

63.1

**New Writing from  
Western Australia**

Fiction

Creative Non-Fiction

Poetry

Essays

**In this Issue**

Claire G. Coleman

Philip Neilsen

Beejay Silcox

Dan Disney

Jane Monson

# Westerly



Westerly

Volume 63 Number 1, 2018

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Westerly acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of Indigenous people and their vital contributions within Australian society.

Westerly's office, at the University of Western Australia, is located on Whadjak Noongar land. We recognise the Noongar people as the spiritual and cultural custodians of this land.

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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing the winner of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2017, to

**CAITLIN MALING**

For her creative non-fiction essay,  
*'Travelling Through the Dark: Six Weeks in Oregon'*

Published in *Westerly* 62:1, 2017

Correction to *Westerly* 62.2

Please note that Anton Hur was the translator (into English) of the Korean-language poetry featured in the issue as part of the Melbourne–Seoul Intercultural Poetry Exchange. We apologise to Anton for the omission of this recognition in the issue, and thank him for the contribution of these translations.

## Review of *False Claims of Colonial Thieves*

Brenda Saunders

Brenda is a Sydney writer of Wiradjuri and British descent. She has written three collections of poetry and her work appears in major anthologies and journals, including *Best Australian Poems 2013* and *2015* (Black Inc.). Brenda is currently completing a manuscript concerned with changes to the Australian environment since colonisation. She also reviews for *Plumwood Mountain and Mascara*.

Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella,  
*False Claims of Colonial Thieves*.  
Broome, WA: Magabala Books Aboriginal  
Corporation, 2018. RPP: \$24.99, 148pp,  
ISBN: 9781925360813.

In this consistently strong collection, two Australian poets from different cultures come together to tackle the subject of colonisation head-on. These one hundred and forty-four poems pass like a Message stick from one to the other: from John Kinsella, a white Australian of Irish inheritance, to Charmaine Papertalk Green, a Wajarri/Badimaya poet of the Yamaji Nation. 'False Claims' of the title refer to the legacy, the residue of past wrongs carried out by 'Colonial Thieves'. In 'Prologue' and 'Prologue Response' (xi), the first two short poems introduce the urgent voice present throughout this collection: 'False Claims' about our country are still taught and upheld through ignorance, as Papertalk Green concludes in the 'Prologue Response'.

what lies on or within country  
cannot be seen for the  
privileged are privileged blind  
(xi)

In the responses that follow, each poet is driven by the need to protect and restore the land. Each looks back on past wrongs and fears future harvests. Kinsella begins the conversation on the first page. In 'Undermining', he finds a landscape changed, destroyed by mining leases:

[...] the range folding inwards, burst back out. Scrub, forests,  
their contents. All gone. Hole

[...]

Quarry expanding to echo round owl rock its footing shaky and  
mice sharp as shrapnel.

(1)

Many of his poems examine particular landscapes, with titles such as 'Niagara Dam Poems: Eastern Goldfields Western Australia (Wongai Country)', the poem sequence 'Lake Magic Resonances (January 2017)' and 'The Salt Chronicles', written as a series. Throughout these poems, Kinsella plays with traditional poetic devices such as simile and metaphor to evoke astonishing insights and a vivid sense of place as seen in part four, 'Contrary'. Here is an impassioned plea against the hazards of mining:

The salt that hardens arteries,  
the salt whose lack has the shearer crippled  
on the shed floor, kicking like a wether.

The agistment of salt mines  
and the way sweat and blood  
dissolve with history: the paranoia  
that stays underneath it all  
must be holes in the text

(22-23)

Papertalk Green responds to mining with forceful lines in language. She sees the mineral wealth hidden below the surface as Elder spirits.

Balu winja barna, real winja  
Real old ones them ones  
Old ground our country  
With ancient ones deep within

(2)

Later she lets fly with explosive directives in titles such as 'Don't want me to talk' (about mining) (7), and 'Don't mine me' (14):

Don't mind me Australia  
I just don't care for mining  
And your colonial bulldust  
I think all the time about minding  
This land for the next generation  
Am I allowed to do that?

(14)

This finishes with a repeated demand: 'Don't mind me and don't mine me' (14).

Throughout this collection, Kinsella's poetry speaks to the physical exploitation and degradation of land due to mining and the 'False Claims' of scientific research and development. Papertalk Green speaks of the spiritual dislocation and exploitation of her Yamaji culture. This dialogue comes together in a memorable and masterly exchange as the two artists recall specific memories of growing up in Mullewa, a mining town near Geraldton. Kinsella begins the ten-part series 'Hawes—God's Intruder':

The church Hawes made in Mullewa  
was great in its stone and earth.  
The white folk praised its God-  
shape out in the hot zone  
(34)

This introduction receives a quick rebuff by the Aboriginal poet who only sees:

A place of living  
A place of ceremonies  
Long before it was  
called Mass Rock  
Hawes, God's intruder  
(35)

Sent back and forth, these antiphons are also chants that ring with discord and confrontation. Like fire-sticks, they are hot, fiery and illuminate the darkest places of our collective history, evoking powerful images of colonial life. In the 'Grandmother' poems, repetition is used to set each poem in sharp contrast. Kinsella begins with a recollection: 'My Grandmother was a mining town child' (3); Papertalk Green responds immediately: 'My grandmother washed white town fella's clothes' (3). Each recounts their own family's experience of living in a mining town. Kinsella remembers:

My grandmother told me many stories  
of the desert. Of flowers and birds  
on the edges. I am free to retell her stories  
[...]  
She told me she 'watched the blackfellas'  
through the hessian curtains, watched  
them go out past the town limits  
(5)

Papertalk Green comes back with 'There were no nanna Alice stories' (6), and ends her poem with a telling reminder in the final stanza:

I am glad the only mining  
She would have known was  
From the rich ochre on her  
Body and in her hair during  
Ceremony time out on country  
(6)

Later poems that tackle death and destruction are poignant and powerfully felt. Kinsella speaks of spaces he considers sacred, the 'pain and loss' of trees, of a landscape changed in poems entitled 'The Great Western Woodlands' and 'Sammies (Salmon Gums)'. Paperbark Green offers a tight series on death in her own Yamaji culture with titles such as 'Drug Slaves', 'Needle Teacher' and 'Death Stress'.

Our Australian identity is questioned in two wonderfully linked poems. Kinsella's 'The Wild Colonial Boy' uses repetition of the title to expose the angry, mixed-up identity of today's white youth. The last forceful lines remind us:

The wild colonial boy can't call Australia home, though he has never  
really left its shores; but he has travelled outside its jurisdictions,  
and he has travelled far beyond its metaphors  
(135)

Papertalk Green's 'The White Colonial Boy' begins a bitter response.

The wild white colonial boy  
Arrived with the settlers  
Sits at the table of invasion  
Drinking regrets and dreams  
(138)

These short, punchy lines are used to great effect in many of her poems. This direct, emphatic style slows down the reading and drives the narrative impact. Some of her poems look at new ways to a shared identity and belonging:

We carry on sharing our space  
Knowing our space and our place  
As Indigenous peoples  
Sharing bacon bones and kangaroo meat  
(‘Campfire’ 63)

And later, in 'Third Space', she offers hope for future dialogue: 'But everyone will grow up...' (100) and:

Find common ground  
It is somewhere we can  
Both own the space  
To exist, grow, move forward  
(100)

In the epilogue the two poets come together, 'move forward' writing as one with the hope that 'some of us who aren't traditional owners, are also torn from the inside out' (144). The final page ends with a plea to resist, and to refuse to surrender to government policies, mining and the growing consumerism. The second stanza begins:

Refuse to hit your head for sadness  
Refuse to draw head blood for grief  
Refuse to consider death of our land  
This barna—our ancestors' land—our land  
Exists as long as we exist to protect it  
(144)

The book ends with a forceful demand for change. The historical, cultural and environmental traces left behind by these 'Colonial Thieves' are rigorously scrutinised in this collection. The poetry questions the colonial narrative, its effect on the land and on Indigenous identity and culture. The fine glossary and notes provided strengthen our understanding and appreciation of this challenging and rewarding enterprise.

This 'Message stick' has been sent out across the country, past the salt mines and small towns of Western Australia. It delivers a challenge, speaks to a truth forgotten or ignored, left in a dark place for too long.

## WA Writers United

*Westerly* is part of WA Writers United, a collaboration of literary organisations in Perth. *Westerly* subscribers will benefit from member discounts on tickets for all the following events—just mention WA Writers United when you book!



### July

- 27th July Sundowner Session—with Laurie Steed, KSP Writers' Centre, 6.30pm–8.00pm.
- 28th 'So You Want to... Conquer Competitions' with Guy Salvidge, KSP Writers' Centre, 1.00pm–4.00pm.
- 29th 'Writing Your Life Story' with Rosemary Stevens, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 29th Deadline for 2019 Emerging KSP residency applications, 5pm AWST.
- 30th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Café @ The Rose, North Fremantle.

### August

- 11th 'The Pro's and Con's of Self-Publishing' with Glennys Marsdon, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 11th 'So You Want to... Polish to Perfection' with Catherine Noske, KSP Writers' Centre, 1.00pm–4.00pm.
- 16th Perth Poetry Festival Launch, WA Poets Inc., at Queens Building, 97 William St, Perth.
- 11–19th Perth Poetry Festival. WA Poets Inc. details at their website.
- 25th 'Drafting and Editing for Publication' with Josephine Taylor, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 25th Spooky Stories Night Fundraiser, KSP Writers' Centre, 6.00pm–9.30pm.
- 26th Deadline for 2019 Established KSP residency applications, 5pm AWST.
- 27th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Café @ The Rose, North Fremantle.
- 31st Deadline for Submissions to *Westerly* Magazine, November issue.
- 31st Deadline for entries to 'Spilt Ink' Competition, OOTA Writers.
- 31st August Sundowner Session—Open Mic, KSP Writers' Centre, 6.30pm–8.00pm.

### September

- 9th 'Editing Your Short Stories (or Fiction)' with Shane McCauley, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.
- 17th Voicebox Poetry Reading, Café @ The Rose, North Fremantle.
- 22nd Wild Writing, with UK-based Poet Cath Drake—OOTA Writers Workshop, 22nd September, 1.30pm–4pm, Fremantle Arts Centre.
- 28th September Sundowner Session—with Cath Drake, KSP Writers' Centre, 6.30pm–8.00pm.
- 29th 'Memoir Writing: Writing the Self and Others' with Susan Midalia, Peter Cowan Writers Centre, 1.30pm–4.30pm.