

## University of Canberra

## Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington

### Convergence

#### Biographical notes:

Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice and Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on the relationship between art and society; she is currently working, with Kevin Brophy, Michael Biggs and Paul Magee, on an ARC-funded project that investigates creativity through a case study of contemporary poetry. Jen publishes work on cultural theory and creative research; she also writes poetry, and produces artists' books for exhibition.

Paul Hetherington is Associate Professor of Writing and head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) at the University of Canberra. He edited three volumes of the National Library of Australia's four-volume edition of the diaries of the artist Donald Friend and, with Jen Webb, is founding co-editor of the international online journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*. He has published eight full-length poetry collections, most recently *Six different windows* (UWA Publishing), which won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Prize for Poetry.

#### Keywords:

Creative writing – convergence – collaboration – ribbons – light – seeing

1.

Furniture flattens  
in swathes of ribboned light,  
afternoon  
in disorderly elongation;  
a straddle  
and undulation  
obliterating shape,  
light carousing  
a drowned room.

It slides past  
ropes of conversation,  
through gaps  
where words  
have failed,  
dissolving arrangements  
of seating and knowing.

And this might be  
remembering  
because yesterday,  
and last year,  
light was also torn  
between such  
unpossessable things,  
briefly, ineluctably  
burnishing them.

2.

Marking every place  
with a signature  
finger-drumming  
staccato,  
even where it never falls.

You can see it  
from the moon,  
bigger than  
Singapore;  
snaking  
right down  
the west. Lake  
Moore – we call it  
'lake' but its water  
turns to salt, its  
skin to sand.

Halfway down  
the borders bulge;  
lake as open palm  
facing the sun  
holding light.

It has forgotten  
its past, and  
small fish that  
swam in  
its shallows,  
eels lurking  
in the dark parts  
above its heart –  
how  
things change

now  
only light  
remains.

The weather  
roils, clouds thicken  
and fade, winds  
come and go,  
careless.

Even there,  
where it's only  
a susurrating  
rumour,  
still 'rain' is conjured  
like a visiting linguist's  
implausible word.  
And, after all,  
once rain fell  
in the unutterable desert –  
when a market  
sprawled beneath  
sways  
of blue canvas.

North or  
south, it's all the same.  
It comes, it goes  
more or less the same.  
Between movements, I  
wait for  
one moment  
that will make  
waiting  
worthwhile.

Vendors unseated  
gathering, small pools  
with up-thrust broomsticks,  
and a humpback  
gestured  
at flushing spills  
of dark tomatoes –  
every place gouged,  
and every language,  
by water.

In places  
it barely needs speaking,  
so insistent it is,  
like knifing  
cold ribbons,  
or collapsing belief  
flooding  
and eroding –  
weather that drones  
with no-clear-utterance  
on tiles and tin,  
over wattle  
and daub.

After it passes  
everything's altered –  
not because smeared

by mud  
or conjecture  
but because  
joined  
in damp abrasions  
of an unshiny past.

3.

These words  
are not worms,  
or strings  
of gut,  
or scarves  
of discussion,  
but thought  
falling  
like blood-  
dyed rain.

They insinuate  
a love  
that climbed  
away from  
its moment;  
an explorer  
who abandoned  
secure supplies.

They were never  
exclamations  
but were names  
that stretched  
towards endings –  
'house' and 'attic';  
a cache  
of rotting letters;  
a scribbled  
expostulation.

The small plane  
scrolls along the sky  
stretching out its line  
breathing out  
those words,  
it's writing my desire.

I meet you  
on the bike path;  
reach out to  
say hello, feet  
on the ground  
eyes  
on the sky:

'read the signs'  
it spells  
'and not' – we  
hold our breath,  
as it turns, catches  
its own breath –  
'the time'

the propeller  
blades edit  
the letters, the  
wisdom blurs –  
step off  
the path, follow  
lines of  
your own desire.

4.

It is not an animal  
waking  
with something torn  
in its paw –  
this sense  
of bright-seeing alacrity –  
but being and becoming  
ribboned by evening.

The blood-colour reminds  
that thought follows  
worn steps  
of avened afternoon  
where a young woman  
holds herself carefully  
with crimsoned hand.

She turns into a street  
where houses lean  
like a family  
towards gossip.  
'I am', she begins  
but the traffic  
absorbs her words.  
'I am', she states  
as someone pushes  
a shuttered window,  
beckoning her in.

It's this thing we'd  
almost forgotten  
A splinter  
nudged up against  
the bone. It had  
been there so long.  
No matter –  
is anything  
what it seems? Birds  
outside, shouting  
for food, would  
turn us to dust  
if they could;  
the lizards  
recall  
when they were  
dinosaurs and we  
were mud. Don't  
look down, don't  
look back

Keep walking.

5.

Through square-  
seeming minutes  
awkward notions  
swoop and lift,  
leaving swathes  
of dissolving  
colour.  
Through afternoons  
of failing sunlight,  
sloping like  
ungainly birds,

An old man  
outside at midnight  
taking the air  
and a cigarette  
before bed,  
he saw me  
threading my way  
through ribboned streets  
and called out  
'Look at the moon'.

they follow flat  
horizons of light.

They are words  
we never said  
in time –  
a loved one  
waiting  
as the burden  
of a responsibility  
closed  
our hands.  
We knew it  
as we failed –  
that sometimes  
they weigh  
implacably  
in our throats.

Waning,  
propping its pared edge  
against the night

its thin beams  
felt their way  
toward us,  
reaching  
the town,  
touching  
the street.

## Research statement

### *Research background*

All writers ‘steal’: even the most original writers rarely invent, but creatively use, the language they have been finding all their lives. This project is part of a larger work investigating the ethics of literary appropriation; in this instance, the appropriation is both our ‘borrowing’ of each other’s ideas and commentary, and the repurposing of poems we initially wrote for exhibition, rather than publication.

### *Research contribution*

Many writers have discussed this issue: Sterne speaks of the dullness of reiteration; Eliot distinguishes literary borrowing from theft; Brophy warns poets against other poets;<sup>1</sup> and Brady sees the writer as bowerbird. What all point to is that the individual never creates art simply as an individual separate from the zeitgeist. We address this issue, and reconsider the poetic practices of collaborative creativity, re-purposing and homage.

### *Research significance*

In exploring and asserting the abiding significance of independent creation in a context of mutuality and reciprocity, we suggest approaches to collaboration that involve genuine reliance on and appropriation of each other’s practice, knowledge and thinking. We aim to identify ways, beyond influence, plagiarism or citation, in which original creative thought is stimulated by another writer’s work.

## Endnote

1. Apropos of other poets, Brophy advises: ‘Tell them nothing. They steal everything. / They are thugs and desperately / short of ideas, even words’ (‘Advice to poets’ in *Portrait in Skin* 2002)

## Works cited

Brady, Tess 2000 ‘A question of genre: de-mystifying the exegesis’ *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 4 (1), at <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/april00/brady.htm>> (accessed 28 December 2009)

Brophy, Kevin 2002 *Portrait in skin*, Five Islands P: Wollongong

Eliot, TS 1921 ‘Tradition and the individual talent’ in F Kermode (ed) 1953 *Selected prose of TS Eliot* Penguin: London, 37–44

Sterne, Laurence 2012 [1857] *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, Oxford UP: Oxford