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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

A place does not exist, Nettie Palmer believed, until it exists “most formidably on paper”, that is except to the people who lived in those places. Littered around the coast of Australia are some tens of thousands of islands small and large, let alone innumerable islands across the globe. Palmer is making an important point about the representations of islands in the literary imaginary. How many islands do have this kind of representative existence beyond those people and creatures that inhabit them? The names come thick and fast. Dunk Island off the Queensland coast emerges clearly in the textual domain through E.J. Banfield’s accounts of his twenty-five years there, overlaid by Dorothy Cottrell’s whimsical pen. One can’t but think of Stradbroke Island, one of the barrier islands off Brisbane, without imagining the paperback trees of Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Are all islands linked powerfully in the public imagination with particular writers? Patrick White and Fraser Island. Eleanor Alliston and Three Hummock Island. Or academics? Kay Schaffer and Fraser Island. Stephen Murray Smith and the Bass Strait islands. Or do we have to struggle a little here and rather is it that Australia’s islands exist most formidably visually through representation by the tourist and entertainment industries? Randolph Stow in *To The Islands* begins to evoke the complexity of islands in the national imaginary as powerful symbolic sites especially when the central character’s journey is seen as both towards an imaginary centre, “towards the islands of death and mystery” as well as towards “the islands of self-knowledge”, as noted by James Wells-Green. In Australia, narrators have been telling stories about islands long before paper existed; does each island need its own stories, albeit incomplete, as each island has its own dreaming story towards the Murri sense?

“I carry the islands inside my head as a woman and as a writer” says Joanna Murray-Smith who spent family holidays on the remote, uninhabited Erith Island, one of the Kent group. For her the islands are “an intense, unwavering landscape inside my own imagination” (*The Sydney Morning Herald*). In response to our call for writing islands, island writing, we received not so much island literary studies, as memoirs by, firstly those who grew up on them, such as Rachel Johnston in Papua New Guinea who lived there until she was eight, or by Nicole Crowe on Magnetic Island. Are younger people, while more open to ecological diversity than adults, more susceptible to seeing islands as parochial culture prisons? Do they carry the island inside their heads? Crowe makes it clear she found Magnetic Island as both beautiful and culturally isolated. A second grouping of contributions came in from researchers and academics who wanted to express their often intense experiences of visiting an island

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when carrying out field work, or researching aspects of the island's past. We get glimpses of breathtaking vistas on Breaksea Island off the West Australian coast, or a sense of restfulness from Elba. A third layer of contributions came in from the sea-change generations, that is those more mature people who journeyed from the cosmopolitan centre to oft remote islands and whose ecocritical writing tends towards empiricism. A couple of these contributors have started to address the other, non-human inhabitants of these islands, that is the seals and muttonbirds. When it comes to poetry and island imaginaries, one of the most distinctive contributions is that of Iris Dunkle's stunning, presumably autobiographical pieces, on the inner discursive island of poetry, the muse as island space, which when accessed open up possibilities for freedom and autonomy. Other poets on real islands across the globe, such as those by Donna J. Gelagotis Lee, express immanence and connection despite the tourists.

And while Gilles Deleuze might believe that dreaming of islands is always contradictory "of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone—or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew", we are privileged to include different voices, with different dreams about re-appropriating, re-imagining. Islands are exposed as sites of colonisation in two pieces by writers closely connected to those islands extensively damaged by foreign interventions, that is by Wanita Limpus from Kiribati in the Pacific island, and Michael Lujan Bevacqua from Guam. With Susan Cochrane's piece on the role of art in imaging a different vision of the future in the Pacific, we have also included another piece addressing the challenges faced by these small island development states in metaphorically writing their own stories and setting their own agendas while drawing on overseas expertise. With global warming, many of the low lying islands are taking the initial brunt of the changes and the empowerment and agency that can come from environmental connectedness *in their own terms*, and storytelling, are all the more important.

In his essay on islands for a study of ecocritical writing, Cranston offers some important points about ways of reading islands, warning of the sheer magnitude of the topic and the importance of not seeing islands as mere *marginali* to mainland activities. While we have a good geographical range, we can only just begin to shine a small light on the topic. When one starts thinking and listening for islands in the media, for instance, and how metaphors of island emerge, in Queensland alone, as representations of paradise or hell, these metaphors open out on to other questions - about environments and Edens before the fall, about cultural appropriation and tourism, convicts, exiles and the abject. Detention centres on offshore islands remain a powerful relic of earlier days of incarceration. But overall, one thing has become clear, Australian environmental writing needs to be better recognised and valued.

The importance of two Australian novelists who died in the last few months is only slowly beginning to be recognised. Anyone interested in islands needs to read Randolph Stow; the untimely loss of Roberta Sykes is a tragedy. While no feminist in the 1980s could have been unaware of her contribution to Black rights, it was through finding her letters in the University of Queensland Press archive, as their first published Black Australian woman poet and best seller, that I began to get an inkling of the capacity of this extraordinary woman who opened so many doors for others to follow.

Thanks to Victoria Kuttainen, Lindsay Simpson and the team at JCU for making this possible, and thanks to all our contributors.

We hope that you enjoy what you read here.

Deborah Jordan & Fiona McKean [fiction]

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