

Editorial

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THIS is the first editorial in the fifty-three year history of *ALS* that will not pass through the hands of a typesetter. It will not be sent to a printer, nor will it be part of an issue that is tucked into envelopes and posted all around the world. In taking *ALS* online, we are doing quite belatedly what many journals have already done, but we are doing so in a manner that is well within what I like to think of as the *ALS* house style. This is an approach to scholarly publishing that takes very seriously its responsibilities as producer, curator and caretaker of the history of Australian literary scholarship. Over the past five decades, its previous editors, Laurie Hergenhan and Leigh Dale, have gone about the business of scholarly publishing in a style that is rigorous, principled and increasingly independent.

From its beginnings, when the very idea of a scholarly journal devoted to Australian literature was itself an idiosyncratic exercise, through to its break with (or abandonment by) government funding bodies in 1997, *ALS* has gone its own way in the interests of encouraging careful and challenging research on Australian literature and ensuring that this research will reach its readership. And so we are going our own way now, venturing into the world of online scholarly publishing in *ALS* style.

In becoming an independent publisher of literary scholarship online, we are occupying a sliver of middle ground between large academic publishers, on one hand, and open access publishing on the other. We believe this middle ground to be worth defending because we want to publish high-quality scholarship that is widely accessible, and we want the work that goes into publishing it to be undertaken under conditions that are fair. The world of publishing –scholarly or

otherwise – relies heavily on unpaid labour. At the same time, university library budgets are increasingly constrained, and beholden to the expensive subscription bundling of major publishers and aggregators. Our middle ground is a small-scale mix of subscription and open access publishing. New essays will be open access for a period of at least a month before joining the rest of the archive behind a paywall. For a very low subscription, individuals can access the thousand or so essays in our archive; and libraries can purchase multi-user subscriptions. Student subscriptions are only \$16 a year. This is a departure from the usual way of doing things, it is a risk, and we will rely on the support of readers and libraries to make it work.

And so, to our first online issue. Readers will notice, over the coming months, that we are taking extreme liberties with the definition of the journal issue. Future issues will consist of as few as one or two essays, and they will be published much more regularly than the previous four issues per year. This, our launch issue, includes no new essays at all. It is, rather, a retrospective, and an appropriately idiosyncratic one.

The ‘we’ I have been using in this editorial is not the royal one: this venture has been a collaboration instigated by the editor of *ALS* for the past fifteen years, Leigh Dale. *ALS* is unusual in that I am only its third editor over its fifty-three years. Hergenhan and Dale have each, in different ways, shaped the study of Australian literature, and of literary scholarship in Australia. In this retrospective issue I hope to give a sense of the kinds of literary scholarship that have been encouraged and enabled by Dale’s time as editor, and of the trajectories I would like to see the journal continue in the years to come.

We begin in 2009, with Margaret Henderson and Ann Vickery’s introduction to a special issue, ‘Manifesting Literary Feminisms: Nexus and Faultlines’. This issue marks a moment, seven years ago, at which Australian literature and feminism turned their attention outwards: the editors describe the special issue as heralding ‘a new direction’ for the journal ‘in seeking to position Australian literary studies within an international context’(1). Over Dale’s time as editor of the journal, *ALS* grew from two issues a year to four, with two of those focusing on literary studies beyond Australia. In its new iteration, *ALS* will continue with this wider ambit; Australian literature and its scholarship are implicated in global literary studies, and I have no interest in adjudicating the boundary between Australian literature and the rest.

The following two essays evidence this scope – Shameem Black’s ‘Humanitarian Sex: Biopolitics, Ethics, and Aid Worker Memoir’ and Louise D’Arcens’ ‘Meta-Medievalism and the Future of the Past in the “Australian Girl” Novel.’ These essays bring disciplinary knowledge from outside or the edges of literary

studies to bear on literary texts. Perhaps more importantly, they show the force of literary modes of reading in understanding our relationship to the past and to the suffering of others in the present. They are illuminating, nuanced, and compelling to read.

Finally, I have included a pair of essays from recent special issues – Tanya Dalziell’s ‘Afterward: The Story of a Bookmark’, from the ‘The English Issue’, and Leigh Dale and Louise D’Arcens’ introduction to the issue, ‘The Impact of Literature’. In these issues *ALS* turned its attention to difficult questions about what it is we actually do when we research and teach literary studies, and what its impact might be. I am not the first to note that a significant impact of Dale’s time as editor of *ALS* has been to turn Australian literary scholars’ attention to the history, politics and disciplinarity of their own work.

We launch the new *ALS* at a time when there are few certainties about the future of scholarly publishing, or of literary studies for that matter. What I do hope is that, from here on in, the body of scholarship in the *ALS* archive will find new readers, and that the new essays we publish will deftly find their way into scholarly conversations beyond my anticipating.