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## Abstracts, Notes of Contributors, Notes on Editorial Advisors

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## Abstracts, Notes of Contributors, Notes on Editorial Advisors

### Abstract

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## ABSTRACTS

STELLA BORG BARTHET

**Religion, Class and Nation in Contemporary Australian Fiction**

This article tackles the charge of elitism levelled at some Australian writers by Australian critics and suggests that these assessments may be biased because of an over-emphasis on class. This kind of criticism connects elitism with the writers' appropriation of the spiritual for the endorsement of the nation, and either rejects works that treat the spiritual, or it refuses to acknowledge a spiritual element in writing that is accepted for its working-class ethos. Through readings of David Malouf's *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* and Thomas Keneally's *A Family Madness* and *The Office of Innocence*, I question the connection that has been made between high literariness and the symbolic endorsement of the White nation in Australia.

GAIL FINCHAM

**Zakes Mda: Towards a New Ontology of Postcolonial Vision?**

In this article, I look at *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) by postcolonial writer Zakes Mda — painter, playwright, novelist and musician of the 'new' South Africa. Mda bases the story world of *The Madonna* on paintings by the Flemish-born expressionist/symbolist artist Frans Claerhout, a Catholic priest working on a mission station with local people in the Orange Free State. Mda juxtaposes the exuberant colour of Claerhout's paintings against the black-and-white newspaper coverage of the notorious Miscegenation Trial in the Free State town of Excelsior. I argue that Mda's painterly imagination deploys processes of focalisation to change the reader's apprehension of social and political realities. *The Madonna* creates altered spaces in memory, history, and communal consciousness, which undo the stereotypes of apartheid and prepare for a new way of thinking in post-apartheid South Africa.

J.A. KEARNEY

**Glimpses of Agency in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

In this article I challenge the notion that Roy's novel is so immersed in the evocation of determinism in her characters' lives that the possibility of agency is cancelled. Basing my approach on Roy's own socio-political writings and utterances, I argue that through a variety of fictional strategies she integrates into the novel a counter-position that leaves the reader with a sense of ambivalence rather than of doom in relation to agency in Roy's world. To begin with I give full weight to ways in which historical forces seem relentlessly deterministic in the novel, allowing betrayals through political power, caste and a whole range of related social prejudices to triumph. In contrast I draw attention to Roy's special relish of word play and spontaneous drama as potential manifestations of individual agency. The complexity of Roy's vantage point is heightened by the

way in which she allows historical determinism and drama to achieve a significant victory. Nevertheless, through a final and stunning chronological reversal Roy enables her fiction to challenge loss of faith in agency.

JOHN O'LEARY

### **Speaking the Suffering Indigene: 'Native' Songs and Laments, 1820–1850**

This article considers the many short poems published by settlers in British colonies and the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century in which settlers voiced their concern about the suffering of indigenous peoples in the face of colonisation. Though the indigenous peoples in question were very different from one another, and the nature of colonisation in the various colonies and states by no means identical, this verse shows a remarkable homogeneity of style and tone, being an expression of a common evangelical tradition and a shared fascination with the indigenous Other. The article argues that while these poems were certainly conditioned by an ideology of European superiority, and raise issues of paternalism and agency, they were sincere expressions of outrage and sorrow, and should therefore be accorded more weight than they are usually granted by postcolonial critics.

ANN PISTACCHI

### **Interrogating 'The Full Dog': Reframing the Incest Narrative in Patricia Grace's *Dogside Story***

Maori author Patricia Grace has shown a long-standing interest in the violation of incest prohibitions and the ramifications of such transgressions. Her early experiments with the constitutive relationship between incest prohibition and narrative structure in *Mutuwhenua* (1978), *Cousins* (1992), 'Flower Girls' (1994) and *Baby No-Eyes* (1998) prepare the ground for Grace's much more exhaustive examination of the subject in her 2001 Kiriama Prize winning novel, *Dogside Story*. This article examines the ways in which the treatment of incest in *Dogside Story* diverts from the anthropological, philosophical and psychoanalytical paradigms of Grace's earlier texts by placing the characters of Rua and Ani in a complex critical position that resists and ultimately subverts a traditional/Western reading of their incestuous relationship. By re-contextualising the act of sibling incest in *Dogside Story* within a specifically Maori-centric framework, Grace rejects essentialist readings and challenges what is at the heart of the near-universal cultural taboos surrounding incest.

GAETANO RANDO

### **Recent Italian-Australian Narrative Fiction by First Generation Writers**

This article examines Australian narrative by first generation writers published from the mid-1980s to the present, a period that has seen both an increase in

the production of texts, a tendency towards the more widespread use of English with respect to Italian language and a diversification of thematic content. Apart from some very few exceptions (Rosa Cappiello, Antonio Casella), most first generation Italian-Australian writers constitute a largely 'invisible' presence in Australia's literary culture with their works being largely overlooked by the mainstream literary establishment. Yet they present a discrete corpus of literary writing that focuses on making sense of the liminal space between the old country and culture and the new, and the physical and metaphysical transitions involved in the process of migration. While many of the narrative works deal with the social realities of the diaspora, some also provide a constant and ever-shifting appraisal of two different worlds and two different cultures in an attempt to demythologise and remythologise past and present in the light of new experiences.

ASHA SEN

### **Re-Visioning Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* in a Post-National Age**

The current inter-disciplinary status of postcolonial studies is most accurately reflected in connections between historical discourses on women and gender from the Indian subcontinent and their contemporary literary representation. Many postcolonial novelists in India and Pakistan, for instance, have adopted the form of national allegory and drawn parallels between the coming of age of their individual protagonists and the Pakistani or Indian nation-state's birth and growth. However, feminist critics like Josna Rege and Lydia Liu have pointed out that this allegorical format is not always compatible with women's interests. Drawing on such critics, my article presents a critique of the use of national allegory in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* (1989). *Cracking India* is centred on the development of a child narrator who tries to define herself against the colonial and nationalist narratives presented by the adults around her. Ultimately, my article asserts, the novel is a failed attempt at decolonisation because its narrator does not adequately interrogate the biases present in the dominant narratives that surround her.

DIMA TAHBOUB

### **The Locket Becomes a Bullet: Nationalising the Feminine in Palestinian Literature**

This article presents Palestinian literature as a distinctive genre of war literature inspired by sociopolitical features. Using examples drawn from Palestinian novels, it discusses how the entanglement with the nationalistic ideology tailors the female imagery and literary iconography to highlight the values of resistance and steadfastness. The essay explores the numerous female roles and images through various periods of war literature, underscoring the difference in depiction between male and female writers.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STELLA BORG BARTHET was awarded her PhD by the University of Malta for her thesis on 'Myth and History in the West African Novel' in 1997. She is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Malta where she teaches courses in postcolonial literature and theory, and in 18th- and 19th-century English and American fiction. Stella convened the conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) in March 2005 and was appointed adjudicator for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize later that year. She is the author of articles and book chapters mostly on African, Australian and Maltese fiction. Stella's current research interests include Arab and Anglo-Arab writing.

Head of the English Department at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and co-editor of the South African journal, *The English Academy Review*, GAIL FINCHAM has edited, co-edited, and contributed to three volumes of essays on Joseph Conrad (1996, 2001, 2002); has chapters in *Literary Landscapes from Modernism to Postcolonialism* (Palgrave, 2008), *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre* (Ohio 2008), and *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda* (UKZN Press 2009). A chapter is forthcoming in *J.M. Coetzee and the Aesthetics of Place* (ed. Carrol Clarkson) and she is currently completing a monograph on the novels of Zakes Mda for the University of Cape Town Press.

PALOMA FRESNO CALLEJA is a Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of the Balearic Islands, Spain. Her research focuses on issues of multiculturalism, identity politics, gender and diaspora in New Zealand and Pacific Literatures. Recent publications on New Zealand and Pacific theatre or ethnic minority writing have appeared in *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Australasian Drama Studies* and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (forthcoming).

J.A. (JACK) KEARNEY is a senior research associate at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (Durban) where he taught in English Studies from 1970 until his retirement in 1998. Seconded to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Faculty of Education from 2003 to 2007, he became Acting Head of the Department of English. Presently he teaches English literary courses at two Varsity College campuses, Pietermaritzburg and Westville. Having published extensively on early and contemporary South African fiction, he then focused on fiction by Islamic South African writers. While at present he is engrossed by contemporary fiction generally, his immediate research concern is the fictional representation of children by writers from Africa.

RICHARD LEVER is a freelance editor and writer. He co-authored, with James Wieland, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: Australia 1970–1992* (G.K. Hall 1996). He is a copy-editor for Giramondo Publishing and *HEAT* magazine, and

runs a professional manuscript assessment service, Manuscripts Online ([www.manuscriptsonline.com.au](http://www.manuscriptsonline.com.au)).

KATE LLEWELLYN is the author of twenty books. They comprise nine of poetry, four of travel writing while the others are essays and memoir. She is the co-editor of *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*. *The Floral Mother & Other Essays*, *The Waterlily*, *A Blue Mountain Journal*, and *Playing With Water* have been made into talking books. Her latest book (*Kate Llewellyn* 2010) has been published by the University of Wollongong in the Poets and Perspectives series.

JOHN O'LEARY gained his doctorate in 2001 with a study of nineteenth-century settler writing about Maori. Since then he has specialised in the study of nineteenth-century settler writing about indigenous peoples. His book, *Savage Songs & Wild Romances: Settler Verse about Indigenous Peoples, 1830-1880*, will be published by Rodopi in 2010.

TOLU OGUNLESI is the author of a collection of poetry, *Listen to the Geckos Singing from a Balcony* (Bewrite Books, 2004) and a novella, *Conquest & Conviviality* (Hodder Murray 2008). In 2007 he was awarded a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg poetry prize, in 2008 the Nordic Africa Institute Guest Writer Fellowship, and in 2009 a Cadbury Visiting Fellowship by the University of Birmingham. Tolu's fiction and poetry have also appeared in *The London Magazine*, *Wasafiri*, *Farafina*, *PEN Anthology of New Nigerian Writing*, *Litro*, *Brand*, *Orbis*, *Nano2ales*, *Stimulus Respond*, *Sable*, *Magma*, *Stanford's Black Arts Quarterly* and *World Literature Today*. When he is not travelling, Tolu lives in Lagos, Nigeria.

ANN PISTACCHI joined the Department of English at the University of Auckland in 2002 as a tutor and lecturer specialising in comparative indigenous literary studies and contemporary women's fiction. Her current research lies in the field of Maori fiction, and she has recently completed a doctorate titled 'Spiraling Subversions: The Politics of Maori Cultural Survivance in Contemporary Maori Women's Fictions'.

GAETANO RANDO is Associate Professor in Italian Studies and English Language and Linguistics at the University of Wollongong. He has written extensively on Italian-Australian studies including the recent translation of and introduction to Rosa R. Cappiello's *Oh Lucky Country* (3rd ed., 2008). He has also edited *Literary and Social Diasporas. An Italian Australian Perspective* (2007) with Gerry Turcotte, *La Diaspora italiana dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale. The Italian Diaspora after the Second World War* (2007) with Jim Hagan, and *Emigrazione e letteratura: Il caso italoaustraliano* (2004). Gaetano has also published articles in recent issues of *Studies in Australasian Cinema* and *JASAL*. In 2005 the President of the Republic of Italy conferred him with the award of *Commendatore, Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà italiana*, for research and teaching achievements.

ASHA SEN is Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Her recent publications include 'Feminist Ethnographies of Desire and Resistance' (*South Asian Review* 2007) and 'Looking Forward, Looking Back: Pre-Colonial Sexualities in a Postcolonial World' (*ARIEL* 2009).

DIMA M.T. TAHBOUB is Jordanian and is currently employed as an Assistant Professor at the Arab Open University, Jordan Branch. She completed her PhD at the University of Manchester in 2007 on Comparative Literature in the field of Middle Eastern Studies. Dima's research interests include Women and War in Palestine and Ireland, the Literature of Commitment, and Postcolonial Feminism. She is a member of the Association of Professors of English and Translation at Arab Universities (APETAU).



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