

## The Degradation of Land and the Position of Poetry

*Martin Harrison*

*"Words are not meanings for a tree...."*  
Judith Wright

There could be a very long version of this essay, but this will have to be the short version. Occasionally, there will be far too obvious indications of where a much longer, more argued version ought to take over. This version is a short cut. This last remark has to be said with a certain unabashedness because, really, a short cut is something impossible in such a large terrain. The questions I am asking are ones provoked by the almost automatic connection made between poetry and ecological issues, matters to do with the poem and matters of the environment and nature. Is there in fact any reason to make such a connection? Does poetry have any part in the current array of activities necessary to maintain the environment in the face of the new millennium's pressures of urbanism, of technology, of poverty, of capitalism and population growth? Anyway, how much contemporary Australian poetry is ecological?

### **A Note from Mindi Station**

Mostly I want to discuss Philip Hodgins' poem "A Note from Mindi Station" with its immediately provocative opening line about the spaciousness

of Australian landscape: “The isolation seemed so reasonable.”<sup>1</sup> Yet before saying anything more about the poem, one further aspect of the short cut must be mentioned straight away: there seems to me to be a difference (I derive a sense of this difference, in part, from my own practice) between poetry which offers a “picture window” account of the environment and one which offers a level of immersedness and provisionality in relation to the environment.<sup>2</sup> My “picture window” characterisation is not unlike the American critic, Charles Altieri’s famous 1984 critique of what he termed the “scenic mode,” a mode which he traced in much late 20th Century poetry. For Altieri, the scenic mode is excessively resorted to in poetry which connects with landscape. For Altieri, the “scenic mode” is a repetitive poetic gesture – mainly derived from the ongoing influence of Romantic poetry – by which a poet isolates or snaps off a moment in nature (a scene) and then, in the poem, identifies the make up of that scene as part of the poet’s own psyche or mood within some or other version of a privileged moment of structured insight.<sup>3</sup> The “picture window” poem is like this: only, as the reference to an architectonics of viewing might suggest, it is pivoted around a conscious act of seeing, of identifying and naming. Altieri argues that the problem with the scenic mode starts with the issue of the poet’s overwhelming centrality to the poem, a suffocating Romantic egoism which, arguably, lingers more in the American tradition than it does in the Australian. For me, however, the emphasis on an architecture of sight and seeing marks a genuine cultural divide between Australian and American poetry. Recent Australian poetry often stresses the newness of how a supposedly “strange” desertic or arid landscape is describable, or draws attention to the relative newness of typically Australian senses of placement. The issue, in other words, is less about the ego – the presence of the democratic self amid the landscape – than about cultural perception and, arguably, cultural originality. This difference in sensibility is usually expressed in a deeply conscious attention to the visual behaviour of things or the visual images of humans in landscape.

This emphasis on visual form is one of the ways in which Philip Hodgins’ poem “A Note from Mindi Station” – a poem so concerned with how the poet views an arid landscape – is of particular interest. Via the picture window Hodgins is able to look on with great patience and sensitivity. He even, for instance, “sees” the difference between focus and blur. Quickly filling us in on the scattered layout of buildings on a large property he talks of how:

...the North Cottage has been a base,  
 a kind of focus in this blur of scrub.  
 It’s near a dried-up section of the creek  
 about five miles from where the homestead is.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, if the settled placement of a dwelling place is in focus, its surrounds are not: thus, the cottage works indeed as “a kind of focus in this blur of scrub.” Similarly the final stanzas of the poem derive much from the contrast between panoramic and then close-up photography techniques and the manipulation of focus in foreground and background. A reader needs to get an overall sense of the visual dynamics of the poem in order to understand this feature fully. For the poem moves (via a conversation with a young woman delivering supplies from the homestead) through a series of different takes which shift from surround senses into a vertical construction of space:

She says she loves to watch the tiny jets  
adhering to their flight-path eight miles up  
and wonder where they might be headed for.  
By straining you can just make out their shape  
but nothing of the isolated roar.  
They're silent as a particle of dust.

Today a sparrow hawk was hovering there.  
Its legs had been let down with claws outstretched,  
the wings had worked themselves into a blur,  
the head was changing settings like a switch;  
but what was fixed in place was one small bird,  
which might have been the pivot of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Such reflectiveness about the architectonics of the view also includes, it seems to me, an awareness of the newness of how “we” (i.e. the sort of people who set up bases, have radios, dream of aeroplanes etc) construct our seeing of Australia. At the very least, “A Note from Mindi Station” invites the reader to acknowledge a degree of extremity in which we look at the harshness of landscape. It is woven with sparse but very telling details of this extremity – the “strangely ferrous” colour of the soil, the days of slow four wheel driving to get there, the dried up creek. Hodgins’ poem manifests a fully self-aware visual acuity. It is, besides, a poem which plays to such a degree on the “seeming” nature of the reasonableness of being so far away from a town (“the isolation seemed so reasonable”) that any reader will immediately suspect that really it is a poem to do with the “un-reasonableness” of the isolation he describes out at Mindi, south of the Hammersley Ranges: in short, every gesture of being there is surrounded by an intense, watchful sense of the presence of landscape, of the horizon and visual depth. This is somewhere where the hugeness of the sky lacks a name and where implications to be drawn from that realisation are not

clear. It's a place where jet planes are "tiny" and hard to make out in the sky's intense glitter. Such pictorial or photographic isolatedness brings with it a self-conscious intellectual and psychological edge, or frame, which both marks the uniqueness of the moment and, at the same time, suggests a "something else" which cannot be developed or named.

Here, however, are some other characteristics of the picture window. Firstly, the viewpoint in the poem is entirely ballistic: it is to do with straight lines drawn across space, in which target areas (the cottage, the sparrow hawk) are in focus and others not. Even the woman seems to stand in front of us, as if in the hairline of a rifle's eyepiece or in a camera lens. The poem sets up, in other words, a geometrically constructed cinema scene. A second characteristic, closely connected to the first, is the non-negotiable distance between speaker and the things (a woman, a place) observed: it is not that nothing happens to motivate that sense of space, nor that there is no sense of "event," but that the relationship between the speaker and the things going on is oddly stabilised. The same distance is maintained throughout, much like a contour-copy made by a pantograph – that mechanical device which allows you to trace contours and diagrams exactly and which maintains an unchanging distance between the pointer which traces on one piece of paper and the pencil which draws on another. The distance is, so to speak, a fixed distance which an entire discourse structure can take up in a transparent, untroubled way: illusionistically, the poem offers a correspondingly "entire" and unwavering state of mind. (Again the "seeming" reasonableness mentioned in the poem's opening line is closely suggested here.) Further, there is a third characteristic deeply implicated in the way the poem proceeds as a discursive structure – namely that the images of the poem are seamlessly folded into it. Whether we consider the visual references – the dried up creek, the ferrous colours – or the similes (silence like a particle of dust, the bird's head-movements like a switch), these are not disjunctive, shock-filled images. Each image contributes to the singular direction of meaning and intention which the discourse carries. Image is, in other words, absorbed by thought; vision leads back to discourse, so that ultimately nothing extraneous or vagabond can disrupt the carefully formalised play-off between thought and emptiness, between viewpoint and non-reason.

Hodgins's finely honed poem is in many ways the straw man of this essay. It comes from someone who had a deeply knowledgeable relationship with country. It is a finely managed piece of writing. But to speak frankly, there is also something disturbing (and even irritating) in the way the poem formalises the relationship between speech and space: it's that descriptiveness, I suppose, and the care with which the place is so well

“captured” in images which immaculately feed back into thought-structure. For a fourth characteristic of the poem is the way in which the poem’s incidental narrative is, unquestioningly, wholly in the domain of the speaker’s project: the result is that the place is offered in an ideal fashion, without equivocation, without a sense of searching for how to account for it – and only from the vantage point of the speaker. Even the woman’s observations are blended in, and taken over, by the speaker. Epistemologically, in other words, Mindi is a place where (to borrow a phrase from the philosopher Charles Taylor writing about Heidegger) the understanding of reality is disposed principally “through the power of a subject.”<sup>6</sup> There is very little to suggest that subjective awareness is operating other than in control of the place. There is no skepticism as to whether or not the real is what can be represented by that subject.

### Immersion

“A Note from Mindi Station” is poetry closely identified with land and country. It is by a poet whose work often reckons elegantly with land, with working on land, with the nature of technology and the impact of technological visions of country. It is one of the pieces in which Hodgins uses a formulation I much admire – his notion of “landspeak” (“strong ancient landspeak on the radio”):

The isolation seemed so reasonable:  
 three days of stasis on a broken track  
 with big cogs grinding in low ratio,  
 a survey map to make it possible,  
 strong ancient land-speak on the radio  
 and unexpected camels staring back.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of lands-speak and the tone of the line it occurs in are very Hodgins.

If you read a number of Australian poets, especially those publishing towards the end of the last century as was the late Philip Hodgins, it is hard not to be surprised how often the originality of recent Australian poetry is in part to do with what I have elsewhere termed a kind of subjunctiveness, a conditionality, in relation to European-derived terms land, landscape and countryside.<sup>8</sup> To be in an Australian place and to “see” it brings a number of conditions, a number of reflexive and reflective moments of awareness. Here, again, there is the risk of offering only a “short cut” version of this statement about a conditional mode, since obviously the category is complex. But one fairly obvious way of thinking about conditionality is to think

about it in cultural or bi-cultural terms: namely that, given the recentness of European settlement in Australia, a sense of how European structures, land forms and land uses have been imposed on the country is relevant, living and thinkable. It is possible, for instance, to become conscious of how someone may “see” country in an exclusive, imperialistic way. It becomes possible, too, to understand how, if you overlook or refuse a sense of a multi-sided construction of Indigenous and westernised vision, then you suffer a kind of amnesia in relation to the past. But worse, you suffer too what might be termed amnesia towards present time: in other words, certain things simply do not come into vision. These might range from issues to do with the use of land, its re-shaping and sculpting, through to a sense of the multiplicity of names which places have historically and a reckoning with the recentness of European nominalisation. Or it might be to do with an awareness of how many traces of Indigenous settlement are still visible when looking out, say, across a hill side. Indeed, this sort of many sided “viewing” may invoke even an understanding of the different forms of custodianship, care and ownership which country is subject to.<sup>9</sup>

To envisage this conditionality as primarily bi-cultural teases out the concept but at the same time risks reducing it to history and politics in a way which, unintentionally, effaces the real memories of real people. For many less obviously intercultural ways of seeing offer a kind of conditionality – such as how movement, colour, senses of dimension, or an intuitive reckoning with the relations of the built and unbuilt environment, can work together to suggest a totality or a sense of deep relatedness between these elements. These factors when drawn into the imaginative texture of a piece of writing – a poem or a fiction – start to bring into play a sense of the appropriateness and inappropriateness of some metaphors of sight, listening and atmosphere over others. There are conditions, in other words, by which we can accurately account for our seeing, for how the world looks to us. This subjunctive state requires that a particular style of sensing and feeling is invented, one cognizant of the given limits of a singular vantage point in time and space. Put another way, there is a series of phenomenological subject-object relations available here which are not just part of the observer’s social or psychological context but are part of the phenomenological settings of the things themselves. Equally, there are deeply historical requirements in the inherited texture of language and sensation (especially some of the earlier mentioned issues which cohere around memories of settlement, or around direct, personal experiences of country and around perceptions of the environment) which not only oblige poetry to acquire a phenomenological fullness but which open up ways to do so. A number of Australian poets have responded to this many-sided sense of the environ-

ment, including very notable examples like Jennifer Rankin or the later Taoist-influenced work of David Campbell. Contemporarily I can think of examples such as John Jenkins's precise, almost botanical observational poems, or recent poems by Louise Crisp. The most outstanding example remains, however, Judith Wright's poetry, with its re-iterations of the multiple sense of local vision and her persistent, at times ecstatic awareness of both the limits and the necessary centrality of language in the formation of perception.

At heart, an awareness of the controlling position of the subject has to address how consciousness constructs the world and is constructed through it, and particularly in relation to the medium in which, as poets, we constitute our sense of the world – namely language. To go back to Taylor's phrase, the disposition of an understanding of reality which has the speaker or the he or she who utters at the centre of language is one which will not acknowledge the problem of an absence of authentic being in a highly technologised world, or the breakdown of an ontologically founded relationship between human consciousness and things and the abyssal problem of how to construct meaning, how to be meaningful. These, as Australia's greatest environmental poet, Judith Wright, repeatedly said, are centrally problems to do with language and how knowledge is constructed.

Her thoughts about poetry consistently reflected this concern to step over the position of the subject and a reductive form of subjectivity. To some degree this awareness of the reductive, narrowing nature of human presence is the meaning of her term "wisdom" in a poem like "Gum-Trees Stripping": wisdom, here, is a deeply attuned and observant "quietness" in which human reason does not look "for reasons past the edge of reason."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, this very same sense of provisionality is what obliges an understanding, not without its own tragic dimension, that it is language which makes the place for significant experience. It is, to quote from the poem "Nameless Flower", the poet's ability to set "a word upon a word" which allows for evanescent, nameless events and things – in this case, a botanically unidentified white flower – to become meaningful:

Flakes that drop at the flight of a bird  
and have no name,  
I'll set a word upon a word  
to be your home.<sup>11</sup>

Many of her best poems are, like "Nameless Flower", deeply intimate, yet at the same time seem to proceed from a place in the mind which is not subjective and, indeed, is even impersonal. Experience goes hand in hand with the way that this seemingly impersonal requirement – a requirement

borne by language and by an awareness of the limited place of human consciousness in the wider world – is handled and brought to fruition. Such understanding is not a matter of intention but of immersion.

We know, too, from her own account, of the extent of her engagement with aspects of her husband Jack McKinney's work in philosophy and the history of science – for example, the impact on both of them of the then new concepts of immeasurability (such as Heisenberg's theories and other areas of quantum physics). Both McKinney and Wright are equally concerned about how such scientific theories challenge the notion of experience and set up paradoxical conditions for intuition and reason. The congruence of this with Heidegger's work at the same time – he is also responding to Heisenberg's physics, no less than to Heisenberg's writings on language – are striking.<sup>12</sup> For our purposes, what is clear is that Judith Wright was thinking about the relation between human experience and the technologisation of nature through most of her life. Within her evolving philosophy of the environment and nature, there is inevitably a comparable read-through, so to speak, to her views on subjecthood. Thus, for instance, when, in her memoir *Half a Lifetime*, she starts to think about the significance or lack of significance of the personal memories on which a life story is founded, she starts to muse on subatomic particles which are, as she puts it, "shot through with cosmic relationships". Selfhood too cannot be seen as unified and measurable. "I," she goes on to write, "is a shimmering multiple and multitude, it seems."<sup>13</sup> This is an extraordinary and immensely interesting version of what I term "provisionality."

### Land and Poetry

References to Heidegger have hovered behind this essay. Not unconnected with the broad theme of language and land, Charles Taylor and others such as Robert Zimmerman wanted some years ago to argue for a link between the sort of consciousness theory at work in Heideggerian language theory and many of the concerns of so-called "deep" ecology.<sup>14</sup>

For the moment it may suffice to say that, given Heidegger's focus on how systemic elements of consciousness construct meaning and how human participation in meaning-making is motivated by response, by attentiveness and by self-conscious reflection on a dimensional awareness of things and their settings, Heidegger offers, in my view, an ecological, or a proto-ecological, language theory. For Heidegger, "we hear what language says only because we belong within it."<sup>15</sup> In the well known essay "Language" ("Die Sprache") Heidegger offers not a refutation of structuralist or grammatical theorisations of language but rather an attempt to refound the



study of language within a hermeneutic account of the intertwined relationship between utterance and being – in particular a way to move the speaker (the subject and the subjective domain of discourse) to one side of language and away from a central controlling role. While Heidegger warns of the dangers of taking his acoustic metaphors too literally, the phraseology of calling and response, the modelling of meaning on the displacing and mobile behaviour of wave-effects (sound waves, for instance) and the intense meditation on the category of stillness (both inertia and silence) are all means of redefining where the “I” or the subject speaks from. The “I” speaks from a displaced, moving and partly unconscious relationship with meaning. Indeed it might be true to say that, in his concern for realising the highly ambiguous way in which utterance engages both with the presence and absence of being, Heidegger is trying to let into language a role for the pre-linguistic and unconscious way in which meanings are evoked in speech. In every regard, human attentiveness focusses not on words but on things and on their meanings and voicings in human consciousness. Such an intertwining of things and consciousness is not only best understood as a feature of poetic language, it provokes in human consciousness a deeply structured, never fully resolved interplay between intimate senses of envioning things and no less compelling senses of differentiation and objectification.<sup>16</sup> It is founded in short on the insight which the epigraph from Judith Wright which starts this essay offers: “Words are not meanings for a tree.”<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, we can find, in the contemporary context, other not entirely dissimilar de-centring and potentially ecological accounts of subject relations in regard to the constitutive function of language: for example, cognitive theories of language, especially those which focus on the deeply implanted nature of metaphor in concept formation. Here, as Lakoff and Johnson have pointed out, there is no ideal point of removal from immersion in already emerging meaning and experience: there is no glass wall from behind which to view the world. “Metaphorical thought is,” as they put it, “normal, not deviant.”<sup>18</sup> Metaphors are like deeply structured morphemic elements in discourse which inevitably engage with the sensory and physical constructions of human experience. Far from being a deviation from correct theorisation, they are the pre-requisite of theory. Meaning, similarly, cannot be dissociated from a context of embodied and envioning experiences, whether to do with the specific cognitive structures which construct both overt and autonomic consciousness or to do with the construction of space and location which, more broadly, are part of human modalities to do with the senses.

For Lakoff and Johnson, the embodiment of meaning “locates mean-

ing in the body and in the unconscious conceptual system” of the body’s own reflexive structure. For them:

(o)ur brains and minds do not operate using abstract formal symbols which are given meaning by correlations to an allegedly mind-independent world that comes with categories and essences built in. The body and mind are where meanings arise in and through our interactions with the environment and other people.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, language and thinking are (biologically) part of a two-way bio-feedback process between mind and thing: they are implanted in the conceptual and sensory mapping which we call being-in-the-world.<sup>20</sup> Nor are the environmental implications of recognising “meaning” as (in my terms) a located, immersive modality overlooked. “The environment,” they write, “is not an ‘other’ to us. It is not a collection of things that we encounter. Rather, it is part of our being...We cannot and do not exist apart from it.”<sup>21</sup> Descriptiveness is something, in short, which cannot be separated out from the environment. Similarly metaphors do not articulate only a space within discourse, but articulate the integration of discourse in event-filled, conscious space.

With these thoughts in mind then, it is time to turn back to “A Note from Mindi Station.” Philip Hodgins’s poem seems at first sight to come out of the tradition of Australian land-centred and landscape poetry. If it has been introduced here as something of a straw man for a discussion between the polarities of landscape on the one hand and ecology on the other, that may have disguised the fact that even this poem is not in any straightforward sense about landscape – or, arguably, even about a place. As with so much of his poetry, we can happily lose our way in the skill with which he offers descriptive richness and forget how much his poems are about intention, about psychological senses of doing and not-doing: in this case, about a deeply structured lack of communication. The lack of information (what are “we” doing there, out there?), the failure of the speaker to engage in conversation with the woman, the uncanny silence of the presumably male speaker, the silence which surrounds the sparrow hawk, all make the poem intensely memorable. It is as if the poet wishes to silence pathos, to silence language in a way which offers no further communication. It is in many ways a poem about language, about the blockage of utterance.

There is no intention, then, to argue against the poem in the sense of failing to acknowledge its worth or subsuming it into my own ideas about language and the environment. The point all along has been to trace the connections between poetry which focusses on landscape and a by no

means automatically identical set of thoughts about subjectivity and language which are inherited through ecological philosophy. Landscape poetry, after all, may not be ecological at all. The ecological position of poetry is more than just a representational one in which the bare ground, the cottage and the plane's vapour trail find themselves. This conclusion – in effect, that the demands of an ecological perception break open the picture window and the concept of landscape alike – brings with it two further consequences. Firstly: no matter how well intended, we cannot protect the world through more and more irony about our uncomfortable location in it. Putting an aesthetic framework around the absence of a connection with a fullness and a responsiveness in the environment does not respond to the reasons for that absence. Even the way the calculated, symbolic refusal of a sense of place blends into a much deeper, more psychological sort of denial – this is, in the final analysis, what probably most motivates “A Note from Mindi Station” – does not lead through automatically to a re-thinking and regrounding of a sustainable, livable place. Such landscapes may be no less part of the conscious and unconscious degrading of land at the hands of consumerist, late capitalist economies than any other form of submersion and conversion of country. For it is not possible to carry through a thinking about sustainability without thinking through what has emerged in the interfusion of contemporary technologies and contemporary scientific understanding and what is still meant by the term “nature.”

Secondly, the environmental work of poetry in the world is not sufficiently explicable in terms of a psychology or a “sentiment” of place. Of course, those who love particular environments and locales do so with deep feeling. Sooner or later, as in “Nameless Flower”, the awareness of interlinkage between human presence and natural process emerges as an understanding of what Wright calls “(b)eing now; being love.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, as Wright also saw, the link between poetry and land is, ultimately, a technical one. It is do with a set of technically parallel relationships: it is about what sort of relationship you take up with language – in effect, how you inhabit it. If the ego remains imperialistically at the centre of utterance, then the consequences are rational control, a self-defeating sense of irony, an inability to deal with non-human meaning. Unlike this way of proceeding, an ecological language lets the poem become a place to work out a relationship with meaning: literally, to work out the embodied nature of how being a subject inhabits meaning and is part of making meaning. Poetry written in the midst of today's ecological crisis, inevitably will have much to do with an attentiveness to things and their setting. For poetry is what occurs – it is the event – when things come, for themselves, into place.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Philip Hodgins, *New Selected Poems* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000), p. 129.
- <sup>2</sup> By “picture window” you might indeed imagine the sort of house which litters far too many stretches of the Eastern seaboard and which has proliferated in most hinterland areas of our major cities: placed obtrusively on ridges and eminences, often vying with other similar dwellings constructed mainly for taking in the view, the house take up a controlling, surveying position in relation to its environment. The long version of this talk would go into the many ways in which such buildings are, literally, out of place, caught in insensitive discourses of the picturesque and the controlling “viewpoint” of surveying and land enclosure.
- <sup>3</sup> See Charles Altieri, *Self and Sensibility in Contemporary Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- <sup>4</sup> Hodgins, “A Note from Mindi Station”, *New Selected Poems*, p.129.
- <sup>5</sup> Hodgins, “A Note from Mindi Station”, p.129.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, “Heidegger, Language, and Ecology” in eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, *Heidegger, A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 258.
- <sup>7</sup> Hodgins, “A Note from Mindi Station”, p. 129.
- <sup>8</sup> In particular, I have written about this conditionality in a collection of essays, *Who Wants to Create Australia: Essays on Poetry and Ideas in Contemporary Australia* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 2004).
- <sup>9</sup> This is, for example, the narrative journey that Mark McKenna takes us on in his remarkable *Looking for Blackfella’s Point: an Australian History of Place* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002) where a question about a name and a hillside, visible from the weekend he is building, leads to a complete re-writing of the local history of the area and undoing of the suppression of Indigenous history. Several other cultural historians – notably Paul Carter, Stephen Muecke, Martin Thomas and Ross Gibson – have written with great insight into the multiple histories of seeing and experience in Australia.
- <sup>10</sup> Wright, “Gum-Trees Stripping,” *Collected Poems 1942-1970* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971), p. 134.
- <sup>11</sup> Wright, *Collected Poems*, p. 131.
- <sup>12</sup> McKinney, Wright and the poet and editor Barrett Reid were sharing their reading of Heidegger for a number of years in the late 40s and early 50s. Personal communication from the late Barrett Reid.
- <sup>13</sup> Judith Wright, *Half a Lifetime* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), p. 289.
- <sup>14</sup> See Michael E. Zimmerman, “Re-Thinking the Heidegger Deep Ecology Relationship”, *Environmental Ethics*, 15:3 (1993), pp. 195-224.

- <sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982), p. 124.
- <sup>16</sup> Thus, for example, a formulation such as: “The intimacy of world and thing is present in the separation of the between; it is present in the difference” – which is to say, in the registering, the immersion and the becoming of things in cognition. “Language” in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 202.
- <sup>17</sup> Wright, *Collected Poems*, p. 133.
- <sup>18</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 124. Later they will add: “Reason and conceptual structure are shaped by our bodies, brains, and modes of functioning in the world. Reason and concepts are therefore not transcendent, that is, not utterly independent of the body” (*ibid.*, p. 128). At risk of reducing poetry to other people’s ideas, some version of this style of conceptualising body-mind-world relationships can be associated with the work of several contemporary American poets such as Jorie Graham. Interestingly, too, Graham’s middle period poetry references Heidegger explicitly and some recent poems reference no less embodied systems such as fractal maths.
- <sup>19</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 463.
- <sup>20</sup> Charles Taylor glosses Heidegger’s thoughts on the situatedness of human perception within an already constituted world, contrasting it with the “mistakes” of Platonic theories of the Idea on the one side and of subjective representationalism on the other. Both assume that somehow we control what we see in the world – the first, by re-thinking the world as a series of intellectually apprehended Ideas, the other by employing subjective awareness as the measure of the world. The shared mistake is to assume that we have access to our knowledge of the world in a manner which is not “Dasein-related” – namely, from and through the world.
- <sup>21</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p.566.
- <sup>22</sup> Wright, “Nameless Flower,” *Collected Poems*, p.131.

[Arts Faculty](#) » [Publications](#) » [colloquy](#) » Issue Twelve «

 [Print version](#)

## Issue Twelve

**November 2006**

All articles are in pdf format. To download the whole issue as one file, click [Issue 12](#).

[Contents](#)

[Editorial](#)

[Introduction](#)

*Kate Rigby*

### ARTICLES

[Nietzsche \*contra\* Lawrence: How to be True to the Earth](#)  
*Greg Garrard*

[A Green Flaw in the Crystal Glass: Patrick White's \*Riders in the Chariot\*](#)  
*Iris Ralph*

["Keep Close to the Earth!" The Schism between the Worker and Nature in Katherine Susannah Prichard's Novels](#)  
*Karen Barker*

[Salt-lakes and Swamps: Michael Meehan's Australian Environments](#)  
*Greg Pritchard*

[Alice and the Wolf: Exploring Dennis Danvers' \*Wilderness\*](#)  
*Peter C. Coleman*

[Are Rats Comrades? Some Readings of a Question in Orwell](#)  
*Robert Savage*

[Talking about Native Plants...](#)  
*Kylie Mirmohamadi*

[How to Reinvent the World: The Hope of Being True to the Earth](#)  
*Veronica Brady*

[Longing to Belong: Judith Wright's Poetics of Place](#)  
*Jenny Kohn*

[The Degradation of Land and the Position of Poetry](#)  
*Martin Harrison*

[Human Rights: An Earth-based Ethics](#)  
*Rebecca Garcia Lucas Rose*

[The Artistic and the Literary Imagination in Australia and Beyond](#)  
*Nonie Sharp*

### REVIEWS

[Freya Mathews. \*For Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism\*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003; and \*Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture\*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005.](#)  
*Peter C. Coleman*

Thomas M. Wilson. *The Recurrent Green Universe of John Fowles*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.  
*Chris Coughran*

Gersdorf, Catrin and Mayer, Sylvia (eds). *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006.  
*Iris Ralph*

Lawrence Buell. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.  
*Rebecca Garcia Lucas Rose*