

**NOTES ON RECENT AUSTRALIAN POETRY: A TALK GIVEN AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, 14<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2005**

**Pam Brown**

Central to contemporary Australian poetry is the work of a poet who didn't exist. Poems written as hoax poems, nonsense poems, reflect the Australian poet's propensity for irony, for laughing at oneself, and for questioning received ideas - those Ern Malley poems also catch a hint of national anxiety. A kind of ontological anxiety - uncertainty as to the nature/status of one's being<sup>i</sup> - so that 'when literary fraud takes place in Australia its unmasking produces anxieties that can't be confined to the victims of the hoax. A dim fear is brought to light that perhaps *everything we do* is fraudulent.'<sup>ii</sup>

Although, in 1944, it was not his inventors', James McAuley and Harold Stewart's, intention, the prank poet Ern Malley broke ground for ensuing generations.<sup>iii</sup> It can be liberating to read a poet who never existed. If it's possible for somebody to invent a poet then it's possible to invent yourself as a poet. Maybe you could just put things together as 'Ern Malley' did and it would be poetry. You could just *make it up*.<sup>iv</sup>

As the hoax phenomenon of the anti-modernists of the 1940s exemplifies, Australian poetry has often been seen as wracked by factionalism. During the 1970s Australian poets had the reputation of being competitive, internecine and self-interested. Although there are those who say that the old factional differences have disappeared or are reconciled, I

don't think that's entirely the case. Today, it seems that the conservative poets have `won' - they have the federal funding body in their pockets (they are in fact on the literature board of the Australia Council for the Arts). They run the national book review magazine, *Australian Book Review* which publishes, for example, Clive James, the expat TV host, as a poet and the editor embraces a *Times-Literary-Supplement-U-K*-cringe (i.e. lots-of-Peter-Porter).

Currently in Australia amongst younger poets there is a kind of cliquish love-and-peaceness that I find mildly stifling. It's an inclusiveness that prevents argument, celebratory or anarchic difference and definitely prevents heckling - it's an apparent supportiveness and acceptance and, unfortunately it's a *modus operandi* that also results in avoiding having to hold a public opinion about poetries or an editorial and/or philosophical direction.

A decade ago things looked dire for Australian poetry due to the takeovers of publishing houses by transnationals like Bertelsmann and Murdoch and the subsequent dropping of poetry (and most books of what used to be called `works of literary worth') from the commercial publishers' lists.

Mainstream publishing did show an interest in the verse novel - Dorothy Porter wrote four of these <sup>v</sup> in the last decade (none of them, in my opinion, as interesting or as `poetic' as the individual poems in her earlier books *Little Hoodlum* and *Driving Too Fast*). Big Les, Geoff Page, the marvellous trilogist Alan Wearne and others followed suit.<sup>vi</sup>

Commercial publishers of poetry disappeared but poets didn't. Small press activity, journals and the internet - online discussion lists, blogs, websites and e-journals all currently support the production of poetry. It survives. And has been, in fact, freshly invigorated. Currently, the `quality' (for want of a better word) of Australian poetry is booming. A new generation of poets has begun to publish in the last decade. There's some variety of style but David McCooey a poet, critic and academic at Deakin University in Victoria has recently called the renewal of poetry writing in Australia,

portentously, 'new lyricism'.<sup>vii</sup> (I think he's called it 'the new lyricism'.) By this he means poetry comprised of three tropes - I quote - 'worldliness, the uncanny and lyricism' (by 'lyricism', I assume he means the main enquiries of human consciousness that are the province of the lyric poem - subjectivity and desire). Lyricism is generally determined by musicality, brevity, intensity, the drive to insight or epiphany, and an emphasis on thought, feeling and subjectivity. The uncanny has to do with strangeness, eeriness, disruption of the natural and could also connect with poets' continued anxiety about self and place. Oddly though, I would think 'worldliness,' McCooley's third trope, could also be an anti-lyrical, realist poetic. My imputation is that he means a worldly kind of self-consciousness.

David McCooley reckons that the 'new lyricism' is both faithful and unfaithful to poetry. It is musical but generally in a self-conscious way, it often has a toughness - there's often a meta-textuality in which notions of text, identity and form are integrated and questioned - Kate Fagan writes in her poem 'return to a new physics': 'lyric interjects / demanding specific / impatient approval // quick like junk, / memorial about position / and meaning'.<sup>viii</sup>

David McCooley's urge to categorise seems to me to be a desire to incorporate or assimilate this recent upsurge of poetry-writing as a 'movement'. It could simply be a result of the burgeoning of writing courses within Australian academies from the '90s on. Or the fact that many poets (new and old) have enrolled in postgraduate writing degrees as an expedient act. Many universities pay fellowships to poets doing Doctorates in Creative Arts. The requirement is usually to complete a collection of poems and to write an exegesis on the finished work. Sometimes these fellowships provide an income for three years. The cutbacks to government arts funding and the difficulty of obtaining and/or staying on the dole leading to an increase in applications for postgrad fellowships). So it could be seen as an academic or institutionalised phenomenon. And, within that, an influence of post-L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetries from the U.S. via the internet (most often, these days, the U.S. is the larger influence on Australian English-language culture than Britain - in fact, we're practically ersatz North Americans). Perhaps David

McCooley's desire to label this upsurge has its basis in the same cultural anxiety I mentioned earlier. To describe this increase in activity as a new movement is to suggest that this disparate group of poets is on the move, going somewhere (not necessarily knowing where). Understanding modern poetry in terms of movements is a usual practice but really these occurrences are more likely to be short-lived breakthroughs. 'Movements *can be* hugely influential, Surrealism for example, on a vast range of writing, without the movement itself producing a substantial body of work which goes on being read. Will L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry have a similar role in retrospect?'<sup>ix</sup> And does anyone remember the so-called 'New Formalists'? (You know - avant-garde *enfant terribles* end up becoming socially-assimilated elder statespeople.)

I heard that Peter Porter refutes an apparent 'new lyricism' in his introduction for the just released *Best Australian Poems 2005* - a selection from print journals only - but I have yet to see that anthology.

My list is not of lyrical poets alone and, in fact, some would most probably question that description - these are the newer poets I'd be most likely to read:

Samuel Wagan Watson - *smoke encrypted whispers*

Cassie Lewis - *High Country*

Lidija Cvetkovic - *War Is Not The Season For Figs*

Michael Brennan - *The Imageless World*

Keri Glastonbury - *Hygienic Lily*

Ted Nielsen - *Wet Robot*

Kate Fagan - *The Long Moment*

Michael Farrell - *ode ode*

Kate Lilley - *Versary*

Peter Minter - *Blue Grass*

Romaine Moreton - *Post Me to The Prime Minister (Audio CD incl.)*

John Mateer - *Loanwords*

MTC Cronin - *More or Less than 1 > 100*

Ouyang Yu - *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-Coloured Eyes*

Justin Clemens – *The Mundiad*

And from earlier generations –

Adam Aitken - *Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles*

Philip Hammial - *Voodoo Realities*

Miriell Lenore - *The Dog Rock*

Lionel Fogarty – *Minyung Woolah Binyung : What Saying Says*

Susan Hampton - *A Latin Primer*

Lee Cataldi – *Women Who Sit On The Ground*

S.K.Kelen - *Goddess of Mercy*

Dipti Saravanamuttu - *The Colosseum*

*Note: see my notes at the end of this talk for further brief comments and links for a selection of these poets.*

And then the usual suspects I can't avoid and always read ; John Kinsella, Ken Bolton, Laurie Duggan, Gig Ryan, Jennifer Maiden, Alan Wearne and John Tranter. These poets are all of 'my generation', give or take four or five years each way. Each a ficto-member of what I imagine as the glorious pell-mell of the post-modern, leg-pulling, oppositional vanguard – the current 'greats' of OZ poetry.

We have the continuing problem of the gaps and clashes of settler culture (Australia is no longer 'white') and the indigenous culture. Lionel Fogarty<sup>x</sup> and Samuel Wagan Watson<sup>xi</sup> are, at the moment, the strongest poets in this regard. These poets are both from Queensland and are, in fact, related – Lionel Fogarty is Sam Watson's uncle. Lionel Fogarty became actively involved in Aboriginal politics in the early 1970s after the realisation of injustices experienced while growing up on the Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve near Murgon. He began writing poetry out of a commitment to the Aboriginal cause, a belief that land rights is the basis of Aboriginal people's hope for a future not

based on racism and oppression, and as a way of expressing his Murri beliefs and continuing to pass on his own knowledge and experience. His first work *Kargun* (1980) was published when he was twenty two and he has since published several titles. His language use is individualist and interventionist, deliberately using the creole language of the Murri Aboriginal people in preference to standard English. Sam Watson is aware of his dilemma as a young urban black man writing poetry in English. He writes exhilarating road poems and urban songlines in interface with ancestral ties. Recently, I heard Sam refer to himself as an 'urban pansy' who's never been beaten up, never spent time in a lock-up, not slept in a park and so on. He is aware that his ancestors did not use a written medium to communicate. His poetry is definitely located in the 21st century.

We also have the problem of the government being part of the 'coalition of the willing' and of practising excessively punitive treatment of people seeking asylum in our country. A creeping totalitarian aspect of the current (entrenched) government is an obvious quest to silence all critics - in all media. There is a proliferation of collections of essays - like the recent *Do Not Disturb*<sup>xii</sup> - on censoring and silencing in the media. The Melbourne publisher Black Inc produces *Quarterly Essay*<sup>xiii</sup> - essays on indigenous struggle (land rights, stolen generations, deaths in custody), detaining of refugees, neglect of the mentally ill and other controversial, topical issues. Of course, this particular political climate affects the poetry being written and the modus operandi of poets who are also, simply, citizens.

The readings scene is alarmingly bad in Sydney. There are monthly readings in two suburban bookshops, one in a community centre and one in a gallery. Hardly anyone goes to them - four friends of the poets, you and the other reader, a dog, the reading co-ordinator and a jazz guitarist. The Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts has just recently cut the funding to an alliance called Sydney Poetry Network that used to run the Loft monthly readings at University of Technology Sydney, the *Southerly magazine* lunchtime readings at the English Department, University of Sydney (no one went to those either), the Poets' Union monthly reading at an inner city gallery and an annual weekend poetry seminar where any ideas having currency could get an airing. So,

those events will soon, most probably, fold. *Heat* magazine is currently hosting occasional (three, so far, this year) Sunday afternoon themed readings (the old chestnuts - poetry and religion, poetry and irony and so on) at a posh private grammar school. On a recent wintry Sunday a kind of schizoid miracle occurred in Sydney - two readings on the same afternoon ! Steve Kelen was featured at a Poets' Union reading. The audience was his brother, his sister-in-law, his mum, his partner, me, the organiser and the five people waiting to read in the open section. The reading entry fee was \$7. Up the back on a card table - a cask of white wine, some plastic cups and a glass jar to collect your dollar for a drink. Afterwards I raced across town for the later free *Heat* magazine event at Sydney Grammar School. There was a well-heeled, Eastern Suburbs kind of culture-vulture crowd, catered quiches and vol-au-vents, a plethora of bottled red and white wines and stemmed wine glasses. And there was me, Judy Beveridge and Adrian Wiggins - the only poets in the sizeable audience. For those of us lucky enough to have been there, the last twenty-five years of the last century were a boon - there were readings everywhere and often. This was a time before large, commercially-driven writers' festivals became the official venues for the reception of live writing and, as Murray Edmond says (and I agree), in both New Zealand and Australia, there has been a kind of 'officialisation' of writing - writing fellowships, festivals, an enhanced publishing industry, writing programmes and degrees, which has sucked the life out of the 'unofficial' world.

The journals aren't at their best either, cutting back from four to three issues a year in some cases and some have ceased publication altogether (*Westerly*, *Salt*). Melbourne-based *Meanjin* seems to be pursuing lifestyle themes, making it appear not that much different from the newspapers' glossy weekend liftouts and it no longer carries any book reviews. But *Overland* chugs along, maintaining a strong socio-political agenda, although the current poetry editor has reverted to choosing mostly politically didactic, confessional poems or doggerel (the best of those three). Very old fashioned.

In Sydney *Southerly* cranks up slowly a few times a year and is always late, but usually worth it. *Southerly*, refreshingly, often has a guest editor. *Heat* is the most public of all Australian journals - appealing to the literary festival set, always getting some attention

for its new issues and activities in newspapers and it keeps a kind of multi-cultural bias alive. *Heat* has also cut back to three issues a year. In Tasmania there's *Island* magazine - arty and polite - and Ralph Wessman's brave independent *Famous Reporter* trying to fill the cracks. And smaller independents like *Blue Dog* (Melbourne) and *Sidewalk* (Adelaide) struggle along. That's about it.

The newspapers - *The Age* and *The Australian* run one poem a week on Saturdays and the largest city's paper, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ignores poetry entirely.

For the good news : There is some independent press activity in Sydney.

Vagabond Press, a small non-profit publisher begun by young poets Michael Brennan, Elizabeth Allen and Jane Gibian. They publish chapbooks - Rare Objects Series and Stray Dog Editions - in beautifully-produced editions of only one or two hundred copies.

The other independents in Sydney are the tireless Phil Hammial's Island Press and Mabel Lee's Peony Press, publishing Chinese poets in translation.

The small presses that publish poetry alongside fiction and memoir are Veronica Sumegi's Brandl & Schlesinger and Ivor Indyk's Giramondo Press.

In each of the other major cities there's at least one publisher of poetry - Black Pepper and Five Islands (ex-Wollongong) in Melbourne, UQP in Brisbane, Ginninderra in Canberra, Wakefield and Little Esther in Adelaide, Magabala Books (indigenous poetry) in Darwin and Fremantle Arts Centre Press in Perth.

Online magazines : *Cordite* began as a newspaper-style broadsheet by poets Adrian Wiggins and Peter Minter about ten years ago and is now exclusively online. It's edited by David Prater. *Cordite* has received Literature Board funding and has actually paid contributors.

<http://www.cordite.org.au/>

*foam:e* appears occasionally and began 'organically' from Cassie Lewis's now-defunct discussion list *poetryespresso*. It is edited by Brisbane-based artist and poet, Angela Gardner.

<http://www.foame.org/>

Another Queenslander, Paul Hardacre, runs papertiger media, producing a CDROM poetry magazine, *papertiger*, an email what's-on bulletin, *tiger talk*, and an online journal called *hutt*

<http://www.papertigermedia.com>

There's also a Darwin-based e-journal called *Thylazine* but you almost have to pay to be in it and, in my experience, its editorial style is amateurish.

<http://www.thylazine.org>

*Gangway* is a bi-lingual (German-English) quarterly edited by Sydney-based publisher Gerald Gangblauer. *Gangway*, as well as publishing European and American writers continues (to present) many Australians.

<http://www.gangway.net>

The best of the online journals is *Jacket*. Begun in October 1997 by the poet John Tranter, it is still pretty much the state-of-the-art. It's snazzy.

John Tranter has been fascinated by typeface for years, always detailing the particular design-history of fonts used in his printed publications. For a few years recently Tranter has also used one of several freely-available internet text-randomising computer programs, Brekdown, to collapse and combine texts to make his own prose-pieces and poems that turned out to be something like electronic William Burroughs cut-ups. So it follows that *Jacket* might reflect these interests in its design and selection of material. Included on the site, Tranter's general essay on the internet, 'The Left Hand of Capitalism', also foregrounds *Jacket's* rationale, the labour involved and the interminably frustrating problem of the distribution of poetry which internet publication largely solves.

<http://www.jacketmagazine.com/lefthand.html>

*Jacket* makes Deleuzian lines of flight within a Euro-American realm – transmitting and collecting buzzy literary signals. It's eclectic. *Jacket* gathers material from many sources - hard-copy and electronic - transfers them to the site and uploads them into cyber space. Often selecting international material from the poets, critics and teachers who participate in discussion lists like the S.U.N.Y. Buffalo-based *Poetics* list, British poets list and the *poetryetc* list.

The content is lush with contributions from a sweeping range of luminaries, lesser-knowns and soon-to-be-someones. The genres are broad – essays, reviews, poems, interviews, conference papers and reports, memorials, special issues, literary histories, featured poets, all accompanied by photographic beauties and oddities, cartoons, comic strips as well as many photographs of the authors. *Jacket* has produced collaborative print/electronic issues with print journals *overland*, *SALT* and *New American Writing*. From time to time, *Jacket* showcases writing features from particular countries like the one from New Zealand

<http://jacketmagazine.com/16/index.html>

*Jacket* solicits the material it publishes and, given the daunting eight A4 printed pages that comprise the *Jacket* style-guide (a mini-encyclopaedia about web publishing, including a digression on why not to send chain letters via the internet which displays Tranter's skill with mathematics), it would take an intrepid cyber-cadet to send anything uninvited. <http://www.jacketmagazine.com/styleguide.html>

Of course, Tranter uses a scanner and so he does receive solicited material (especially graphics) through the old-fashioned post.

One of the efficacious aspects of web-zines is the ease of accessing the archive of previous issues. Every issue of *Jacket* is always available. To move from the first issue to the latest, or any in-between, just takes a quick click of the mouse.

*Jacket*, like most web-zines, is hands-on. Tranter does all the design, coding and uploading himself. It is also entirely self-funded (sponsored by John and Lyn Tranter's company, Australian Literary Management). An application for some financial assistance was knocked back by the Australia Council for the Arts basically because of *Jacket's* large quantity of international, rather than exclusively Australian, content - so contributors remain unpaid.

*Jacket* ran as a quarterly for the first three years and then, following the trend of several hard-copy Australian journals, Tranter decided to cut back to only three issues a year. Last year, John Tranter asked me to edit an issue of *Jacket* (<http://www.jacketmagazine.com/27/index.html>) and subsequently asked me to become associate editor.

<http://jacketmagazine.com/>

*Australian Literature Resources Index* is another project begun by John Tranter earlier this year, 2005. There is already a useful database called Austlit but it's expensive which means that access is generally limited to subscription via educational institutions. (<http://www.austlit.edu.au/>). It provides a comprehensive list of Australian writers and their publications but it doesn't cross-reference to live links. *Australian Literature Resources Index* is broad-ranging in its links to live material and it offers free access. <http://www.austlit.com/a/index.html>

*Pam Brown: Australian poet. Poetry editor of Overland 1997-2002, assistant editor of Jacket from 2005.*

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Notes

*Michael Brennan / The Imageless World / Salt Publishing / 2004*

These poems are excised from the work of mourning. Endearing, 'emotional', also tinged with an eastern european tone (eastern europe before the 1980s fall). Axiomatic fragments sensitize a reader's consciousness with feeling. 'Freedom might be the week love begins or love ends. Well fed words might keep it from us.' The wanderer's already-nostalgic letters and postcards home are also occasionally tragicomic – a lover's departure – 'She left a sliver of green soap/Which I started to use/The day after the day she left./I tried to mail the postcard but/Without a forwarding address/Only the soap that was almost gone was left.' Michael Brennan is the Australian founder of the vibrant independent chapbook imprint Vagabond Press

*Justin Clemens / The Mundiad / Black Inc. / 2004*

A mock epic modelled on classical poems à la Virgil or Milton. A fabulously irreverent rant, the story of the lusty liaison between Juliano Parataxis and Sophy Vesperal and the conception and eventual premature birth of their daughter, Mundia. Scholarly without being ponderous, beautifully elegiac about popular culture and witty to boot. Justin Clemens revives the ancient poetic ambition to speak differently about the world

*MTC Cronin / More or Less than 1 > 100 / Shearsman / 2004*

This is MTC Cronin's tenth book. A compositional tour de force, the entire poem consists of one hundred sections, their line counts progressing from one line in the first poem to fifty in the fiftieth, and then decreasing from fifty lines in the fifty-first section to one line in the last section. The sections of equal line counts are mirrored pairs - not the same, but resonating creatively against each other through form, concept or vocabulary – presenting to the reader different possible readings of the sequence. The effect, if read from 1 to 100, is of an enormous breath, a rising utterance that gains momentum and then moves back (or forwards) towards infinity and ultimate silence.

This structure reflects the content of the poem, or rather it controls and ‘holds’ the content, which questions death, life, bodily existence, meaning, love and all that it means to be human. An ambitious project which extends the possibilities of poetic form: the lines, which are often enigmatic, create a cumulative effect that is moving, emotionally resonant and intellectually stringent, using vocabulary and imagery of extraordinary richness. In the first ‘rising’ half of the poem the voice refers to others, the ‘they’ of humanity that exists beyond the self; the second half of the poem, (section 51), begins “I, my I/ it is ruin language/ you fall into me/ and are born to what?/ this extraordinary justice/ we shall be to each other”. This heralds an increasing intimacy as the voice now appears through the second half of the poem in relationship to others, the ‘you’ in a variety of non-specified forms – lover, child, other persons. The effect on these non-specific terms is to focus on the speaker’s voice as isolated yet endlessly reaching out towards others, towards meaning. It is this that makes the work so moving. This project by MTC Cronin is significant for its vision, the depth of its philosophical, existential and spiritual questioning. There is a largeness, or greatness, in poetry that goes as far as this into the un-asked questions and hidden fears of human life.

A selection of poems -

<http://www.cordite.org.au/archives/000557.html>

*Lidija Cvetkovic | War Is Not The Season For Figs | UQP | 2004*

A gifted newcomer to Australian poetry, Lidija Cvetkovic writes with sustained elegance even in the face of the solemn complexities of lives deeply affected and displaced by political events in the collapsed world of the war-torn Balkans. These poems are grounded in the space of the migrant, where memory of family and place intersects with a new life in Australia. The poems also mourn the loss of childhood and grieve for the destruction of her former homeland. Serious yet never sombre, sometimes startling yet never histrionic, they are imbued with a minimalist clarity in the midst of descriptions of hugely human troubles and triumphs.

*Kate Fagan | The Long Moment | 2002*

<http://jacketmagazine.com/27/faga-pp.html>

*Michael Farrell / Poems / 2005*

<http://jacketmagazine.com/27/farr-p.html>

*Keri Glastonbury / Triggering Town / 2005*

<http://jacketmagazine.com/27/glast.html>

*Cassie Lewis / High Country / Little Esther Books / 2001*

[http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1\\_8\\_2002/current/alerts/brown.shtm](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1_8_2002/current/alerts/brown.shtm)

*Kate Lilley / Versary / Salt Publishing / 2002*

Kate Lilley's poetry is resolutely 'literary' and although it's probably preferable to have some knowledge of rhetoric, semiotics, and postmodernism it's also quite possible that you can get a huge variety of pleasures from reading *Versary* whether or not you know anything at all about poetics and its influences.

To read full review -

<http://www.geocities.com/p.brown/KL.htm>

*John Mateer / Loanwords / FACP / 2002*

John Mateer was born in South Africa, lived in Perth for many years and is now based in Melbourne. In 2001 he won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry and in 2002 was awarded an Asialink Literature Residency in Japan. His publications include *Loanwords*, *Barefoot Speech*, *Anachronism* and *Burning Swans*, all published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

*Peter Minter / Empty Texas / Paperbark Press / 2000*

The title of Peter Minter's exciting second collection, *Empty Texas*, situates his influences in late Twentieth Century American poetries. This Texas is a place where language distils through experimentation and contemplative thought into pure poetry. Sequential, playful, intellectually alert to language-use as a game, these ironies are multiple. Refreshingly, Minter abandons the construction of "self" common to most

contemporary poetry and is instead atmospheric, conceptual and syntactically innovative. His landscapes are representational. His science is in living systems. Some of Minter's poems include Paper Bark publisher, Bob Adamson, acknowledging Stéphane Mallarmé as a common inspiration. or, imagined nicely, your red/ pastourelle reconstitutes virtue, the Tempest/ and all that futile glamour/ surging over paddocks/gently wrecks the poppies/ atonal and clean, wind-up/ gorging on fever/ beside his and hers luminescences. Peter Minter, irrational Mallarmiste for a new generation, write on !

*Romaine Moreton | Post Me To The Prime Minister | 2004*

Romaine Moreton is an Indigenous performance poet, film maker and writer. Originally from Stradbroke Island, her family settled in the country town of Bodalla, New South Wales, when she was a child. She says of her work: "The things I have to say and how I say them are a direct response to the environment in which I have grown up and continue to live in. To create works that do not deal with the morbid and mortal effects of racism for one, and the beauty of Indigenous culture for another, would be for me personally, to produce works that are farcical."

Aboriginal experience and displacement is at the heart of Romaine's work, and the tension is clearly palpable. That she has taken a responsibility for her people one feels immediately. But beyond injustice and sorrow, we also feel the power and beauty of aboriginal culture and myth brought into contemporary Australia. 'Jimi Hendrix and Ochre' immediately lands us in a vivid desert of dying orange light, a colour scheme mirrored in 'My Tellurian Grandfather'.

If you ask most people under 30 who their favourite poet is these days, they'll likely tell you Eminem or Tupac. For those of us still breathing a literary poetic, this answer is to misunderstand the question. Regardless, there are positives in this changing public perception of the art. The poem 'In My Country', with its hop-hop-esque rhyme scheme, has a direct engagement with its themes and listeners, and it is partly by the forcefulness of these rhymes and rhythms that the poem achieves its objective. Its title juxtaposes it against Dorothy Mackellar's iconic piece of Australiana, although its message is altogether other. There is no aestheticisation of landscape or loss here, but an unrelenting drum beat of protest. ( Berndt Sellheim )

*Ted Nielsen / Poems / 2005*

<http://jacketmagazine.com/27/niel.html>

Web site pre-the-invention-of-blogs diary

<http://www.magicdog.com/>

*Dîpti Saravanamuttu, / The Colosseum / 2004*

The title of Dîpti Saravanamuttu's third book of poetry is well-chosen: it connotes the way time fixes experience as both momentous and fragmented, and the way in which the memory and experience of a life, while becoming 'ruin' as it recedes in time, continues to transform creatively to evoke new meanings. These are passionate poems of place. Based in personal experiences of places lived and traveled in – Sri Lanka to which the émigré returns, the Eastern suburbs and beaches of Sydney, the United States at the time of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, an un-located bush garden and cottage, as well as places of the heart, bent and beaten into new form through the loss of love and the renewal of spirit - the personal experience becomes meaningful only in its relationship to the wider issues of a moral universe. The sense of displacement in the poems - and the displacement of the poet in the world of postmodern images - is also their creative force. This force is generated through the capacity to perceive, through the "found art" of objects, memories and sensory experience (such as preparing Sri Lankan food on a hot, solitary, Australian day), what Saravanamuttu evokes as "The maps we have for beloved landscape,/ the space for faith and other flowerings/ of the unpredictable and savage heart".

In addition to its passion and its willingness to range far beyond the realm of individual experience, this is poetry that has an intellectual rigor, an ability to mould feeling and perception into philosophical argument reminiscent of the poems of Coleridge. In poems such as "Anatomy of the Perfect Delusion" where the poet confronts the way we 'know' the of suffering of people through our history and through media images, and "Flying North in Winter" where she engages directly prejudices aimed by others at herself, Saravanamuttu allows her poetry to expand conceptual understandings and to engage

with a paradoxical universe that includes cruelty and kindness, love and betrayal, paradox and faith.

*Samuel Wagan Watson / smoke encrypted whispers / UQP /2004*

More a walkabout than a fashionable white flâneur's stroll. Sam Wagan-Watson's poems drift like smoke through worlds of encrypted urban experience. Already estranged by indigenality, this poet takes his 'itinerant blues' on the road (from Brisbane to Berlin) and, on the way, decodes and seeks a transforming, connecting language.

*Ouyang Yu – Australia's most published unpublished poet*

Ouyang is a controversial figure within Australian literature, sometimes characterised as 'the angry Chinese poet.' His work captures the frustrations (personal, social, professional and sexual) of the migrant experience and hits out at the indifference and hostility with which Australia has greeted recent waves of Asian immigration. He writes with insight about the dilemmas of transnational artists and intellectuals caught between different literary, cultural and linguistic traditions. His raw, uncompromising style (according to one critic, the 'deliberate unloveliness' of his language) challenges literary as well as social establishments at the same time as it engages in courageous acts of introspection and self-criticism. Ouyang typifies the new generation of post-colonial writers and intellectuals who can write with detachment about the forces of globalisation and their impact on East-West relations and at the same time acknowledge their complex and often painful impact on their own life and work. Ouyang Yu is currently Visiting Professor of Austlit. at Wuhan University in China

<http://www.ouyangyu.com.au/Default.asp>

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<sup>i</sup> David Brooks, *The Australian Line*; *Agenda*, 41, No1-2, 2005

<sup>ii</sup> Laurie Duggan, *Impostures: Nationalism, Modernism and Australian Poetry of the Late Twentieth Century* (unpublished paper, 2004)

<sup>iii</sup> The Sydney poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart invented 'Ern Malley' and submitted his poems to *Angry Penguins*, edited by Max Harris, as an attempt to expose what they considered to be the sham of modernist poetry. The work of Malley comprised lines and words selected randomly, everywhere from Shakespeare to an American report on the drainage of the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Ern Malley's *Collected Poems* were published by Angus & Robertson, 1993.

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To read an extract from Michael Heyward's book *The Ern Malley Affair*  
<http://www.jacketmagazine.com/17/ern-heyw.html>

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>v</sup> Dorothy Porter's verse novels : *Akhenaten* (1991), *The Monkey's Mask* (1994), *what a piece of work* (1999), *Wild Surmise* (2002)

<sup>vi</sup> Les Murray, *Fredy Neptune* (2003)  
Geoff Page, *Drumming on Water : A Verse Novel* ( 2003)  
Alan Wearne, *The Nightmarkets : A Novel* (2000)  
*The Lovemakers : Book 1 : Saying All the Great Sexy Things* (2001)  
*The Lovemakers : Book 2 : Money and Nothing* (2004)

<sup>vii</sup> David McCooey, *Surviving Australian Poetry: the New Lyricism*; *Agenda*, 41, No 1-2, 2005

<sup>viii</sup> Kate Fagan, *return to a new physics*, A chapbook-length poem, Rare Object Series, Vagabond Press (2000)

<sup>ix</sup> Interlocution from Murray Edmond.

<sup>x</sup> To read Lionel Fogarty in conversation with Philip Mead :  
<http://jacketmagazine.com/01/fogartyiv.html>

To read some of Lionel Fogarty's poems :  
<http://jacketmagazine.com/01/fogpoems.html>

<sup>xi</sup> To read some of Samuel Wagan Watson's poems :  
<http://jacketmagazine.com/16/ov-waga.html>  
To read Angela Rockel's review of *smoke encrypted whispers*:  
<http://jacketmagazine.com/27/rock-waga.html>

<sup>xii</sup> Manne, Robert (ed), *Do Not Disturb : Is The Media Failing Australia ?*, Black Inc. *Agenda* (2005)

<sup>xiii</sup> For information:  
<http://www.quarterlyessay.com>