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Kunapipi 34 (1) 2012, Contents, Editorial, A Tribute to Margaret Mary Lenta, 1936-2012

Anne Collett

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Kunapi 34 (1) 2012, Contents, Editorial, A Tribute to Margaret Mary Lenta, 1936-2012

Abstract
Contents, Editorial, A Tribute to Margaret Mary Lenta, 1936-2012

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Kunapipi is a biannual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Submissions should be in the form of a Word or Rich Text Format file sent by email attachment to acollett@uow.edu.au. Image files should be high resolution tif format and submitted on compact disc if larger than 1mb. Please include a short biography, address and email contact.

Kunapipi is an internationally refereed journal of postcolonial literature formally acknowledged by the Australian National Library. All articles are double-blind peer reviewed. Work published in Kunapipi is cited in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature’s Annual Bibliography (UK), The Year’s Work in English Studies (UK), The Grahamstown Information Journal (SA), Australian Literary Studies, The Indian Association for Commonwealth Studies (India), The New Straits Times (Malaysia), The Australian Public Affairs Information Service (produced by the National Library of Australia) and the MLA.

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EACLALS
European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Front Cover:
Detail of El Anatsui, ‘In the World But Don’t Know the World?’ 2009, Aluminium and copper, 10 x 5.60m, Photo Jonathan Greet, Image courtesy October Gallery London.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
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EDITORIAL

When Grace Musila and Maria Olaussen approached me about publishing a selection of articles derived from a conference panel entitled, ‘African Intellectual Archives’, it was an opportunity too good to miss. Kunapipi has not published as much African material (either by or about African writers, artists and scholars) since I took over editorship of the journal (upon Anna Rutherford’s death) as it was wont to do. This has not been due to a lack of interest, but more related to my distance from Africa (the journal having shifted base from Europe to Australia), to the loss of Kirsten Holst Petersen as a collaborator whose literary and artistic interest in Africa is well-known to scholars in the postcolonial field, and to the small amount of material I receive about or from Africa. This, then, is my chance to remedy that lack. I leave it to associate editors of this issue, Grace and Maria, to explain the genesis of the articles:

‘Most of the articles assembled in this special issue were developed from papers presented at the 4th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS 4) held at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, in June 2011. The conference theme “African Engagements: On Whose Terms?” invited presenters to reflect on how to engage with Africa in ways that disrupt problematic patterns of scholarship, while creating space for mutual relationships of knowledge production that acknowledge Africa/ns as partners in the knowledge industry. For their part, Grace A. Musila and Maria Olaussen convened a panel entitled “African Intellectual Archives: Cultural Productions and the Question of Theory”. The panel brought together a range of papers that variously reflected on why, despite increasing globalisation and technological developments, the flow of ideas and concepts seems to remain uni-directional across the North-South axis. This panel focused on African intellectual archives, with keen interest in African contributions to the global knowledge economy. Taking its cue from feminist theorist Obioma Nnaemeka’s reminder that,

[T]he imperial nature of theory-formation must be interrogated to allow for a democratic process that will create room for the intervention, legitimation and validation of theories formulated ‘elsewhere’… [T]heory-making should not be a unidirectional enterprise — always emanating from a specific location and applicable to every location — in effect allowing localised constructs to impose a universal validity and application. (362)

the panel sought to explore the trajectories of diverse practices and ideas emerging from the interaction of local and global histories as well as the means by which these ideas are expressed within African contexts. Of particular interest was the relevance of cultural productions as important sites for critical thinking and theorisation in and on Africa. In what modes, medias and genres does Africa contribute to our conceptual understanding of itself and its relationships with the
world? How can we trace the multidirectional legacies of African intellectual traditions in both African and global contexts? How can we re-think conventional methodological approaches to literary texts, from reading literary texts as “case studies” to reading narrative as articulations of conceptual formulations? What would “transcribing” a narrative register into a “theory register” entail? What insights do these interventions offer into Africa’s place in the world?’

I leave you to reflect upon these questions as you read through the various contributions to this special issue. With the exception of the articles by Ashleigh Harris, Chris Ouma and Tina Steiner, the articles collected here were first presented at the conference, and Grace and Maria would like to acknowledge the ECAS 4 organising committee for affording them the platform to convene these important conversations. In addition to scholarly articles, this issue includes poetry by Gabeba Baderoon and Conceição Evaristo, an essay by Parselelo Kantai, a short story by T. Michael Mboya and interviews with both Kantai and Evaristo. Together, with the cover art by El Anatsui, this issue offers a vibrant forum for and about African literature, art, culture and scholarship in the contemporary world.

Trawling through the web looking for interesting contemporary art work by an African for the cover of this special issue, I came across the vibrant hanging sculptures of El Anatsui. The sheer beauty of colour, texture and movement, not to mention the monumental scale of the sculptures and the ingenious material from which they are crafted, could not help but capture my attention as it has captured the attention of the world. Susan Mullin Vogel2 claims that ‘Anatsui is the first and only black African artist to achieve global recognition at the highest levels while living and working continuously in Africa’, and that ‘he has felt no need to study or work outside Africa, though he has had many formative residencies of a few months’ duration abroad’ (11). Although he grew up in Ghana, most of El Anatsui’s working life has been based in Nsukka, Nigeria, where he took up a position as Professor of Sculpture at the University of Nigeria and where he still directs a workshop that creates the ‘bottle top’ sculptures for which he has become famous. Anatsui’s artistic practice and intellectual life developed almost exclusively within an African art world: Vogel contends that until the mid-1990s ‘his thinking and his work took shape far less in dialogue with the works of contemporary American and European artists than in exchanges with Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe … Wole Soyinka … and other African intellectuals. For two formative decades, his most involving debates were with African visual artists’ (16). But it was also in 1990 that Anatsui came to international notice as part of a group exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (Contemporary African Artists: A Changing Tradition); and in 1995, the October Gallery, London, hosted a solo exhibition (El Anatsui: West Africa).

Exhibiting work in Japan and the US throughout 1995 and 1996, Anatsui’s art began to gain currency outside Africa and gathered momentum throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the (first) high point of which was the acclaim he
received when he exhibited in the Venice Biennale of 2007. Anatsui was at this point in his 60s with more than 30 years of art practice in various media behind him. He comments: ‘I’ve been to Venice four times now, twice as an exhibitor and twice as a visitor. When I first went, twenty years ago, I was cast in the light of an “African artist”, whereas in 2007, I was just another artist. The constraining label of being an artist from somewhere else has disappeared. That’s an important development’ (qtd Vogel 77). The work featured at the Venice Biennale was the metal ‘sheet work’, composed of flattened recycled bottle tops, that has become his signature. ‘I could spend the rest of my career using bottle tops,’ comments Anatsui, ‘because there’s an open-endedness — a sense of freedom present in this medium’ (qtd Vogel 70). These metal-fabric sculptures are curiously soft and fluid; their colours, textures and shapes are startlingly beautiful. The work, ‘In the World, But Don’t Know the World?’, of which a detail is featured on the cover of this issue, and is reproduced in full here, was presented (by El Anatsui and the October Gallery) at the Dubai Art Fair of 2010. I wish to thank El Anatsui and the October Gallery for generous permission to feature ‘In the World, But Don’t Know the World?’ in this special issue on Africa. The opportunity to learn about and support the work of contemporary artists is one of the many special things about editing Kunapipi that I will miss when my 15 years of editorship comes to a close with this last volume.

Anne Collett

NOTES
A Tribute to Margaret Mary Lenta, 1936 – 2012

Margaret Lenta died on Monday, 5th November after a courageous struggle with cancer. She was born and grew up in Northumberland, in the extreme north of England, and taught in Nigeria and Kenya before coming to South Africa in 1966. She joined the Department of English at the University of Natal in 1973. At the time of the merger leading to the formation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, she had long been a full Professor in the discipline.

Over the forty years of her academic career, her research output was considerable and continued into her retirement. Her early focus was on the writing of the Enlightenment period in Britain, but after completing a PhD on the eighteenth-century novelist, Samuel Richardson, she redirected her attention to developments in literature in Southern Africa. In this field she published more than thirty articles and ten chapters in books. She also edited five books, three of them the writings of Lady Anne Barnard. She is perhaps best known nationally for The Castle and the Vineyard: Lady Anne Barnard’s Cape Diaries. Besides her scholarly articles, Margaret is known internationally as a founder-editor of the journal Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa. She helped to create the success of this journal, now in its 24th year, by guiding its policy and practices, by making it known at the many international conferences which she attended, and by liaising with its many reviewers and contributors. To celebrate the journal’s coming of age, Margaret Lenta and Michael Chapman edited a special double issue which was subsequently extended and published as a book called SA Lit: Beyond 2000.

After retirement, Margaret Lenta added to her repertoire by writing reviews and articles for newspapers, particularly the Sunday Independent and Business Day Weekender. At the same time she offered her extensive research knowledge and skills to students whose first language was not English, mentoring many registered in the College of Humanities to the successful completion of Masters or Doctoral degrees. She also guided new staff in the production and publication of
their first research articles. Many of the students and staff members who enjoyed her help have remained her friends.

Margaret will be remembered by her colleagues as a warm-hearted, witty, lively and energetic person who was also a fine cook. She took a strong interest in the achievements, and the occasional sorrows, of all in the Department, and particularly in her younger colleagues. Since her death, several colleagues who are now abroad have written remembering her with affection as the person who helped to make their years in the Department the happiest time of their career.

She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Margaret Daymond
Johan Jacobs