Antonella Riem Natale, Sue Ballyn, Stefano Mercanti and Caterina Colomba (eds), *I'm Listening Like the Orange Tree: In Memory of Laurie Hergenhan*

Udine: Forum, 2021, 203pp, €17.10, ISBN978-88-3283-277-8

I'm Listening Like the Orange Tree is a collection of essays and remembrances compiled as an homage to Laurie Hergenhan, founding editor of *Australian Literary Studies*, founding Director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland and a leading scholar of Australian literary history, who died in 2019. In all those roles, Hergenhan was central to the development of Australian literature as a field of study, both in Australia and internationally. On his retirement in 1996, his work was celebrated through the publication of a *festschrift*, *And What Books Do You Read? New Studies in Australian Literature*, edited by colleagues at the University of Queensland. *I'm Listening Like the Orange Tree* is edited by former students and colleagues based in Italy and Spain. It includes contributions from Copenhagen, Geneva and New York, as well as from long-standing colleagues and friends at Australian universities.

The volume is arranged in two parts. The first comprises essays that have been inspired by Hergenhan's teaching, research and work as an editor. The second part includes memoirs, stories and photographs by those close to Laurie – his daughter, old and newer friends, and students. Many of the writers speak of him warmly as a mentor who encouraged and supported their work and careers. As well as being an homage to him, the volume is about sorrow and loss, not just of a valued colleague but of a common experience of discovery and pleasure in the academic study of literature. Many of the contributions conjure up the closeness and sociability that reading and discussion of texts, and even disagreement about them, can sustain.

The scope of the scholarly essays reflects the range of Hergenhan's contribution to the field. Antonella Riem Natale offers a fresh reading of John Shaw Neilson's 'The Orange Tree', a poem that has attracted commentary from poets and scholars over many decades. Her reading draws on new understandings of human nature's place in living systems and represents a departure from her first encounter with the poem in Laurie's class; however, her recall of that puzzlement and continuing interest in the poem is a tribute to his teaching. Leigh Dale, Hergenhan's successor as editor of *Australian Literary Studies,* excavates the archive to describe the work and life of Jean Hamilton, who left Australia to teach abroad from the 1930s, in Germany and later Canada. This account focuses on the institutional and political forces that shaped her career, and reflects on how few traces of a teacher's work are left for later biographers.

David Carter aligns his project on Australian writing and book publishing in the United States with Hergenhan's work on the American observer of Australian life and literature, C. Hartley Grattan. Grattan described a distinctive Australian culture, independent of Anglo-European culture. *No Casual Traveller: Hartley Grattan and Australia–U.S. Connections* (1995) repositioned Australian literary study. Carter's work also shifts perceptions of what 'making it' in America looked like. Instead of thinking of Australian books breaking into a new market, he demonstrates that American publishing was central to the development of Australian literary culture: 'Australian literature was international long before it was national, *international* and not merely imperial' (1995: 73, italics in original).

Thinking about 'Australian' literature beyond the framework of the nation has been a preoccupation of several decades of scholarship. Bill Ashcroft, a pre-eminent postcolonial critic and co-author of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), adopts Ernst Bloch's term 'Heimat' (the promise of a home that we have not known) to elaborate how two contemporary women writers, Heather Rose and Zoë Morrison, like Henry Handel Richardson and Christina Stead before them, look beyond the borders of the nation to conceive of a relation to place. Their novels, *The Museum of Modern Love* and *Music and Freedom,* both published in 2016, 'offer a transnational orientation through the lens of the utopian function of art' (2021: 60). Philip Mead, who held the Chair in Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia from 2009 to 2018, turns his attention to D. H. Lawrence and Georges Perec, visiting writers who he terms 'sojourners', who have produced fiction here, in a place where they are decidedly not 'at home'.

Nicholas Birns's essay on Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*, 'The Stench of Rotten Kangaroo', cites Hergenhan's work on Xavier Herbert to consider how postcolonial literary history can face the 'dark truths … lurking beneath Australian representation' (2021: 98). Birns, the editor of *Antipodes*, responds to Jeanine Leane, who has 'excoriated' (2021: 89) White's novel for its misrepresentation of the Badtjala people as cannibals. Birns frames the novel as a modernist text to show how White adapted a well-known shipwreck narrative, and questioned European presence on Australian land. Challenges like Leane's, and a growing awareness that Australia is not yet 'postcolonial', cause readers and critics much discomfort.

Laurie Hergenhan supervised the work of many graduate students from Europe and regularly attended conferences there. He co-edited a collection of travel pieces, *Changing Places: Australian Writers in Europe*, with one of those students, Irmtraud Petersson. David Malouf, also a graduate of the University of Queensland, lived for a long time in Italy. Chinmaya Lal Thakur's essay, on *Ransom*, Malouf's reworking of the meeting of King Priam and Achilles from the *Iliad*, confronts another uncomfortable question: mortality. Thakur argues that it is not Priam's appeals as a father that move Achilles to return Hector's body; rather, the king's appearance profoundly unsettles his reason: he is *'wonderstruck'* (2021: 107, italics in original), completely unhinged by Priam's intrusion and by a vision of his own impending death. His own grief or desire for his friend Patroclus is displaced by an awareness of his own mortality.

In 'Remembering Laurie', the second part of this collection, some of the ideas and themes of the essays are crystallised in personal tributes. One is the concept of mentorship, expressed in the academy through formal roles such as doctoral supervision and journal editorship. Another relates to the ways in which an otherwise ordinary pursuit – reading and its pleasures – is professionalised in the routines of the institution (tutorial discussion, lecturing, publication). How has literature – and Australian literary studies in particular – found and maintained a place in these institutions? What of the future? *Australian Literary Studies* has had a series of new editors, but the

Australian Studies Centre has disappeared and the Chair in Australian Literature at the University of Sydney is in abeyance.

At the University of Queensland, the Fryer Library's collection has grown and it supports scholars who work on the papers held there. The Fryer hosted Laurie's memorial, and Simon Farley has written movingly in this volume about their friendship. In 'Words that Speak to the Heart', he remembers their conversations and records how generously Laurie shared knowledge that now will be forgotten. But one gesture failed: Simon lent Laurie Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*, in English *The Heart of Things*, a story about the friendship of a young man and his teacher. Laurie found its themes of isolation and guilt 'heavy going' (2021: 192). Perhaps this is an unsurprising reaction from a reader in old age, but it chimes with Martin Leer's observation that 'Laurie Hergenhan was an awkward man'. Lest this seem blunt, he adds, 'And I write this essay in praise of awkwardness, for which society seems to have less and less tolerance. To our loss, not least intellectually' (2021: 137). Leer recalls his postgraduate education at the University of Queensland, and his ongoing connection with Laurie, his supervisor. His piece is also an account of the rise and subsidence of literary studies at the university and in the wider academy. A last visit in 2018 is particularly poignant, and disorienting: the English Department as he has known it 'no longer existed', staff were long gone, and the familiar surroundings of the Michie Building had been given a corporate makeover. The only 'remnant of all the eras' of Australian literature is the Fryer (2021: 147).

The issue of reputation and legacy always lies behind any homage. Laurie Hergenhan, friend and scholar, is remembered here as a generous man with a love of travel and a sweet tooth, who left behind a room full of books and a lasting imprint on the minds of students and colleagues.

Kay Ferres
Griffith University

Queensland Review 30.1 (2023) 140–142
ISSN (print) 1321-8166 (online) 2049-7792 https://doi.org/10.1558/qre.26488