-Aboriginal people shouldn't write about Aboriginal Australia, especially Dreaming stories or stories with strong cultural elements. I think that the majority of Aboriginal people understand that it is very difficult to censor writers though and therefore prefer that non-Indigenous people engage with them to ensure that the representation has integrity.

**TPA:** What in your opinion identifies contemporary Australian Indigenous literature?

**JT:** There are so many boundaries being pushed by Aboriginal writers at the moment so innovation is definitely one of the key characteristics of contemporary Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literatures. Brenton Ezra McKenna from Broome who writes graphic novels, for sure, has lately impressed readers. Since 1988 much of the work coming from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia was autobiographical. Today there is more fiction than ever being produced. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are employing genres such as speculative, chick lit, horror and graphic novels to convey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and imaginings. Despite the variety of styles being used by authors between the works, there is a strong link to country, community, culture and family that is conveyed. I feel new work differs to past works as there is greater desire to celebrate, challenge, investigate aspects of Aboriginal life rather than continuing to paint ourselves as victims.

Some early Aboriginal literature—such as works by Oodgeroo Noonuccal,<sup>1</sup> much of whose work I love—reinforces the pervading

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<sup>1</sup> Kath Walker.



attitudes of white Australians or presents inferiority to white people. There are some contemporary commentators that continue to do this but those Indigenous authors that are respected by their peers deconstruct and provide opposition to ideologies that impede the aspirations of Aboriginal Australia. It is very difficult to criticize Oodgeroo though because much of her writing is so beautiful and powerful. Perhaps her prominent attitudes were a political poetic employed to engage and re-educate audiences.

In the last decade writers like Tara June Winch and Kim Scott have emerged. Their writing is so beautifully poetic. Tara is known as a novelist but has been undertaking a mentorship with renowned playwright Wole Soyinka. *Swallow the Air* was an incredible success, and I feel that given her ability, dedication to craft and the experience she is gaining, her future works, like Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, will set new standards.

In terms of innovation, Anita Heiss' chick lit is interesting; it is exposing itself to a big readership. Anita would have to currently be Australia's best selling Aboriginal writer. She has edited important Aboriginal anthologies and produced an engaging critique of Aboriginal literature in recent years. She is so effective because she is one of the key advocates of Aboriginal writing in the country and has a great rapport with writers. I know that Ani-

ta is burning to write more literary works and critique but I think her work is so important because she is doing what most Aboriginal writers set out to do, which is to communicate knowledge about Aboriginal Australia to a large audience so that our future may be brighter.

**TPA:** What does it mean to be an Indigenous writer, and what kind of responsibility does such a role bring? What are the pros and cons of a model author and/or narrator or a character to voice his or her authority?

**JT:** Being a Nukunu writer is a great responsibility as I am often mesmerized by the fact that the act of storytelling is one that assists Nukunu people to forge, maintain and progress an amazing culture that produces profound interaction and love between people and care of the environment. In *Nukunu warrala*,<sup>2</sup> *Yura Muda* is the term for what is commonly referred to as the Dreaming. *Yura* means "man of the earth" and *Muda* means "country." *Yura Muda* means the connection between people and land and land and people and our traditional stories reinforce this connection. Through my writing I attempt to articulate, reinforce and inspire others to activate these connections. I do this in a number of works; my new novel *Calypso Summers*, for ex-

<sup>2</sup> In English—the Nukunu language.

ample, set in the 1980s, follows the journey of a young Nukunu man who generates a good economic base for his family through his knowledge of Nukunu culture and principle. I show how connection to country and the learning of cultural knowledge enriches his life—also by tapping into the mindset of young Nukunu and other Aboriginal readers so that they can see themselves reflected in the character. Once young people can engage with characters and hopefully like them, I can then begin to challenge their views or present them with alternatives.

In the case of “The Healing Tree,” I wanted to create sympathy for Alf so that the young readers, particularly Aboriginal people, could come to understand his experiences and hopefully not repeat them. This short story of course educates non-Aboriginal readers about Aboriginal Australia but it is written firstly for Aboriginal people. Due to the profound effect of colonisation, many Aboriginal youth don’t have the opportunity to engage with role models or learn about history or culture. Art and film fill this void.

Due to the responsibility of my role, my writing is a very collective enterprise. I ensure that many Nukunu people have the opportunity to advise upon and amend representations so that my writing in turn possesses the authority of the group rather than myself. “The

Healing Tree” was built upon actual experiences of an Aboriginal man outside of my group. In order to tell the story I spoke with him about my intent and asked his permission to write the story and to set it within the Nukunu context. I think it is through this process that representations move toward closer representations of “truth” of Aboriginal experience rather than merely being a construct based on personal being, experience and observation of Aboriginal life.

It would be false of me to say that I don’t enjoy the attention that communicating Nukunu culture brings but it is more satisfying to know that my representations are imbued with the principles of the collective and provide a legacy for future generations of Nukunu people and other Australians, both black and white, to engage with country and culture in the most meaningful way.

**TPA:** Your short story “The Healing Tree”<sup>3</sup>—from which I borrowed a phrase for our conversation’s title—shows uncommon gentleness, consideration, subtlety perhaps? Is this story an effect of traumas in your family, or is the narrator of the story a communal Indigenous voice?

**JT:** Firstly, thank you for your

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Jared. “The Healing Tree.” *Meanjin: Best New Writing in Australia* 65.1 (2006): 13–18.

very generous commentary on the work. Perhaps the qualities that you have picked up in the writing derive from a non-judgemental stance that I strive to adopt in relation to most human experience. The story's main focus is that of the effects of alcoholism as alcohol has been used as a device to dispossess people of their connection to land and culture. While Aboriginal people today are less likely to drink alcohol in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, the effects of drinking have touched almost all Aboriginal families, so therefore while the story is told within the Nukunu context, I would like to think that it speaks to many Aboriginal Australians.

Members of my family acknowledge the need to heal from what has happened to us as individuals or as a group. You see, it is important to protect our safety by taking time out and resting and giving back to self. Aborigines often still experience racism and sometimes this can really put you in a bad mental space. I personally still get very angry from time to time by the terrible things that continue to occur to Aboriginal people across Australia, such as the current Northern Territory intervention.

I believe that spending time on country and reconnecting with country and culture is vital in our healing. It is also important that we as Aboriginal people take steps to heal ourselves rather than wait for

racism to disappear and the Government to miraculously introduce a raft of programs that fix everything.

**TPA:** The story starts from the voice of the uncle, the elder who is brought to the scene by Alf's memory of his rebellious youth, and ends up with the wish of an old, sick Alf, for his tormented heart to be cured by *yiritas*, the magic healing trees his father once taught him about. Does this envelope-like structure of the story mean that the most powerful voice of the story is the traditional voice?

**JT:** Simply the answer is yes. I believe that before the advent of capitalism and its historic key driving forces, colonisation and slavery, cultures everywhere had through trial and error over the ages refined ways of living that best utilized resources and accommodated human life and environmental sustainability. I hope to constantly remind people that the forsaking of life models that benefited entire communities and nations today only benefit very few and the only way to maintain human and environmental sustainability is to revert to the traditional or at least underpin the contemporary with traditional values. Alf's journey brings him to the realization of the value of his culture and the traditional.

The challenge for me as a writer with future works is to show how culture can coexist in a contemporary world and create better out-

comes for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

**TPA:** What are lingual realities of Aboriginal literature? Does the use of Aboriginal English or Indigenous languages add to the authority and/or authenticity of narration and/or heroes?

**JT:** I understand how language adds to the authority and authenticity of narration and I guess that my use of the Nukunu language does lend to an authority and authenticity. However, I use *Nukunu warrala* wherever it is appropriate, not to heighten the authority of my writing but to ensure that the Nukunu readers can see their culture reflected in my writing. There are few Nukunu language speakers and my incorporation of *Nukunu warrala* is intended to prolong and revitalize this language. I particularly like using Nukunu words for specific landmarks as it assists in reinforcing connection to our country. The way that Aboriginal English differs to mainstream is probably most evident when watching Aboriginal Theatre. When writing for an Aboriginal theatre company there is more scope than when writing a novel and having to deal with agents and editors to infuse the work with the language, speech patterns and idiosyncrasies of particular cultural groups. Vivienne Clemen’s *Bitin’ Back* is a wonderful read because the dialogue is so rich and

reveals so much about peoples’ values. It is interesting to note that the novel was an adaptation of her play which maybe reinforces my theory.

In my novel for children that will be released by Oxford University Press in 2011, Nukunu ways of thinking are explicit through language. Thirteen-year-old Dallas Davis is asked to assist a scientist in the protection of the *Eucalyptus albens*, an almost extinct eucalypt in Nukunu Country. When the scientist sees a bird fly from a tree, he asks what the Nukunu words are for “tree” and “bird.” He learns that the bird and tree have an individual name but the general term for bird and tree is *ita*.<sup>4</sup> The scientist is confused. Dallas finds this strange and says that they are named the same thing because they can’t live without each other. It is a simple concept but these uses of language really do inform of Aboriginal worldview, in this case the way that Aboriginal people value symbiotic relationships.

**TPA:** Let’s ponder a bit more on powers that interplay within the story’s structure, narration and characters. It seems that Alf, a main character, has got the least authorial powers to be listened to, thus—to speak; is it because he can’t be trusted, can’t set an example for boys? Alf’s voice is weak, deceptive

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<sup>4</sup> A variation of the word *yirta* used in “The Healing Tree.”

and at times bitter, while his unhappy story is told validly. How much didactic, politics and (hi-)story is there in this story?

**JT:** Alf is powerful in that his voice represents the voice of the dispossessed and silenced. The power of his voice lies not in what is present but what is absent. Alf's experiences are common to many Aboriginal people, particularly men who are completely disenfranchised. They have spent their childhood in institutions separated from families and culture and are shunned from society as adults. Itinerant, they seek work or acceptance in places only to be continually rejected. The really sad thing about Alf is that his life began with a really strong cultural base. His father was nurturing as was the land he lived in but the realities of western society for Aboriginal people meant that he was marginalized.

In Aboriginal cultures the right to speak is activated by possession of knowledge, experience, and participation in certain cultural events, age and connection to certain parts of country. Alf is detached from all that is good about his cultural heritage and once he realizes this, it is too late to change his life.

Today, many of the barriers that were in place for Aboriginal people to participate in their culture no longer exist. It is my hope that young people again begin to feel proud about speaking about

culture and knowledge authoritatively. It really is heartening when you hear a young person speaking about their culture and land with passion.

**TPA:** "The Healing Tree" has one of the most beautiful, poetic, soft, loving images of the Australian landscape I've ever read. The picture reveals itself when Alf comes back home, which, shockingly, is a mission! (I'll come back to this Indigenous reality later.) Through Alf's eyes one sees a particular road, hills, ranges . . . This is a land depicted with the eye of a visual artist. I know that you are a man of many gifts—an academic, novelist, play writer, poet, teacher. Do you paint or make films perhaps? I wouldn't be surprised if you did, as many Indigenous writers work simultaneously in different art disciplines. David Page composes, writes, dances, directs, sings; I was amazed with his *Page 8*, brilliantly combining oral traditional storytelling and contemporary genres of drama, musical and pop show; Sally Morgan is an academic and a painter; Sam Watson—an academic teacher, activist, writer, filmmaker; and—on top of it—most Indigenous people speak a few languages. Can you comment on the Indigenous concept of creation, philosophy and beliefs behind talent and on the oral tradition genres in contemporary Indigenous artistic rendering?

**JT:** My girlfriend reckons I write schmaltzy pop songs or some such thing and she’s probably on the money. Traditionally Nukunu children would have the opportunity to partake in all aspects of social life and once a talent was discovered, this would be fostered. I experiment in a lot of artistic mediums and have a healthy appreciation for all. I have made some documentaries relating to life and culture of Nukunu people and have been involved in various capacities in the making of big Australian feature films. I paint a little but do this more for personal enjoyment rather than for public exhibition.

My daughter Tilly Tjala is showing great promise as a singer, actress, activist and storyteller—and I must encourage all of these things.

The semiotician Marshal McLuhan is renowned for the phrase “the medium is the message” and I think that Aboriginal artists such as Gordon Hookey and Richard Frankland have truly adopted this philosophy. Richard is an amazing singer/songwriter, author and filmmaker and Gordon is the master of combining text and image.

My parents both dabble in painting landscapes and one can’t help but be inspired and motivated by the wealth of artistic talent amongst Aboriginal Australia. Most of my professional life has consisted of facilitating the work of Aboriginal artists of all forms.

**TPA:** Who is the Indigenous writer/artist? Is s/he a bard? What is her/his assigned place within the Indigenous society? Is s/he a special person, what status does s/he have? Also, how is an image of an artist constructed by Indigenous art and literature?

**JT:** “Our future is our culture and our culture rests in the hands of our storytellers.” This is a profound statement shared with me by women of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands that I feel sums up perfectly the reverence Aboriginal people have for our storytellers. Aboriginal paintings, for example, do not exist in isolation from Dreaming or cultural stories. Importance is attributed to paintings in respect to the importance of the story or the degree of knowledge possessed by the person painting/telling the story.

There are many Aboriginal people that possess great storytelling ability but I am so often overwhelmed by the power of stories told me every day by Aboriginal people about everyday life or cultural experience. It is for this reason that many Aboriginal people with writing ability begin their writing careers by documenting the stories of family members. Our lives are so rich with story. All artistic statements stem from story. So in Aboriginal culture storytellers are considered the most important of artists and perhaps the

most esteemed people in the community.

**TPA:** Let's go back for a moment to the images of landscaping which—from my readings—are particularly vivid in A. Wright's *Carpentaria*, K. Scott's *True Country* or Herb Wharton's *Unbranded*. Land is often a predominant feature in many Indigenous literary works. It represents Indigenous mythology and philosophy. How does the literary concept of Land represent Indigenous culture, philosophy, beliefs and spirituality? How do you incorporate this concept in your work? Is it important to you, in what way?

**JT:** I know that I see Nukunu land differently than non-Nukunu and it is important to me to articulate the way that I see and think about country. My traditional country is more than plants, animals and geological formations; it is full of story, my lifeblood, ancestry and nourishment. It is the umbilical cord to the inner workings of self. There is a story for everything that exists on country and these stories highlight the way people interact with and see the world.

The film *Ten Canoes* for example focuses on stories relating to parts of the landscape that in turn underpin an all-encompassing worldview. Nukunu people call each little story relating to land, plants, animals and objects *Dangora*. Each story needs to be considered in relation to each other and

it is through these stories that understandings and discourses evolve.

There's a small section in my new novel *Calypso Summers* where the central character Calypso is travelling with his girlfriend and they see two *guldass*, sleepy lizards. Calypso's cousin informs that *guldass* always walk together in the direction of water and they mate together for life. This brief discussion about the lizards reveals Nukunu philosophies about love and how knowledge relating to animals enables people to live with their landscape.

Alexis Wright's literary power not only lies in communicating the way that Aboriginal people view country but western objects.

**TPA:** Evidently, Land is represented in a variety of artefacts that also constitute politics. Alexis Wright said: "I believe that Aboriginal government can work in Australia . . . I feel that the quest for Aboriginal government is relevant and important for the future stability of our people . . . and that I can use whatever skills I have as a writer to portray in literature how this dream could be lived."<sup>5</sup> What is your understanding of this opinion and in what way would you support it?

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, Alexis. "Weapon of Poetry." *Overland* 193 (2008): 19. Also available at <[http://web.overland.org.au/?page\\_id=576](http://web.overland.org.au/?page_id=576)>.



**JT:** It is very important to me that successful Aboriginal governance is achieved. Pre-colonial Aboriginal government must have been very effective as we all share the Dreaming and it is known that many groups came together for ceremony and to trade and share resources. The principles of our governance are known to many but there are pressures that impact on the effectiveness of people to work together. I love reading books like Kevin Gilbert's *Because a White Man'll Never Do It* that examine Aboriginal governance and how Aboriginal people are subject to government policy.

I feel that it is critical for Aboriginal writers to further project a positive vision of how Aboriginal Australia can look like. Hope is critical to all people and where problems appear insurmountable, it is important for people to know that they can succeed. Thus, self-determination is very important to Aboriginal people. The concept of it means that we have access to good housing, health and education but are free to maintain and reinvigorate culture and language.

My next novel will be about how life could be if Aboriginal people, in this case the Nukunu, live the life we wish, devoid of opposition from government and western notions of appropriate education, spirituality and aspiration being imposed upon us.

**TPA:** Aboriginal literature sometimes “paints” land with the shapes

of a woman. Divine Serpent, as I understand it, is a manifestation of Indigenous cosmologies but also has a strong feminine element in it. What kind of mythical, metaphorical and/or symbolic connections between such images of land and ancestral snakes can be made?

**JT:** In Nukunu cosmology, there is both male and female serpent ancestors. The serpents are even believed to change gender for particular purposes. It is Nukunu belief that the Flinders Ranges and other geography such as creeks and islands along the coast were created by these ancestors. Wongihara is a significant site on Nukunu Country and it is the place where the snake ancestor gave law to Nukunu people. *Wongihara* literally means “where the snake spoke” and the Nukunu are often referred to as “the snake people.”

Stories about the deeds, trials and tribulations and creations of the rainbow serpent are very common amongst Aboriginal groups. I can't speak for other authors but when I write about the landscape in connection with serpents, it is because it is Nukunu belief that serpents formed the landscape and it certainly looks as if it was created by giant serpents. There is country in the Flinders Ranges that actually looks feminine and masculine in accord with the gender of the serpent that travelled through the landscape.

**TPA:** There are no women in your story. Why?

**JT:** There are strong women in other of my stories and Nukunu culture is based upon a matrilineal social organization so it is something that I have upmost respect for. “The Healing Tree” is a story pitched at young men. I have wonderful aunts that I would like to write about and some of the documentaries that I have made capture these characters.

**TPA:** You have mentioned Anita Heiss’ chick novel. Her heroine, Alice, is unusually strong. A free, knowledgeable woman. To what extent is such a heroine possible in real Indigenous life? What is her cultural archetype? Who is the boss in Indigenous cultures’ relationships? Angel Day and Normal Phantom, a couple from *Carpentaria*, live in separate worlds, well, men’s and women’s worlds. “Only when she had gone, was he able to understand that the woman had always been a hornet’s nest, waiting to be disturbed.” How close to the cultural roles of a man and a woman in the real world is Phantom’s reflection?

**JT:** With colonization, the gender roles of men were severely disrupted in comparison to those of women. The roles of men included conducting rituals, educating and nurturing children, and of course hunting. The basis for this activity is land as

all ritual and education related to it. Women performed similar roles to men but of course they had children and gathered for the family. I think it is easier for women to enjoy some of these traditional roles within a contemporary context whereas men have been disenfranchised to a different degree. In my family women have always been strong, tradition and family strong. This strength is the bonding element that has kept families together.

**TPA:** Some people say that Indigenous cultures of Australia have survived and are sustaining due to Indigenous women’s extreme abilities to adapt to tragic/harsh conditions, their procreation power and the status within their respective communities. It seems that the authority of Angel Day comes from such powers, and—in regard to her fate—from the element that unites the real with unreal, the real and abnormal, and in consequence—the normal and paranormal. The line between different states of our individual and collective human reality (physical, metaphysical, cosmic) is also expressed by the concept of Dreaming/Dreamtime that realizes itself in everyday life. How does this ontologically and epistemologically complicated, complex female character comply with the Indigenous present and traditional worlds? Where is the demarcating line between the real and fictional in Aboriginal literature?

**JT:** I think I may have responded to this in my last comment . . . Anyway, *Angel Day* is extremely strong; she tries to survive in her very hostile environment. The real and fictional in Aboriginal literature? I think I will have to give it further thought. I think the real is always enclosed in fiction. Importantly, I don't think of the Dreaming so much as the metaphysical but rather the pragmatic. If we disconnect the belief that mythical ancestors created certain landscapes or performed certain activities during creation time, the stories that exist from these “myths” still provide a wonderful blueprint for human interaction. The Dreaming does provide a wonderful lens through which to negotiate the world and I believe that some Aboriginal people believe in the Dreaming wholeheartedly and others believe in the power of the stories deriving from it.

**TPA:** While reading Indigenous literary works I am most often on the verge of politics. Politics and ideas reside within the actual context of civilizations, and at the same time they co-create cultural reality. As a result of Indigenous subjugation, Indigenous Peoples lost their status, and—to some degree—their cultural identity. But any acculturation process is always bilateral, thus it also affects the conqueror. On the verge of both cultures a new civilization group has been created; on one hand this group pursues its original roots,

on the other—it leans on its acculturation; henceforth a new culture, such as Indigenous contemporary literature has been created. How important is this kind of cultural flow, osmosis, infiltration of those two worlds in your life and literary work, and in Indigenous literature?

**JT:** The notion of “being caught between two worlds” is commonly bandied around in reference to Aboriginal Australia. I would like to see a reversion to traditional principles applied in the contemporary but the reality is that many Aboriginal people through circumstance embrace elements of western culture. I want to see non-Indigenous people acculturate Aboriginal worldviews and ways of living. For this to occur, it requires a movement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people becoming politicized and contesting the context of our “civilization.”

**TPA:** What do you think about the Australian literocritical postcolonial discourse? In what way does it benefit Indigenous authors and literature? Who is empowered by this discourse, and to what extent do Indigenous authors use it in their creative works? What, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages of postcolonial literary interpretation strategies to Indigenous literary works?

**JT:** This is a very difficult question to answer because I have to con-

sider it from the position of teacher and student, writer and peer. First I have to declare that many Aboriginal people are very dubious about the term “post-colonialism.” There are so many things happening in Australia that highlight that colonisation is still a force in motion and Aboriginal people are in no better position to speak than we were twenty years ago. Now, Australia is still the only country in the Commonwealth not to have a treaty with its Indigenous people and the advancements and institutions gained by Aboriginal people from the late 1960s were seriously eroded during the years of the Howard government. The Rudd government continues to diminish Aboriginal self-determination, with support for the Northern Territory intervention being the best example of this. Briefly, the intervention was implemented to stop so-called endemic sexual abuse of children and alcoholism reported by media. The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended and the army was sent in to support the government taking administrative control of seventy-three communities. Consecutively, doctors began examinations and a handful of sexual abuse victims were revealed. More disturbing was that 80% of the children examined had severe health problems such as trachoma and otitis. This hasn't been heavily reported in mainstream media and the question “how did Australians let the health of chil-

dren become so poor?” was never asked. Government spending on the intervention is \$1.5 billion, yet substance abuse is up 77% and 13% more infants have been hospitalized for malnutrition.

Subsequently, communities are being told they will not receive housing until they sign forty year leases over their land. The issuing of mining leases has significantly increased during this period. For people in these communities, the exercise of colonial power is in full effect and it is due to this type of mistreatment of Aboriginal people and communities that the term “post-colonial” is abstract to Aboriginal Australia.

Now, postcolonialism is a forced concept and not a reality. It certainly isn't one invented by Aboriginal writers in relation to their work. Some see it as referring only to works being written in a time where colonialism has passed and there are more opportunities for minorities and the marginalized to speak. If we look at postcolonial literature as that whereby Aboriginal writers are trying to articulate identity and reclaim our past, again, the postcolonial theory becomes problematic as it has the potential to give rise to essentialist notions of Aboriginality; essentialism is what many Aboriginal writers challenge. You see, Aboriginal writers are largely responding to colonisation and being oppressed, mistreated and misrepresented and exposing silence and invisibility.

I think that Aboriginal creative writers are more concerned with introducing people to our epistemologies rather than considering western theory. Conversely, postcolonial literary interpretation strategies can be useful in developing an understanding of works of art but I am often bemused when learning how others have deconstructed my work. They either make the work seem really more sophisticated than it is or they miss the point of it altogether.

I'm interested in poststructuralist theory but would, for the most part, like to think it's only a subconscious consideration when writing creatively. My experience is that many Indigenous people, not only Aboriginal Australians, are interested in the way that language exposes our ideological values.

**TPA:** There is a lot of debating on the issue of appropriation in local Australian literocritical discourse. Obviously Indigenous writers use Western literary techniques and devices, extending and innovating them, developing new narratives and poetics, incorporating Indigenous languages, accommodating Standard English to convey Indigenous culture-bound specifics and meanings. How do you see this problematic? Also, the editing and publishing discourses seem to be associated with the usage of language and narrative, but is there a political censorship in Australia in regard to Indigenous literature? In Poland

writers of the socialist/communist era had to use specific codes and literary devices for their messages to be decoded by readers.

**JT:** Without a doubt, Aboriginal writers and people generally colonize and use English words in unique ways. There are many words that exist within the Aboriginal vernacular such as *maial* meaning “native” or used to imply a backwardness, and *gammon* meaning “humbug” or “deception” that are today only used by Aboriginal people. These are old English words that many Aboriginal people believe to be Aboriginal words. “Deadly” is such a commonly used word, which is used to mean very good, impressive or excellent. My friend and fellow playwright Cathy Craigie believes Aboriginal Australia adopted this application of the word from the Irish.

In regard to censorship of Indigenous language and culture, my experience is that when working with mainstream agents and editors, Aboriginal writers can have a battle on their hands to convey meaning. Some things just don't make sense to non-Aboriginal readers unless you live within the culture. For example, in the novel that I am writing, my agent finds it odd that the main Aboriginal character Calypso has never had a relationship with an Aboriginal girl. However, it is common for many Aboriginal families to be cautious of their children having sexual relationships with other Ab-

original people. Traditionally, marriages were based on a strict social organization and, with the effects of the Stolen Generations, it becomes much more difficult to ascertain who is and isn't related to you.

I'm interested in writing another play in collaboration with an Aboriginal theatre company. This time I want to ensure that the message is targeted at an Aboriginal audience rather than striving to educate non-Aboriginal people about our issues and interests. I imagine this will provide me with a sense of liberation that I haven't experienced through my writing to date.

**TPA:** Given Indigenous writers' opinions on Indigenous literature as mirroring the truths of Indigenous communities' reality,<sup>6</sup> in what way should one read Indigenous literature, through what paradigm or prism? What does this "reality" mean in a literary work?

**JT:** Aboriginal people are so diverse and, like in all communities, there is always a range of opinions in relation to certain topics amongst people. I certainly don't agree with the viewpoints of all Aboriginal people. In terms of looking at reality and truth in literature, this is a very difficult task. In addressing any type of question, I'd encourage people

to check facts, bias and agenda and see if there is some type of consensus among people on certain issues rather than assuming that a text is a construct of a particular individual's "reality."

There are those non-Aboriginal historians and commentators that assert that colonization of Australia was devoid of massacres and that the Stolen Generations didn't exist and a debate on this issue is termed the "history wars."

It is so important that Aboriginal people and their writers and artists speak back to this view and that those stories known amongst the mob about early and more recent acts of injustice are shared.

**TPA:** Can you tell what is the picture of the Indigenous person in Aboriginal literature? How do you portray the indigene, in your literary and academic work? How does the literary Indigenous change the stereotype of the native that we know from Australian literature and art?

**JT:** My characters usually possess characteristics of a range of people that I know. Again, Aboriginal people are so diverse today and many participate in a range of subcultures. For instance, there are Aboriginal surfers, punks and business women. There is no one homogenous group. The thing that we all have in common is the experience and effects of colonization. And then I'd

<sup>6</sup> Explicit in Alexis Wright's, Anita Heiss', Denis Walker's and Jack Davis' public addresses, just to name a few.

say that the second most prevalent commonality between Aboriginal people is that many of us share a belief in the Dreaming from which a respect for the environment and people flows.

**TPA:** Indigenous cultural roots were cut drastically. How does written literature and art attempt to find and pass on something else, traces of the oldest world? From where/what is writers' and artists' knowledge obtained? Can one recreate roots? Obviously, there are cave drawings, songs, (hi-)stories, but are they enough to reconstruct what was lost?

**JT:** There are many Australians that love to remind Aboriginal Australians of how much we have lost because it legitimizes further taking of land and resources, etc. It eases people's guilt. My experience is that even amongst the Aboriginal groups' earliest dispossessed, there still exists a very rich cultural knowledge evident through the proliferation of traditional stories written in language and rich visual arts practice. In all Australian capital cities, Aboriginal people of the area possess traditional stories and practise dance and art. So despite the huge changes that have happened to the landscape, story and knowledge has survived.

The last thirty years has seen a revitalization of Aboriginal culture because people are no longer

subject to policy and legislation that prevents them from engaging with family and therefore culture. A new cultural pride is emerging and many non-Indigenous people are supportive of this development realizing that Aboriginal culture is the one truly unique thing about Australia.

In terms of recreating roots, I think this is possible. For example, one can learn to speak another language at any time in their lives if a speaker of the particular language exists to teach the student. However, it takes much time to become acculturated. Both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous recordings of Aboriginal culture and language can be a very useful tool in the revitalization of cultures.

**TPA:** Can we concentrate on myth for a little while? There are so many things I would like to ask you about, and so small the space we can share with others on the pages of a periodical! Naturally, a reader can only read a literary myth, as known for example from Wright's or Watson's novels. This is so because myth always touches these areas of cultures that are best represented by the concept of sacred/secret. Both authors widely call upon myth as a constructing element of the presented worlds of their novels. I understand that Indigenous myth is living; it is believed in, lived by Indigenous people today. Don't you think that this can cause a bit of confusion to the outside culture reader? How would they recognize that



the myth is real, that it is not fiction but the way of living? The same question would apply to, for example, Dreaming or Walkabout . . .

**JT:** I always find this question a bit perplexing because it is so easy for me to understand the role of myth in other cultures and their literature and to respect it as a framework from which people live their lives. Dreaming or *Yura Muda* in the Nukunu context forms the framework for how Nukunu people live. Whether or not giant mythological characters formed the Australian landscape is irrelevant, what is important is recognizing that the values inherent in the stories provide a very important framework for looking at and engaging with the world.

The term “walkabout” is commonly used in an insulting manner by Australians. Many Australians use the term to describe someone who acts in a reckless or aimless fashion. However, Walkabout is similar to a pilgrimage whereby Aboriginal people would learn and reinforce spiritual values by visiting and paying homage to sacred sites. The act was given negative connotations to support slavery. Walkabout was a spiritual duty but it was ridiculed because it was seen as an activity that diminished servitude to white station owners or “employers” and therefore slowed Australia’s “growth.”

**TPA:** At the beginning of our conversation I said I’d come back to the

gloomy/shocking element of the presented reality of “The Healing Tree,” the one that does not stop striking me, namely, a mission being called home. Given the history of Indigenous people in Australia, I understand it, as I can comprehend orphanages being called home. But it still shocks me that such places may ever be called home! Anyway, what else is being pictured as home in Indigenous literary and art works?

**JT:** Home to me is the country from which thousands of generations of my ancestors were born and lived. The country nurtured and provided everything that one needs.

There are many “returning home” narratives being written by Aboriginal people such as Terri Janke, Larrissa Behrendt, Fabienne Bayet-Charlton. Even the film version of Jimmy Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* directed by Rachel Perkins can be viewed as a “returning home” narrative.

There are also many representations of home not being places but rather family and people and I certainly feel like I am home when I am with family, whether we are on country or not.

**TPA:** Some say that the true homeland of people is language. Isn’t this true that the true motherland for Indigenous persons are their Land, Dreamtime and Walkabout?

**JT:** This is a problematic concept because many Aboriginal people do

not speak their native language, at least not fluently. However, not being able to speak language does not diminish one's Aboriginal identity. I feel very proud that I can name country in my traditional language and it does make me feel more connected to place. It's a good feeling to be able to name country in the same way that my ancestors did thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans to Australia.

**TPA:** Many Indigenous writers/artists, as you, are lucky to entertain crosscultural family, social, professional, creative relations. Can you tell how Indigenous visual images, knowledge, movement/dance, sound/music/silence converse in your work and life? I refer to a concept of oneness of an act and acting, a person with a being. Does “to see” mean “to hear, paint, and speak”? Or perhaps “to hear” means “to speak, paint and see”? In other words, where is there for you a separating line between a drawing and a word, acting and being/existing in art and literature? And in (Aboriginal) literature and life?

**JT:** I've had moments to really consider who I am and how I live, knowing that I could change these things if I desired. I feel blessed that my passion for Aboriginal culture and how I approach life has never wavered. My engagement isn't habitual; it's innate. I am a writer but I can't separate other forms of Abo-

riginal art and culture from the way I see, understand and experience. I believe that Nukunu culture provides a good basis also to venture out into the world and interact with people of other cultures because it teaches reciprocity, that worldviews differ between groups, this is acceptable and something that one can benefit from.

I have faith in my dreams that Nukunu and other Aboriginal people will again live our lives to the fullest.

**TPA:** Thank you, it has been a fascinating trajectory. We could certainly say “a very intense but short relationship,” but for sure a crosscultural one! *It taste good iny?*

**JT:** Hope that my insights have been inspiring to you to further read and engage with Aboriginal Australia and I hope to one day visit Poland and experience first hand Poland's rich artistic and literary tradition. For now, *nbakadja, widzenia i dziękuję.*

# Engaging the “Forbidden Texts” of Philosophy

Pamela Sue Anderson Talks to Alison Jasper

**AJ:** In reference to your work in feminist philosophy of religion, Tina Beattie implied that you were perhaps less willing to explain the “particularity” of your “own religious positioning” (Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism* 76–80), or I might say, feminist genealogy than your critique of “male-neutral” would seem to require (cf. Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 13, 142–48). Would you be prepared to say something about your own background and the relationship of what you see as your philosophical project to, for example, Christianity?

**PSA:** Yes. In the course of this interview I will position myself in relation to my own religious background, or if you like, my “feminist genealogy.” Yet, if you don’t mind, it is important to admit that over the years I have found theologians who object to the lack of any explicit religious positioning given to my own yearning, very frustrating! Generally, this objection has seemed to either misunderstand or dismiss the nature of my feminist struggle. In particular, this has obscured my struggle against an intransigent epis-

temological obstacle which blocked women’s claims to think, to know or—simply—to have ideas of their own in philosophy.

For example, Beattie recognizes that the heart of my feminism is philosophical; and yet she challenges my philosophical method for being blind to my own religious positioning (Beattie 78). Her challenge is clear: it is that I do what I accuse male philosophers of doing when I employ philosophical methods as if these methods are neutral of my own presuppositions and, in particular, my religious positioning. Beattie also recognizes my determination to uncover and to struggle with the myths of gender identity embedded in the texts of philosophy of religion; and yet she objects to my bracketing off the specificities of my own religious desire, in order to explore the resistance to gender-oppression within other religious traditions, notably in Hindu practices of *bhakti* (Beattie 77; cf. Mukta, *Up-holding the Common Life*).

After having been trained to read philosophical texts in the 1980s with the hermeneutic insight of Paul Ricoeur, I began to see the vital need

in the early 1990s for more than Ricoeurian hermeneutics. The need was for a method which enabled feminists to learn from the gender practices of other cultures, especially through the religious matters of texts. While Ricoeur’s hermeneutics had already made me a thinker sensitive to damaging presuppositions, or “prejudices,” in philosophical and theological thought, I became explicitly aware of the serious and generally hidden obstacle to recognizing oppressive gender-bias not only in reading Hartsock’s “The Feminist Standpoint,” but in both reading and discussing Sandra Harding’s “feminist standpoint epistemology” (Harding, *Whose Science?*). As a result, I worked to develop an epistemological method, employing Harding’s “strong objectivity” and “self-reflexivity” explicitly for a feminist philosophy of religion (Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 70–80).

Harding argued that objectivity in epistemology remains “weak” as long as we are unaware of our own privileged positions in making claims to knowledge but, equally, of our reasons for action and religious practices. We can only acquire more objective knowledge by “thinking from the lives of others” who occupy positions on the margins of the dominant epistemology (Harding, *Whose Science?* and “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology;” cf. Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 67–87). The feminist task is not thinking that we have neutrality, but instead is strug-

gling to see ourselves reflexively and less partially; that is, to see an alternative account of oneself as another. We gain less partial knowledge both of ourselves and of others not by claiming absolute objectivity but by working towards the engaged vision of a feminist standpoint.

In the first instance, of course, Hartsock and Harding were articulating the standpoint of women in philosophy. But to uncover gender oppression in the social and epistemic relations of philosophy, each of these feminist philosophers sought “a feminist standpoint” which was not simply that of being born a woman. Questions of sexually specific desire were not generally raised by the feminist standpoint epistemologists. Instead such questions were often left to feminist psycholinguists (like, for example, Luce Irigaray who was read by Beattie) and to queer theorists. As a feminist philosopher of religion, I gained much from considering these different sorts of feminist questions, while working to avoid contradictions. However, my readers did not always agree with, or follow, this ambition.

AJ: Perhaps, nevertheless, readers might be as interested in the context within which you have come to this philosophical position as in its nuances.

PSA: I grew up in the Lutheran “mid-west” of the United States,

in a suburb of Minneapolis. I won a scholarship to study Mathematics at St Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. In fact, by the time I arrived at St Olaf, my real passion was French language and literature, but I was told that I needed more than “French.” When I arrived in Oxford, having spent some time in France, my plan was to combine my interests in French with Philosophy by working on the French philosopher, Ricoeur, whose hermeneutic philosophy I’ve already mentioned.

In the 1980s, Ricoeur was very little read by Oxford philosophers, and I had to struggle to persuade my tutors in Philosophy to take my interest in his writings seriously (while today international societies for Ricoeur studies flourish). On the one hand, Oxford analytic philosophers were suspicious of Ricoeur’s apparent sympathies with theology and literature; on the other hand, Christian philosophers of religion did not see Ricoeur’s philosophy meeting the rigorous standards of philosophical argumentation for Christian theism.

To make matters worse for my dual interests in French and in Philosophy, many of those people close to me within the Lutheran tradition which linked St Olaf College (as a very highly respected Lutheran liberal arts college) and Mansfield College (as the only Oxford college which had a Fellow’s post in Lutheran Theology) would never recognize my intellectual passions

as suitable for “a girl” from Minnesota, suitable for the heartland of Lutheran Protestantism! Looking back what made this negative judgement of unsuitability clear to me were dismissive comments about my enigmatic behaviour, puzzled expressions, teasing, general lack of understanding of, or conversations about, my goals. I became used to expecting disapproval and accepted the lack of support I found from the religious authorities in the colleges which, in turn, obscured other personal and intellectual support.

In the light of this religious background, you could say that I came, eventually, to feminist philosophy of religion via my consistent experiences of resistance to having “ideas of my own” as a woman who sought to think philosophically rather than conform to the mid-western Lutheran image of theology and of Christian gender stereotypes; for example, being “a good girl” as both a wife and a mother was never my gender ideal. Even if this ideal could have been combined with a career, I did not see things that way. The attraction of French language, culture and literature provided me with the freedom to question my upbringing (perhaps, another language or culture would have served a similar purpose). Confronting cultural differences provided an opportunity to think beyond the perspectives which had been imposed in being brought up Lutheran in Minnesota. It could not be true that the best life was to

be Lutheran and to “settle down” in the Twin Cities (i.e., Minneapolis-St Paul, Minnesota and Mansfield). The attraction of philosophy lay in the possibility of thinking for myself, while also reflecting on life together with other people.

So, in reply to your question and Beattie’s request to be honest about my religious positioning, I admit that this background has been an obstacle and a problem for me as a woman and a free thinker. Philosophy and European culture provided a framework for the reflexivity of both my philosophical and my personal thinking. Feminism added to the intellectual task of philosophical self-reflection the possibility of empowering women (including myself) to not accept epistemic injustice; that is, to not exclude subjects on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or religion. Feminist philosophy continues to offer an antidote to certain kinds of dishonesty and self-deception, especially to excessive piety.

**AJ:** So what was it like for a young woman philosopher in those student and early career years?

**PSA:** I would say, in the philosophical terms of Michèle Le Doeuff, “the primal scene”<sup>1</sup> of my education

as a woman in philosophy arose in resisting the Lutheran norms of piety which I found burdensome at St Olaf and Mansfield Colleges. My primal scene came when a voice inside my head paralyzed my well-warranted confidence, saying, “Lutheran girls don’t have ideas of their own, they are respectful of (male) authority!” To silence this inner noise, I fled that “sacred” scene to a different place, even though I would find other forms of patriarchy in philosophy. Yet the oppositional voice in my own head would keep me running defiant of the gender norms of a pious upbringing, “. . . and girls don’t ‘go off’ to European cities, foreign institutions and other cultures, searching in libraries and hiding away in impenetrable books.”

Nevertheless, some sense of belief that I could think for myself and make a valuable contribution in life to women and men in philosophy (of religion) remained. My desire to make a critical contribution as a woman in philosophy would grow gradually stronger. But I have never had an easy relation to the branch of philosophy to which I am most often associated: that is, to the philosophy of religion. I am constantly uncovering problematic norms such as the omni-attributes of the traditional theistic God which still dominate the field. The world of Oxford

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<sup>1</sup> For my more detailed discussion of “the primal scene” in Le Doeuff, see Anderson, “Michèle Le Doeuff’s ‘Primal Scene:’ Pro-

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hibition and Confidence in the Education of a Woman.”

philosophy had prepared me for the resistance I would continue to experience in the search for my first permanent job in teaching philosophy. I gave tutorials in modern philosophy at Mansfield, but to appease my parents I went on the job market at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division meetings in 1990 and 1991. In retrospect, it is predictable that I would have been competing with other philosophers of religion and especially, in the USA, from Notre Dame University where philosophers are trained in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of religion; that is, trained specifically and rigorously in the Christian philosophy of religion which remains the privileged tradition in Oxford.

An ongoing failure to be recognized as a woman philosopher—and not merely as someone from St Olaf College doing Christian philosophy of religion—was palpable and predictable. In any event, it was, then, a matter of the very highest significance to me at the beginning of my career that I defend myself and succeed from the beginning in this world which remains not only highly competitive (and elitist), but often very hostile to women. There was a need to convince these men and myself not only that as a woman I could be “up there” with the very best of philosophers, but that my choice of Ricoeur, with his, to some, unconventional literary, theological and scriptural interests,

was fully worthy of the philosophical attention men were lovingly devoting to a canon of dead male philosophers who, in comparison with Ricoeur—to say nothing of Hartsock, Harding and Le Doeuff—had far less to say to me at that point.

Already during those early years in Oxford, I learned to compromise my passions in order to achieve my goal of becoming a professional philosopher. For instance, Ricoeur as a living French philosopher could not be studied on his own, but only with the legitimation of the canonized figure of a dead male philosopher: Kant who would—and ironically to my mind—become a highly contentious figure, courting the disdain of all postmodern theorists, as well as that of the radically orthodox, the conservative and the neo-Barthian theologians. However, if the Oxford tutor’s intention in having me study Kant was to curb my ambition or demonstrate that I wasn’t up to the task of philosophy, his aim failed: and I took on Kant with a will to prove any philosophical doubters wrong!

It was this sort of academic climate that did eventually facilitate my encounter with feminism; first, through Harding during the short period of time I spent teaching at Delaware and second, through Le Doeuff for years right up to the present time. I was a woman in philosophy, engaging the “forbidden texts” of the male philosophers, but also going beyond this to read and un-



derstand the critical work of women like Harding herself who introduced me to the writings of Alison Jaggar, Seyla Benhabib and the early work of Judith Butler on issues of the self. The latter two feminists, along with Harding, gave me a first taste of the debates over the postmodern “death” of the self, of metaphysics and of history. The timely question was: can feminism be compatible with postmodernism?

Le Doeuff would become more significant as I continued to read and be shaped by the subtle and witty insight found in her *Philosophical Imaginary* and *Hipparchia’s Choice*. From her texts, I’ve gained many skills as a philosopher but in particular Le Doeuff’s incisive readings of the history of philosophy gave new confidence to think and have ideas. Her third book, *The Sex of Knowing*, offers additional ground to discover those women whose ideas have been “disinherited” by the tradition of philosophy excluding women. The image of the female Alexandrian philosopher and astronomer, Hypatia, who fell victim to a murderous Christian mob for celebrating her knowledge and intellect too publicly as a woman, was first introduced to me by Le Doeuff (*The Sex of Knowing* 112–14). Le Doeuff’s text on female disinheritance in philosophy appeared well before *Agora* became a popular film about the female philosopher and martyr Hypatia in the cinema of Europe and the USA. In spite of

many similar cautionary tales, none of the inspiring women uncovered by Le Doeuff in the history of philosophy are daunted by the task of challenging men on their own intellectual turf.

**AJ:** In 1993 you took up a post at Sunderland University. How did you find working in a new university in the NE of England?

**PSA:** My particular approach to philosophy—through Kant and Ricoeur—marked me as unconventional and difficult to place before I went to Sunderland. My goal in working in the NE of England was to gain the freedom to write, teach and publish in feminist philosophy. It was also to work on that personal positioning and feminist philosophical consciousness that your opening question about Beattie’s criticisms of “my [non-neutral] standpoint” raised. I still owe a debt to Sunderland for that freedom and that self-reflexive work! It was a new university and not hidebound by conservative traditions in philosophy—there was scope for more radical thinking—which was good for feminist scholars generally and also for me as a woman in the field of philosophy. So, for my scholarship, this period was liberating and productive, giving me the opportunity to respond to Harding’s suggestion that there had never been a feminist critique of the philosophy of religion; I published my first major

monograph, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998). Sunderland also gave me my first opportunity to invite Michèle Le Doeuff to speak to my colleagues and students. And this became a tradition which I've carried on in Oxford, inviting Le Doeuff regularly to inspire feminist and non-feminist philosophers alike with her political wit and philosophical scholarship.

**AJ:** *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* was your first manifesto as a feminist philosopher (of religion); this monograph presented a critique of and challenge to Christian male epistemic privilege.

**PSA:** Yes. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* aimed to expose the weaknesses of building male knowledge on the self-aggrandizement of the male philosopher who is propped up by the blind infatuation of the student and/or lover. Le Doeuff's critique of the Héloïse complex<sup>2</sup> helped me to expose the weakness of both the (female/male) lover and the (male) beloved: the one lover

lacked confidence and the other suffered from over-confidence. Le Doeuff's critique supported my view that knowledge as "male" could never be anything but "weak" as long as blinded by false confidences. Moreover, the false consciousness of both the lover and the beloved not only applied to the pattern of disciple and master, female and male, but to human and divine. This implicit critique of apotheosis—or, self-deification as self-aggrandizement—became even more central to Le Doeuff's later critique of sexism in *The Sex of Knowing* and in her Weidenfeld Lectures (Le Doeuff, "The Spirit of Secularism;" cf. Anderson, "Liberating Love's Capabilities").

**AJ:** *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* also brought you into relationship and often contention with a number of other feminist theologians and philosophers of religion, including Grace Jantzen, Tina Beattie, Luce Irigaray, Sarah Coakley. Some of these relationships seem to take on a rather adversarial character. Would you agree and how would you explain that?

**PSA:** This is a very good question. Immediately, after its publication I did not understand terribly well why these feminist theologians and feminist philosophers of religion seemed to misunderstand the arguments in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. I have been frustrated by their failure as feminists

<sup>2</sup> "Héloïse complex" is diagnosed by Michèle Le Doeuff (*Hipparchia's Choice*, 59–60 and 162–65) as the tendency of women in philosophy to idolize either a male colleague or teacher (as did Héloïse and Beauvoir). This idolization could be of a "great" living or dead philosopher whose name they carry, e.g. "Kantian," but the Héloïse complex benefits the man who is named and destroys the woman by removing her intellectual independence and ability to create philosophy herself.

to understand my text. Perhaps this should have been expected because my academic formation as a philosopher had not been with other women (neither with female theologians nor female philosophers of religion). This formation had not been typical in terms of either my context or my background. Yet my greatest perplexity was with other feminist philosophers of religion not following my lead to Harding and to Le Doeuff.

In addition to feminist theologians asking for clarification of my religious desires, a common thread in their impatience with my text is an assumption, roughly, due to Irigaray and other psycholinguists that “feminist” thinking equals expressing “feminine” language and values; sexually specific self-expression is thought to be possible in becoming a woman or becoming divine as a woman. But female apotheosis had never been my vision for feminist philosophers or for women generally, especially insofar as suiting patriarchal idolizations of femininity. Instead I hold an Enlightenment view of philosophical thinking as rational and embodied, but not a psychological or theological view of women as generically different from men.

*A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* is a provocative and contentious text on two counts for those feminist theologians and psycholinguists who were advocating a “feminism of sexual difference;” the latter is unlike either the Marx-

ist or the liberal feminists who had influenced my own feminist struggle to transform philosophy in order to include women as equals. First, the text does not equate feminist with being or becoming a woman and especially not with self-expression in feminine language. Second, the text does not advocate any particular conception of God or theology which, in 1998, I left explicitly to theologians. Perhaps, though, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* reads (to some) as if I am ambivalent about psychoanalysis and theology, generally. Ironically, I am more ambivalent about the Lacanian preoccupations of many contemporary, sexual-difference feminist theologians than Freud or Lacan themselves. I tried to give other feminists the benefit of doubt when it came to their theology. But I was not and can never be in agreement with feminine psycholinguistics enabling Christian women to become divine. I remain a philosopher and an equality (rather than sexual-difference) feminist, but not a psycholinguist or strictly speaking a theologian interested in sexual difference, or sexually different desires as the way to (knowledge of, or intimacy with) God.

*A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* treats religion as both an academic subject and a socially constructed reality. I never equate religion with desire for or knowledge of God. Nor do I equate feminist philosophy of religion with feminist theol-

ogy or feminist spirituality.<sup>3</sup> I don't think that for the sake of women themselves feminists can allow "religion" to play on women's own insecurities about inordinate desire—or, roughly, on "Eve's sin"—without generating epistemic injustice. Reassuring women of their own separate sphere of spirituality as, for example, in Coakley's intimacy with God (Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy" 516–20) may enable a gendered (or, a woman's) way of doing theology. Yet the constant danger of this different sphere for women's intimacy and desire will be to reinstate gender injustice and patriarchal forms of sexist oppression. Feminist philosophy and women's intellect address this critical danger.

**AJ:** *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* proposes a rational passion, or yearning, for justice, employing mimetic reconfigurations of our mythic inheritance in the west as a form of imaginative variations. This imaginative form of mimesis, or "philosophical imaginary," aims to be compatible with thinking from women's lives. But is it incompatible with a psycholinguistic—feminine—imaginary?

<sup>3</sup> To qualify this claim, I must agree with Dorota Filipczak's conception of "divining a self" which is a significant alternative to a spirituality of "becoming divine." In contradistinction to the latter, divining a self aims to locate and reclaim the autonomous female self in her own political and religious context, see Filipczak 210–12.

**PSA:** Yes. Here it is crucial to be clear. After discussing Le Doeuff and Harding, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* brings in Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to raise the question of female desire—as a fundamental dimension of that which has been excluded by male social, material and epistemic privileges in philosophy of religion. I also look at how a mimetic strategy has to be disruptive and criticized Ricoeur's threefold form of mimesis for not being disruptive of patriarchal myths. However, I never give up my alliance with Le Doeuff's conceptions of the philosophical imaginary, of reason and of "a feminist" as a woman who "allows no one to think in her place."

**AJ:** In an extended review of *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Sarah Coakley criticized the Kantian account of reality you tried to align with forms of feminist standpoint epistemology as drawn from Harding (Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy"). Her critique, interesting though it was in some ways, was also clearly framed by her own desire to legitimize a distinctly more realist (less Kantian) account of God. Where do you feel you now stand on this debate?

**PSA:** Allow me to try to explain what may be meant by this alignment. I am a Kantian and I see Kant as both an empirical realist and a transcendental idealist. I am

also a feminist philosopher who has criticized Kant and Ricoeur on the grounds of gender bias from a feminist standpoint. But this critique is not decisive or a rejection of Kant and of all Kantians. Instead it reflects the influence of feminist Marxists and such post-Hegelian Kantians as Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib. To understand my own position on Kant today, my readers can turn to *Anderson and Bell, Kant and Theology*; this co-authored book is especially useful for understanding (my) Kantian views of realism and of God.

I also argue that feminist standpoint epistemology derives from a feminist Marxism which has strong affinities with Hegel's master/slave dialectic. But this argument is in Harding and in my discussion of Hegel (Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 87–92). It is essential to understand the social and material reality which is Harding's concern. To gain this understanding, it helps to read such post-Marxist rationalists as Hartsock, Habermas and Benhabib.

So, my reply to your question about “reality” suggests an apparent lack, amongst contemporary Christian theists, of any firsthand understanding of the history of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy and, in particular, philosophical knowledge of the history of Kant, Hegel and Marx. In contrast, a feminist standpoint epistemologist would have read the Frankfurt school

philosophers whose post-Hegelian Kantian philosophy is German analytic Marxism. Their view(s) of reality would have to include social and material dimensions and not just a naïve conception of empirical sensations and “evidence,” or, even, of more profound psychological and spiritual intimacy with the divine. Making the naïve empiricist view of “reality” less naïve by encompassing a personal encounter with the theistic God is highly problematic for philosophers, including contemporary feminist philosophers. Claiming to find knowledge of the divine in deeply subjective, sexual and spiritual encounters with a personal God does not necessarily reassure a philosophical realist.

Otherwise, there is no better way to understanding than for readers to explore the debates about feminist epistemology, Hegel, Kant and so on for themselves. If they merely go by Coakley's account of my position, then they should be aware of her distinctive theological prejudice against socialist or Marxist feminists which inhibits careful understanding of post-Hegelian Kantians and of feminist standpoint epistemology. The danger is to reduce “reality” to a false “purity” of religious experience grasped with a naïve empiricism or psychologism. A falsely conceived real or pure experience would ignore the material and social dimensions; in turn, this obscures the possibility of a reflexively informed gender

perspective on reality. Without the latter, gender can hide unjust empirical and psychological relations.

Coakley writes as a philosopher of religion in the analytic tradition of Christian theism, but she does not explicitly and fairly assess analytic philosophical debates about reality which are more wide-ranging than Christian theism or Christian mystical experience (Coakley, “Dark Contemplation” 292–95, 311–12). Lamentably she leaves out textual analysis of debates in feminist epistemology, Marxist feminism and Frankfurt School philosophies. The highly substantial socialist debates in philosophy cannot be ignored or dismissed by feminist theologians without their missing decisive issues in feminism.

For example, I have in mind the debates of Benhabib as a feminist political philosopher and as a Habermas scholar, but also those of Angela Davies as a feminist and militant philosopher shaped by Marcuse; and the issues of Nancy Fraser as a feminist political philosopher shaped by both Foucault and Habermas. Such feminist philosophers confront political culture, issues of social justice and debates over recognition which necessarily inform our conception of reality. Feminist realists may claim different things about (the same) reality, but this is not necessarily incoherent in a debilitating sense. Instead this sort of disagreement reflects the democratic nature of

the growth of knowledge—for example, as found in Harding’s feminist standpoint epistemology—through a struggle for truth. The range of feminist challenges to what we know about reality forces us to ask whether those who believe in “God” are themselves in touch with “reality,” especially the reality of social injustice. Without a hermeneutic of suspicion and a self-reflexive critique, feminist claims about reality and God run the danger of their own theological mystification (Anderson, “Feminist Philosophy and Transcendence” 37–44; cf. Hollywood 173–241, 329–45).

**AJ:** Coakley criticized your feminist challenge to analytic philosophy of religion. She acknowledged with some approval your continuing commitment to truth, objectivity and rationality, even though you and, to be fair, she as well—were critical of past definitions of these terms. However, Coakley was a good deal more confident than you had been that analytic philosophy was capable of cleaning up its own act in relation to gender consciousness (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 517–19; 2005, 282–95).

**PSA:** Let me break in at this point and respond to make things more clear; and then, I will pick up on the rest of this question about Coakley and analytic philosophy (below). Yes. You are correct Coakley and

I agree on a continuing commitment to truth, objectivity and rationality. But you are not correct in believing Coakley is right in everything she says about what I think. I have never dismissed analytic philosophy or its method: I teach it to my students and employ analytic tools in my conceptions of truth, objectivity and rationality! What you are picking up is a reduction of “analytic philosophy” to “Christian philosophy of religion” as written by Richard Swinburne, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga and Caroline Franks Davis. But an analytic philosopher could easily think that “Christian philosophy of religion” is a mere game of logic with nothing to do with reality—let alone God as (a) reality. The problem for Christian philosophy of religion is, then, how to demonstrate philosophically that their “God” is real. In other words, it is not clear to me either how Coakley can “align” herself “with” analytic philosophy without far more qualification in the analytic terms of her theological position and of philosophical realism.

**AJ:** It was clear too that Coakley wanted to defend the possibility of a conventional view of metaphysical reality that could not be dismissed as the simple outcome of masculine epistemological privilege (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 514, 519). In her view, to some extent, you had conformed

to this secularizing trope, by laying your emphasis on the material reality implicit within power relations between women and men as the lynch pin in an argument under the title of the philosophy of religion. In any case, she was circumspect about your materialist account of standpoint epistemology, arguing that the account of truth and objectivity it proposed was ultimately incoherent (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 507–09). In soliciting all perspectives—marginal, privileged and everything in between, truth and objectivity are necessarily ruled out.

**PSA:** Yes. You are correct that Coakley picks up something about metaphysical reality and defends it as more than a masculine privilege or projection. But the problem is that her argument(s) against the specific critique of Feuerbach and against the many other feminist and philosophical critiques of the concept of the omni-attribute God are not explicit enough. Coakley proposes an alternative to “the more anthropomorphic or explicitly Feuerbachian projectionism” in which “divine reality” is “encountered” in an intimate or deeply “feminine” way (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 518–19); the latter takes up subjectivity and direct perception of the divine as the “feminine” alternative to the objectivity and indirect perception of the divine of the dominant “masculine” conceptions



of the theistic God in philosophy of religion (517–18). Yet I simply don't see this as a "feminist" project—and certainly not a "feminist standpoint" which would reject the feminine and masculine binary of Christian theism as hierarchal, exclusive and so, oppressive for those excluded and/or subordinated.

Moreover, it is not enough to simply accuse me of picking up something "secular." How do we know what aspects of reality are secular and what aspects are sacred? I may agree that personal reality as we encounter it is sacred. But then, I would not be able to separate off easily what in reality could be secular. Is physical matter, or certain aspects of the sensible world, secular? Basically, my philosophical reasoning does not divide reality into secular and (Christian) sacred, or think that secular is an aspect of reality to be avoided. "Secular" is more likely to function as a local or culturally relative term which has been inherited from certain Christian forms of oppositional thinking.

Note, however, that my points about the term "secular" do not imply that philosophical reasoning is neutral and non-local. But they do mean that philosophical arguments must be expressed clearly enough that we know what terms are being employed and what metaphysical baggage is being assumed in any discussions using such terms as God, reality, Christian, secular, analytic and so on. From my philosophical position and personal background,

the danger for those seeking to put an end to domination and oppression is to be trapped inside a box, the outside of which is secular and the inside is Christian. If we claim to live in such separate worlds, then we are in any case not seeing reality.

As for my account of "points of view" being incoherent, admittedly I face a philosophical danger in saying that feminist subjects are "multiple" and "diverse" due to living in different locations. However, my position is not ultimately meant to be incoherent as long as the goal of feminist standpoint epistemology is "less partial" knowledge and not "absolute" knowledge. I am not trying to bundle up incoherent positions and then claim to have coherent knowledge of reality. The process of gaining knowledge never achieves its ultimate goal, that is, never complete or absolute knowledge of all aspects of reality as a whole. It is impossible to achieve absolute truth or absolute objectivity. Instead, we can only seek to achieve less partial knowledge, doing so on democratic grounds (those inclusive of many perspectives) which aim at justice, goodness and at as much truth as we can fairly and honestly expect.

**AJ:** James Carter has recently argued that Coakley seems to confuse the aspiration towards universalism with an idea of uniformity that still fails to take into account her own epistemic privilege as western Christian theologian and senior Cambridge academic. In defending your per-

spective, Carter reads your view of strong objectivity as the struggle itself continually to represent subjects of knowledge that are unavoidably multiple, heterogeneous and complex (Carter 17).

**PSA:** Thanks for the second half of your point (above) about Carter on Coakley. James Carter is very insightful—and he does understand the argument concerning “a feminist standpoint,” in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. I also agree with what Carter says about Coakley, since it is based on the facts of the reality of our material and social perspectives. These are crucial.

Basically I continue to build on *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*—both clarifying what is there and developing what is now more than a prolegomena to feminist philosophy of religion—that is, my project claims to be a “gendering” (Lovibond 151–58) of philosophy of religion. This gendering gets away from some of the confusions of the label, “feminist,” in order to tease out what actually is assumed as the gendered identity in philosophical conceptions of human being or humanity. Thus, I would hope more people would read or reread *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* before merely accepting the various kinds of theological criticisms of my position which we have discussed today. Moreover, I recommend my forthcoming replies in *Gendering Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Our Epistemic Locatedness*.

**AJ:** In relation to feminist and women’s scholarship apart from Harding, Le Doeuff’s work has figured even more strongly in your recent projects than the early one, and you have in many ways tried to promote her work here in the UK. How would you characterize the particular appeal of this thinker for you?

**PSA:** As already suggested (above), Le Doeuff informs me as a brilliant reader of texts. Meticulous in her scholarship she has an extraordinary ability to uncover fascinating and significant asides that have been missed in conventional readings, and so, to see things in a different way. The breadth and intellectual grasp of her scholarship is also inspiring. In her three main books—*The Philosophical Imaginary*; *Hipparchia’s Choice*; and *The Sex of Knowing*—she shows a profound understanding of topics from Gabrielle Suchon, Shakespeare, Bacon, Locke and the early Enlightenment, through the nineteenth century with Harriet Taylor and Kierkegaard’s abandoned fiancée, and into the twentieth century with Beauvoir, Bergson and Deleuze to mention only a few of her favourite philosophers. In each period of philosophy, Le Doeuff goes to the heart of cultural myths about women that colour the most intellectual seeming of scholarly texts written by men.

Highly significant for my perspective (as indicated above) is that Le Doeuff demonstrates how women come to lack confidence in their ability to argue and debate alongside

men but rather than retreat to any sphere for women, bracketed off from the world of men, she leads the way forward, speaking out clearly and defending women's cases always to be included as equal partners in philosophical and political debates. I applaud her—and wish that each of us could be as subtle, witty and confident a woman in philosophy as Le Doeuff is. In addition, the distinctive virtues of ethical confidence, firm calmness and just the right amount of relational charm would be crucial features of an engaged vision for doing feminist philosophy today!

**AJ:** To conclude, would you like to say something about the work which you have done to carve out a new space in the field of philosophy of religion for feminist philosophers who are raising new and distinctive questions?

**PSA:** Yes. I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on my own struggle to open new space for other women and men in philosophy. I have worked hard to generate space for conferences and ongoing research since I published *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. This work began with a lively “Author Meets Critics” day conference at Sunderland University on 18 April 1998; that experience was formative not only for me but for other philosophers of religion who gave critical responses to what I had written. It was a sobering experience to have my book crit-

icized, but also an energizing time. I went on to co-edit with one of my critics, Beverley Clack, *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*. Later with the help of postgraduates, “Transcendence Incarnate,” the first-ever Continental Philosophy of Religion conference at the University of Oxford took place on 10 September 2007 (Somerville College). Several of the papers delivered at that conference were revised and published, along with other commissioned essays, in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*. The feminist dimension in the field of philosophy of religion continues to be open to contestations—but this is not my only philosophical area of research and publication.

Overlapping with this feminist work are the research activities which I have developed and carried out in contemporary French philosophy with Le Doeuff, and before this, with Ricoeur whom I first met in Oxford in 1980 and whose legacy now results in invitations to a wide-range of international conferences. Last but not least, the moral and religious texts of Kant continue to challenge my conception of a feminist standpoint. In the end, the texts which matter most to me in philosophy have come together to create the person I am today. It is great to have been able to review my personal and philosophical formation with you, Alison, in this interview. Thank you!

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# Contributors

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**Marije Altorf** is Programme Director and Lecturer in Philosophy at St. Mary's University College, London. She is the author of *Iris Murdoch* and *the Art of Imagining* (Continuum: 2008), and together with Mariëtte Willemsen translated Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good* into Dutch (Boom, 2003). She has also published articles on the philosophical imaginary in the history of philosophy. She is working on the use of philosophical dialogue in higher education, as well as a philosophical enquiry into imagination.

altorf@smuc.ac.uk

**Pamela Sue Anderson** is Reader in Philosophy of Religion, University of Oxford, and Fellow in Philosophy, Regent's Park College, Oxford, UK. Anderson has D. Phil from the University of Oxford and an honorary doctorate from Lund University, Sweden. Anderson's publications include *Ricoeur and Kant* (1993), *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (1998), *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate* (2010) and her recently completed, *Gendering Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Our Epistemic Locatedness* (2011). Her ongoing project is *In Dialogue with Michèle Le Doeuff*.

pamela.anderson@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

**Tomasz Dobrogoszcz** teaches British literature and literary translation at the University of Łódź. He is the editor of *Contemporary British Literature in Poland* (2008), for which he wrote about Polish translations of Sarah Kane's plays. He has published articles on contemporary British and postcolonial literature, e.g. on Kazuo Ishiguro and John Banville. He has translated Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* into Polish.

■■■■■ [tomaszdobrogoszcz@tlen.pl](mailto:tomaszdobrogoszcz@tlen.pl)

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**Dorota Filipczak** teaches British and postcolonial literature in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. Her monograph on Malcolm Lowry was published in *The Malcolm Lowry Review* (Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, 1998/99). Her recent publications are *Unheroic Heroines: The Portrayal of Women in the Writings of Margaret Laurence* (Łódź University Press, 2007) and "Is Literature Any Help in Liberating Eve and Mary?" in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (Springer, 2010). Together with Agata Handley, she co-edited *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart* (2010). She is a translator and a poet.

■■■■■ [dorfil@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:dorfil@uni.lodz.pl)

**Tomasz Fisiak** is a doctoral student at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. His main interest is Gothicism, especially its evolution as a literary genre. He is currently working on his PhD, in which he analyzes the portraits of female tyrants in contemporary Gothic novels.

■■■■■ [tomasz.fisiak@gmail.pl](mailto:tomasz.fisiak@gmail.pl)

**Alison Jasper** is Lecturer in Religion in the School of Languages, Cultures and Religions at the University of Stirling, Scotland. She is the author of *The Shining Garment of the Text: Gendered Readings of John's Prologue* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Her recent article is "Contesting Memory: Maude Royden, a Case Study in Female Genius" in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (Springer, 2010). A book on the subject will be appearing in 2012. She is



## Contributors

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the reviews editor of the international journal, *Literature and Theology*, published by Oxford University Press.

■■■■■ [a.e.jasper@stir.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.jasper@stir.ac.uk)

**David Jasper** is Professor of Literature and Theology in the University of Glasgow and Changjiang Chair Professor at Renmin University of China, Beijing. He holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Durham and Uppsala. The founding editor of the journal *Literature and Theology*, his most recent books are *The Sacred Desert* (2004) and *The Sacred Body* (2009). He is currently working on a third volume in the series, to be entitled *The Sacred Community*. He is also editing a volume of nineteenth-century biographies in the *Collected Works of Margaret Oliphant*.

■■■■■ [d.Jasper@arts.gla.ac.uk](mailto:d.Jasper@arts.gla.ac.uk)

**Joanna Kazik** is a graduate of the University of Łódź, Poland, and the University of Glasgow, UK. She teaches literature in the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. She edited the first volume of *Studies in English Drama and Poetry* (Łódź University Press, 2007). Kazik was one of the authors in *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities* (Palgrave, 2006). She is currently writing a book on medieval carols.

■■■■■ [jkazik@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:jkazik@uni.lodz.pl)

**Joanna Kosmalska** is a Ph.D. student in the Department of British Literature and Culture at the University of Łódź. Her research focuses on migration and contemporary Irish literature. She teaches literary translation, and has translated *The Day of Chocolate*, the ScripTeast Award winner at the Cannes Film Festival 2010.

■■■■■ [a\\_kosmalska@poczta.onet.pl](mailto:a_kosmalska@poczta.onet.pl)

**Grzegorz Kość** teaches at the English Institute, University of Łódź and at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw. He published *Robert Lowell: Uncomfortable Epigone of the Grands Maitres* (Lang, 2005) and co-edited, together with Krzysztof Majer, *Tools*

of *Their Tools* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009). Kość has written on modernist and recent American poetry, on American photography and portraiture. He is working on a book on Robert Frost and the body politic.

■■■■■ grzesiek.kosc@gmail.com

**Joanna Kruczkowska** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. She completed her PhD dissertation on contemporary Northern Irish poetry at Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle and University of Łódź (*thèse en co-tutelle*). She has devoted her later research to comparative study of contemporary Irish and Modern Greek poetry, about which she has published a number of articles.

■■■■■ jkruczkowska@poczta.onet.pl

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**Agnieszka Łowczanin** teaches in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. Her doctoral dissertation was a monograph on the deployment of death in the early stages of the development of the novel and in Gothic fiction. Her main areas of academic interest are the diversities and paradoxes of the 18th century, and the potentialities of the aesthetics of the Gothic genre in literature and film. She is one of the editors of *Dekadentzya*, an international literary journal based in Poland.

■■■■■ ałowczanin@yahoo.com

**Małgorzata Myk** teaches in the Department of American Literature and Culture, University in Łódź, where she earned her PhD. She holds two MA degrees in English: one from the University of Łódź and one from the University of Maine. Her most recent article is "The Immemorial Waters of Venice: Woman as Anodyne in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*", *The Explicator* 67.3, 2009. Her interests include women's writing in the US, gender studies and feminist literary studies.

■■■■■ goskamyk@gmail.com

**Katarzyna Ojrzyńska** is a doctoral student at the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. Her current project focuses on dance

## Contributors

in contemporary Irish drama. She has published several articles on the works of Irish playwrights such as William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel.

■■■■■ [k.ojrzynska@sens.net.pl](mailto:k.ojrzynska@sens.net.pl)

**Teresa Podemska-Abt** is a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia, School of International Studies. She also holds MA, BEd & MEd (course work) degrees from Universities of Wrocław and Adelaide. She has published two books on Aboriginal culture in Australia, as well as articles, essays, poems and interviews. *Connecting Literatures* (on Australian Indigenous Literature) is her work in progress.

■■■■■ [terapa@gmail.com](mailto:terapa@gmail.com)

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**Małgorzata Poks** teaches courses in American literature and culture at English Teacher Training College in Sosnowiec. In 2009 her monographic study *Thomas Merton and Latin America: A Consonance of Voices* received the biennial award of the International Thomas Merton Society for a publication that opens new perspectives in Merton studies. Her academic interests concern modern American poetry and prose.

■■■■■ [gosiapoks@gmail.com](mailto:gosiapoks@gmail.com)

**Katarzyna Poloczek** is a senior lecturer in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. In her doctorate she analyzed the works of selected Irish women poets. Together with Marta Goszczyńska, she co-edited: *Changing Ireland: Transitions and Transformations in Irish Literature and Culture*. eds. Katarzyna Poloczek and Marta Goszczyńska. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010 and *The Playful Air of (Light)ness in Irish Literature and Culture* eds. Marta Goszczyńska and Katarzyna Poloczek. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011. She is working on female empowerment in the poetry of recent Irish women authors.

■■■■■ [poloczek@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:poloczek@uni.lodz.pl)

**Richard Profozich** is a lecturer at the Department of American Literature and Culture, University of Łódź, Poland. His recent articles include "New Media: Internet Effects on American News

Reporting” in *Tools of Their Tools: Communication Technologies and American Cultural Practice*, eds. Grzegorz Kość and Krzysztof Majer (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), “The Commercialism of American Media” in *The Media and International Communication*, eds. B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, T. Płudowski, and D.V. Tanno (Lang, 2007).

■■■■■ [profozich@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:profozich@uni.lodz.pl)

**Alex Ramon** teaches in the School of English at Kingston University, London, UK. His publications include the book *Liminal Spaces: The Double Art of Carol Shields* (CSP, 2008), the ficto-critical response to Shields’s work “Gertrude, the Fourth” in *Carol Shields: Evocation and Echo*, eds. Aritha van Herk and Conny Steenman-Marcusse (Barkhuis, 2009), and the essay “A Literary Foremother: Iris Murdoch and Carol Shields” in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. Anne Rowe (Palgrave, 2007). He also regularly reviews books for the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*.

■■■■■ [alexramon1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:alexramon1@yahoo.co.uk)

**Monika Rogalińska** is a lecturer at the Academy of International Studies in Łódź. A graduate of Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź and the Dyslexia Institute, University of York, she has written articles on Muriel Spark and John Fowles. She is now working on her doctorate on Muriel Spark.

■■■■■ [monika1mr@gmail.com](mailto:monika1mr@gmail.com)

**Agnieszka Salska** is the author of *Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson: Poetry of the Central Consciousness* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). She wrote the chapter on Dickinson’s letters for *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), published numerous articles, mostly on American poetry, and is one of the authors as well as editor-in-chief of a two-volume history of twentieth-century American literature for Polish readers (Universitas, 2003). Dr Salska retired from the Department of American Literature and Culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź where she taught courses in American literature and served as Chair. She also served as President of the Polish Association for American Studies from 1990 to 1996.

■■■■■ [salska@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:salska@uni.lodz.pl)

**Adam Sumera** is a senior lecturer at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. His publications include *Muriel Spark's Novels* (Łódź University Press, 1996), "Intertextuality in Literary Translation" in *Translation and Meaning*, eds. Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Marcel Thelen (Maastricht, 2002), "Ian McEwan's *The Innocent*: The Novel and the Movie" in *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, 21.2, 2010.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ [asumera@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:asumera@uni.lodz.pl)

**Jared Thomas** is a Nukunu man of the Southern Flinders Ranges. He works extensively in the arts. A lecturer at the University of South Australia, he teaches visual art, communication and literature. His novel *Sweet Guy* was shortlisted for the 2009 South Australian People's Choice Awards for Literature. Initially beginning his writing career as a playwright, his work *Flash Red Ford* toured Uganda and Kenya in 1999 and his play *Love, Land and Money* featured during the 2002 Adelaide Fringe Festival. He is soon to graduate with a PhD from Adelaide University and his two new novels are just about to be released.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ [Jared.Thomas@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Jared.Thomas@unisa.edu.au)

**Paul Tiessen** teaches English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. He is the founding editor of the *Malcolm Lowry Review* (1984–2002). His recent work includes the introductory text for *After Green Gables: L.M. Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916–1941* (University of Toronto Press, 2006) and the art-historical text for *Woldemar Neufeld's Canada: A Mennonite Artist in the Canadian Landscape, 1925–1995* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), both with Hildi Froese Tiessen. He is writing a book on McLuhan and Modernism, with emphasis on work by Sheila Watson and Wilfred Watson, and co-editing a trilogy of novels by Malcolm Lowry.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ [ptiessen@wlu.ca](mailto:ptiessen@wlu.ca)