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Abstract: Charting a theme of exceptionalism, this article attempts to situate Australian Studies within a West Coast and Indian Ocean context. It looks in a westerly direction rather than the more prevalent Pacific coast outlook of studies on Australia. Beginning with a consideration of the journal *Westerly*, it follows networks of Australianists from the west through the teaching of Australian literature and history, and especially the pioneering work of Bruce Bennett, John Hay, Tom Stannage as first wave Australianists, before speculating on generational renewal. The article discusses the zeitgeist generated by the 1988 Australian bicentennial but argues that a distinct form of regionally based interdisciplinarity took root in the west. The attempt to triangulate Australian Studies through Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne in the early 2000s produced a remarkable series of publications through the *Journal of Australian Studies*. The article concludes on an optimistic note following the establishment of the Australian Studies Network at the University of Western Australia in 2019.

In April 2020, Western Australia closed its land borders to the rest of Australia and doubled down on sea and air links nationally and internationally in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively isolating the west from the outside world. Not since pre-federation days had local sovereignty been exercised so rigorously. National bard Henry Lawson had arrived at the “new land” of Western Australia in 1896 with the intention of settling here. His resolve did not survive the experience though, at the time, the colony was flush with gold and optimism while other parts of Australia were in the grips of economic depression. Required to declare all goods and chattels and complete a permit as a condition of entry, Lawson marvelled that imported poetry did not attract duties. Otherwise, he might have taken his unpublished verse “back aboard” the ship: “throw it over the side, and then carry it ashore again in my head, and rewrite it in Perth.”<sup>1</sup> Typical of Lawson’s wit, this small comedy of manners targeted Western Australian parochialism at a time when constitutional conventions were moving in a contrary direction towards the creation of a federated nation.

Into the twenty first century, the announcement of a Western Australian state of emergency overrode all guarantees of freedom of movement between states. The response to Coronavirus had vested in local authorities the power to turn back travellers or alternatively send them into quarantine. A health crisis thereby normalised social distancing—“our own country” the premier called it<sup>2</sup>—while reanimating a language of “robust particularism”<sup>3</sup> observed by the historian Geoffrey Bolton and giving rise to the separation tendencies derided by Lawson in the 1890s. Taking stock of such propensities,

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Roderick (ed). *Henry Lawson: Autobiographical and other Writings: 1887-1922*. Vol II. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson) 86-87

<sup>2</sup> Premier Mark McGowan, Press conference 2 April 2020. Reported ABC 7.30 Report. 28 April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve in*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 1972) 3

this paper attempts to trace some Westralian influences on the development of Australian Studies through literature and history especially, beginning with a consideration of the literary journal *Westerly*.

### **West of Westerly**

*Westerly* is Western Australia's foremost literary journal. From modest beginnings in 1956, it carved out a public sphere from a home at the University of Western Australia (UWA), with antecedents dating back to undergraduate periodicals *Black Swan* (1917-1939, 1945-1949), *Arts Quarterly* (1945-1959) and, "most conspicuously" the *Winthrop Review* (1953-1955).<sup>4</sup> According to institutional folklore, *Westerly* has occupied the same office on the Crawley campus for more than six decades.<sup>5</sup> A hybrid little magazine and academic journal, its title is a descriptor, like the longer extant, east-coast, *Southerly*, which had been founded at Sydney University seventeen years earlier in 1939. Both magazines imply place-inspired tendencies rather than being wholly contained within or defined by location, as might be suggested for example by the more definitively named *Studies in Western Australian History*.

While *Southerly* imputes Australia as the south land and the southerliness of the "premier state"<sup>6</sup> of New South Wales—co-produced by the University of New South Wales—it hails on a wind, the "Southerly Buster", which is represented on the masthead by a line-drawing of a cherub blowing from a southerly direction. Known colloquially as "The Buster," the south wind provides dramatic relief to Sydney's oppressive subtropical

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<sup>4</sup> See "Notes", John Hay, *Literature and Society* in C. T. Stannage (ed), *New History of Western Australia*. (Nedlands, UWAP, 1981) 771-2.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Noske, "'Nothing Much Happens. Life Goes on as Usual': Imagining the North West Through Randolph Stow's Letters and Fiction." Keynote Address. (Re)Writing the North Conference. James Cook University. 5 November 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Lyall Rowe, *New South Wales: the Premier State*. (Sydney: Gordon and Gotch, 1984). The logo adorned NSW vehicle number plates between 1980 and 1988.

summers.<sup>7</sup> In a like manner, *Westerly* imputes the west in Western Australia and even the University of Western Australia by shooting a distinctly different breeze on the Fremantle Doctor, an affectionate nomenclature given to the relieving and occasionally squally south-westerlies that restore vitality to the sweltering city of Perth where the bulk of people live and the mercury routinely hovers above the century on the old Fahrenheit scale from November through to March.

Quite literally, *Westerly* represents Western Australia from an Indian Ocean perspective while serving to temper overheated polemic—the cultural equivalent of Robert Drewe’s “boiling brain disease”<sup>8</sup>—with refreshingly honest and “lively fiction and poetry as well as intelligent articles.” Its masthead, drawn from Margaret Priest’s 1962 Swan Weather Vane atop the terracotta roofs of UWA’s Arts Building, is a revolving pointer indicating the direction of the wind and *Westerly*’s “special emphasis on Australia, particularly Western Australia, and the Asian region.”<sup>9</sup> In the great tradition of small magazines, it produces heteroglossia in each volume and across all volumes, tacking at times into the wind with issues taking issue against what historian Tom Stannage critically referred to as received orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> Embracing a duality of difference and inclusion, each edition reveals critical self-awareness of a Westralian orientation. Yet differing from *Southerly* which had been founded as a tribune and clarion (blowing the wind), *Westerly* calibrates directionality. It observes west as existing here not there but also by reference to its other, the east—the

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Lee, “*Southerly*.” In Bruce Bennett (ed). *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981). 163.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Drewe, *The Shark Net*. Ringwood: Penguin, 2000. 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Westerly*. “About.” <https://westerlymag.com.au/about/>

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Gare and Jenny Gregory (eds), *Tom Stannage: History from the Other Side. Studies in Western Australian History*, vol 29, 2015.

traditional definition and signifier of orient—which portends a reorientation extending to Australian Studies in Western Australia.

### **Sharks and Dingoes**

Western Australia's capital Perth is held to be the most isolated city in the world.<sup>11</sup> For young Rob Coram in Randolph Stow's much loved novel *The Merry-go-Round in the Sea* (1965), it is a "very special city, cut off from other cities by sea and desert, so that there was not another city for two thousand miles."<sup>12</sup> Girt by the deep and the dry—"we'll be turning Western Australia into an island within an island" the premier had announced while closing the borders<sup>13</sup>—exceptionalism "divides into two opposing myths: the Bush or the beach," according to Drewe, "or as I like to think about it, the Shark versus the Dingo."<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, sharks plumb Westralian depths, lurking in "every kelp patch, in the lip of every breaker,"<sup>15</sup> by contrast to hungry howls emanating from the dry eastern borderlands that are more vividly imagined than heard as warrigals of the mind.

Occupying 6,500 square kilometres along a coastal strip, the "people of Perth," as Stannage called them,<sup>16</sup> garrison into detached bungalows and houses, each one an individual fortress and expression of community solidarity. Comprising 80% of the state's 2.5 million population, they hunker down in an area representing less than a quarter of one percent of available landmass, with more than two and a half million square kilometres of Western Australia at their back. Twenty kilometres to the east, the Darling Range serves as their rampart against the elements of earth, wind and fire as citizens go about perfecting

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve in*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 1972) 3

<sup>12</sup> Randolph Stow, *Merry-go-Round in the Sea*. (London: Macdonald, 1965) 143.

<sup>13</sup> "An Island within an Island." <https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/an-island-within-an-island-wa-to-close-its-border-with-the-east-20200402-p54gl6.html>

<sup>14</sup> Robert Drewe, *Swimming to the Moon*. (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2014) 46.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Drewe, *Body Surfers*. (Melbourne; Picador, 1983)

<sup>16</sup> C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*. (Perth, Perth City Council, 1979)

pleasure-seeking in recreation and as a charm against any disquiet that their city defies the scriptures by being built on sand.<sup>17</sup> The beach is their threshold and preferred playground where they strip off in observance of a “pagan festival. An adoration of life, of the sun and sea,” as the novelist Katharine Susannah Prichard observed in 1937.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Big Dry**

Situated in the south west of the state, Perth performs two critical functions as sentinel and custodian of Australia’s “Western Third,” as the historian Frank Crowley called it.<sup>19</sup> Three times larger than America’s largest state and metaphor for American big, Texas, and accounting for more territory than France and Germany combined, Western Australia extends 2,400 kilometres as the crow flies from its most northerly town at Wyndham to Albany in the south and 1,600 kilometres from Shark Bay in the west to its long eastern border with South Australia and the Northern Territory.<sup>20</sup> An expanse within and expanse, the west incorporates the federation’s largest electorate of Durack which is twice the size of New South Wales. Yet, only one in five (or half a million) people make their homes in the regions or live remotely across an area that comprises less productive land usage than the second largest state of Queensland. More than half of these Westralian outlanders are scattered across farms, sidings and towns in Nyungar country, while two thirds live within only a few hours of the city, south west of an imaginary line drawn from Geraldton to Esperance—an equivalent to South Australia’s Goyder Line<sup>21</sup>—that once defined the wheat

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew 2:24-27

<sup>18</sup> Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Intimate Strangers*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937) 75.

<sup>19</sup> F.K. Crowley, *Australia’s Western Third: a History of Western Australia from First Settlements to Modern Times*. (London: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Weller, *Boom Town 2050: Scenarios for a Rapidly Growing City*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 2009) 48.

<sup>21</sup> Janis Sheldrick, *Nature’s Line. George Goyder: Surveyor, Environmentalist, Visionary*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2013.

belt and now includes the south- and mid-west. Referred to as the “golden west”<sup>22</sup> by the “poetess of the pastoral,”<sup>23</sup> May Vivienne in 1901, this agricultural region embraces the contrasting image of brutalising summer heat, as Tony Hughes d’Aeth observed in his 2017 literary history *Like Nothing on this Earth*, which takes its title from Tom Flood’s 1989 novel *Oceania Fine*: “The landscape is so immense, hot and huge like noting on this earth, that I fear it might swallow me.”<sup>24</sup>

Not quite the scrape of A.D. Hope’s controversial poem “Australia”, Perth’s tenacious though tenuous hold over such enormity contributes to a certain parochial defensiveness that from the deserts profits not prophets come.<sup>25</sup> In the “nor-west”, the Pilbara holds the record for being the hottest place on the planet at Marble Bar, ironically a name shared with Sydney’s most iconic drinking establishment. Infamously depicted by the late seventeenth century buccaneer William Dampier as the most miserable place on earth,<sup>26</sup> the Pilbara became Australia’s *El Dorado* in the second half of the twentieth century in the form of raw materials extracted from an ancient landscape that includes the “Dampier Rock Art Precinct”, containing an estimated “one million petroglyphs” concentrated within a radius of 45 kilometres.<sup>27</sup>

Further north, in the wet tropics, is the Ord River Dam harnesses a capacity for freshwater more than 40 times greater than Sydney’s saline Harbour. Lake Argyle as it is

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<sup>22</sup> May Vivienne, *Travels in Western Australia: Being a Description of the Various Cities and Towns, Goldfields, and Agricultural Districts of that State*. (London: William Heinemann, 1901) 29.

<sup>23</sup> C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, (Perth: Perth City Council, 1979) 329

<sup>24</sup> Tony Hughes-d’Aeth, *Like Nothing on this Earth: a Literary History of the Wheatbelt*. Nedlands: UWAP, 1989) 6.

<sup>25</sup> Brandon Ellem, *The Pilbara: From Deserts Profits Come*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 2017)

<sup>26</sup> Shino Konishi, “Idle Men: the Eighteenth Century Roots of the Indigenous Indolence Myth.” In Francis Peters-Little, Anne Curthoys and John Docker (eds), *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia*. (Canberra, ANUP, 2010). 62

<sup>27</sup> Jenny Gregory, “Stand up for the Burrup: Saving the Largest Rock Art Precinct in Australia.” *Public History*. Vol 16 2009 94



also called beguiles “water dreamers”<sup>28</sup> with visions of replenishing depleted dams and aquifers to the south where rainfall has decreased 15% over the past half century.<sup>29</sup> Desiring emulation on a grander scale the engineering feats of C.Y. O’Connor who, between 1898 and 1902, had constructed a pipeline from Mundaring in the Perth foothills 560 kilometres inland to the goldfields, present-day Westralians dare to imagine that their city may yet be spared the encroaching dry.

Yet for all the bewildering wilderness and beyond, the west does not embrace being large quite so boldly nor in the same manner as Queensland. Rather, the sentiment assumes a more skulking character tempered by the stately manners of what Stannage identified as the “gentry tradition,”<sup>30</sup> a Westralian variation on the pioneer legend.<sup>31</sup> There are intimations within the mix of apprehension that any too conspicuous display or swagger might presage disaster, with an average of 14,000 hectares of agricultural land each year lost to salinity.<sup>32</sup> *Future Eaters* author Tim Flannery has speculated that Perth is on track to become the first “ghost metropolis” of the twenty first century,<sup>33</sup> while Nyungar “Keeper of Stories” warns that disrespecting the creative spirit—the *Wakaal* or water serpent—will exacerbate the big dry: “*noonook barminyini Wakaal kierp wart.*”<sup>34</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, elders and supporters attempted to reclaim for the benefit of all the birthing place of the *Wakaal* on the banks of the Swan River, *Goonininup*.<sup>35</sup> Their efforts came to an abrupt end

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Cathcart, *Water Dreamers: the Remarkable History of our Dry Continent*. (Melbourne: Text, 2010)

<sup>29</sup> Walter Cox, “An Institutional Framework for Allocating and Managing Water Resources.” In Marnie Leybourne and Andrea Gaynor (eds), *Water: Histories, Cultures, Ecologies*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 2006) 135

<sup>30</sup> Richard Nile, “Moments.” *Studies in Western Australian History*, 29, 2015, 27-41

<sup>31</sup> J.B. Hirst, “The Pioneer Legend,” *Historical Studies*. Vol 18 1978. 316-337. DOI: [10.1080/10314617808595595](https://doi.org/10.1080/10314617808595595)

<sup>32</sup> Ruth A Morgan, *Running Out? Water in Western Australia*. (Nedland, UWAP, 2015) 295

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Ruth A Morgan, “Water Dreamers Rise Again with Colin Barnett’s Canal Vision.” *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/western-water-dreamers-rise-again-with-colin-barnetts-canal-vision-8625>

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Len Collard, “The Cosmology: the Creator of the Trilogy Waakal or Nyungar Ranboy Serpent.” In *Water: Histories, cultures, Ecologies*. 124-125

<sup>35</sup> Hannah McGlade “The McGlade Case: A Noongar History of Land, Social Justice and Activism.” *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 43:2, 204-205. DOI: [10.1080/13200968.2017.1400371](https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2017.1400371)

in October 1989 when police raided and moved on their occupation as the big dry intensified.

Australia's largest deserts—the Great Victoria, Great Sandy, Tanami, Simpson, Gibson and the somewhat understated Little Sandy—are either wholly contained or substantially located in the west. They link through intervening arid regions into a vast desert world. Despite the 1992 Mabo Decision establishing native title, the sheer scale of this world has served to justify ongoing claims to *terra nullius*, which take the shape of staunch narratives about vacant possession. It follows that a “cult of forgetfulness” extends into agricultural regions, contesting that these too had original owner-occupiers.<sup>36</sup> With 30% of Western Australia constituting “Crown Estate”<sup>37</sup> and a further 40% under pastoral leases,<sup>38</sup> influencers have denounced native title,<sup>39</sup> and been among the most vociferous deniers of historical violence, including a serving Police Commissioner who asserted in 2001 that “massacre allegations” at Mowla Bluff in 1916 and Forrest River in 1926 are “false.”<sup>40</sup> Independently verified as sites of atrocity these have been added to Australia's Massacre Map<sup>41</sup> by historian Chris Owen, author of the monumental study *Every Mother's Son is Guilty: Policing the Kimberley Frontier of Western Australia* (2016), whose ongoing work

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<sup>36</sup> W.E.H Stanner coined this term in his 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures, reprinted in *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne; Black Inc, 2018)

<sup>37</sup> Western Australian Government Landgate, “CRW-01 Crown Land—General.” <https://www0.landgate.wa.gov.au/for-individuals/Land-Transactions-toolkit/land-titles-registration-policy-and-procedure-guides/practice-manual/crown-land/crw-01-crown-land-general>

<sup>38</sup> Western Australian Government Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, “Rangelands of Western Australia.” <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/rangelands/rangelands-western-australia>

<sup>39</sup> Tim Rowse, “How we got a Native Title Act.” *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 4, The Politics of Mabo (Summer, 1993) 116.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy Nadel, “‘Conspiracy of Silence’ How Sabotaged Inquiries Fed Massacre Denials.” *The Guardian*. 6 March 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/06/conspiracy-of-silence-how-sabotaged-inquiries-fed-massacre-denials>

<sup>41</sup> *Colonial Frontier Maps*. <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>

indicates that the killing times persisted through to the 1940s.<sup>42</sup> Kimberley elders reveal:

“when we go out to where those massacres took place we hear the spirits, we hear the screams of those children crying for help.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Rims and Edges**

Fears of such spirits and the great dry which defines much of the state have befuddled the best attempts at an Arcadian dream by May Vivienne, the *Western Mail Annual*, and the artwork of Amy Heap and Fred Flood,<sup>44</sup> among others. According to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation: “South-West Western Australia is one of the most water challenged parts of the country, experiencing Australia’s highest rates of climate change and dryland salinity amid rapid population growth and associated development.”<sup>45</sup> Disquiet occasioned by the rate of inland environmental extinction<sup>46</sup> help contextualise and make explicable concerns expressed about being pushed back into the sea, where Drewe’s sharks circle in anticipation of any exodus.

Arguably, the West’s most representative talisman, Tim Winton, has looked across the deserts and observed that it takes a certain wild “doggedness to be a W.A. writer, defiance even, given the prevailing cultural headwind ... a kind of continental cringe that made A. A. Phillips look pretty tame by comparison.”<sup>47</sup> A writer of edges and oceans, Winton’s fiction only occasionally journeys into this country and with notable trepidation beyond the rim.

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<sup>42</sup> Lorena Allam and Nick Evershed, “The Killing times: the Massacre of Aboriginal People Australians Must Confront.” *The Guardian* 4 March 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/04/the-killing-times-the-massacres-of-aboriginal-people-australia-must-confront>

<sup>43</sup> Emily Jane Smith, “‘The Killing Time’: How Placenames Reveal Violence, Murder and Injustice in the Kimberley”. ABC Kimberley <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-09/placenames-reveal-the-killing-time-for-aboriginal-survivors/9529498>

<sup>44</sup> Stannage, C.T. *Embellishing the Landscape: the Images of Amy Heap and Fred Flood 1920-1940*. (Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990)

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Richard Weller, *Boom Town 2050: Scenarios for a Rapidly Growing City*. Nedland: UWAP, 2009) 67

<sup>46</sup> State of the Environment Report, *Land Use and Management (2011)*. <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/land/topic/land-use-and-management>

<sup>47</sup> Madeleine Watts, “Contending with a Blank Page. Interview with Tim Winton.” In *Griffith Review* p 98

Contrasting Australia's Pacific seaboard, virtually all of Western Australia's twelve and a half thousand kilometres of coastline is defined in a westerly direction by the Indian Ocean, which converges with the Great Southern Ocean to the extreme south off Cape Leeuwin. Kept warm by the Leeuwin current which originates in waters close to equator, according to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: "We boast the longest Indian Ocean coastline as well as its largest Search and Rescue Zone."<sup>48</sup> In her 2015 essay, "From the Edge of the Edge", historian Anna Haebich wrote that she and life partner, Darryl Kickett, a "local Noongar man with a strong culture" and possessing "an ancient family lineage stretching back forty-five thousand years",<sup>49</sup> had several times "travelled the length" of Western Australia's "Indian Ocean rim" though never really "looked out very far from the liminal space."

All that changed in March 2014 with the announcement that "Malaysian Airlines flight 370 had crashed into the 'middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth. This is a remote location, far from any possible landing sites.'"<sup>50</sup> All on board were presumed to have perished though no bodies were recovered. Soon after receiving this news, Haebich watched the apocalyptic film *Those Final Hours* (2013) set in Perth which "cruelly transforms the azure-blue Indian Ocean of my summer reveries, with its cooling Fremantle Doctor and beautiful western sunsets, into a scorching skyscraper-high wall of flames."<sup>51</sup> Half a century earlier, Ava Gardner had quipped that Melbourne was an appropriate place to shoot a movie about the end of the world. Into the twenty-first century, according to the logic, of

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<sup>48</sup> DFAT, Australia and the Indian Ocean Region." <https://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/indian-ocean/Pages/indian-ocean-region.aspx>

<sup>49</sup> Anna Haebich, "From the Edge of the Edge." In *Looking West. Griffith Review* no 47, 2015. 11

<sup>50</sup> Haebich 17

<sup>51</sup> Haebich 17

*Those Final Hours*, Perth had displaced Melbourne. Not even sharks or the dead rising out Davy Jones' Locker would survive such a tsunami.

Drewe refers to those living on the western rim as "sand people" who gaze "over the cliffs to the sea ... trying to see Africa."<sup>52</sup> Alternatively, veranda people, according to the author's near namesake Philip Drew,<sup>53</sup> the beach is a "littoral" of their imagination, according to Bennett<sup>54</sup> In the opening scene of Prichard's *Intimate Strangers*, Elodie notices that the "mirage is breaking up,"<sup>55</sup> a metaphor to her failing marriage with returned serviceman husband Greg and literally Rottnest Island which appears disproportionately large on the horizon before the apparition yields before the arrival of the Doctor. In his history *Land of Vision and Mirage* (2008), Bolton observes a less convincing a reverse image of the moneyed city: "holiday makers on the beach at Rottnest's Thomson's Bay sometimes observe on the eastern horizon the shimmering outlines of high-rise building above the mainland. As the outlines change shape and dissolve, they are seen as mirages, reflecting and exaggerating the profile of Perth's central business district."<sup>56</sup>

### **Cinderella**

One of the last European settler societies established at the height of nineteenth century empire-building, the Swan River Colony had begun independently of New South Wales, unlike Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania (and even New Zealand) which were birthed by the *Mother Colony of the Australias*.<sup>57</sup> Such mater-familial step-relations created from the outset a tendency to differentiate and at times distrust what latter day historians referred

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<sup>52</sup> *Shark Net* 37.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Drew, *The Coast Dwellers*. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1994). 15, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Bennett, "A Beach Somewhere: the Australian Littoral Imagination at Play." In C.A. Cranston and Robert Zeller Eds. *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and their Writers*. Leiden: Rodopi, 2007. 31-44.

<sup>55</sup> Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Intimate Strangers*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937)

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Bolton, *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia Since 1826*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 2001) 1

<sup>57</sup> Frank Hutchinson (ed), *New South Wales: the Mother Colony of the Australias*. (Sydney: NSW Government Printer, 1896).

to as the hegemony of the Hume Highway.<sup>58</sup> Winton observed more plainly that the west was in the “wrong hemisphere, wrong country, wrong part of the wrong country.”<sup>59</sup> Yet it was the Coolgardie-Kalgoorlie gold rushes of the 1890s that provided the clearest indication for believers in exceptionalism that the east coast desired dominion over the west. Gold fever had resulted in an influx of what were called “t’othersiders,” a pejorative term applied to those from the east and who rapidly outnumbered locally born by a ratio of four to three. A greater number were Victorians who “considered themselves superior to old Western Australians.”<sup>60</sup> For their part, Western Australians held that such “rank outsiders” should demonstrate respect and be “thankful for being allowed to remain within the western paradise,” according to the historian and state librarian J.S. Battye in the first full-length history of Western Australia in 1924.<sup>61</sup>

The presence of “t’othersiders” led to some 30,000 petitioners demanding the secession of the goldfields in favour of federation should Western Australians fail to join in which the colony begrudgingly did just months before the proclamation of the new nation with a royal seal already on the constitution. Despite the majority vote supporting union, loyalists continued to insist that their Cinderella State had been coerced into agreement by a conspiring stepmother and conceited stepsisters. Ultimately, it was not a fairy godmother, beautiful gown or glass slippers that carried Cinderella to the ball but the riches of the underworld attracting an entourage of carpetbaggers masquerading as Prince Charming and courtiers in steel-capped boots and hi vis shirts contributing to mining’s most distinctive

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<sup>58</sup> Australian Historical Association, “Q&A with Jenny Gregory”, 14 April 2018.

<https://ahaecr.wordpress.com/2018/03/14/qa-with-emeritus-professor-jenny-gregory/>

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Watts 97.

<sup>60</sup> Entry “Eastern Goldfields” in Jenny Gregory and Jan Gothard (eds), *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia*. (Nedlands: UWAP, 2009) 294.

<sup>61</sup> J.S. Battye, *Western Australia: a History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924). <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500301h.html>

archetype of the cashed up bogan: “in the Perth Qantas club lounge, those employed on ‘fly-in fly-out’ mining sites and dressed in work uniforms of steel-cap boots, fluorescent shirts and ‘king-gees’ now sit alongside those bearing the more traditional marker of middle-class masculinity, the business suit.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Different Axis**

In the same year that the first American astronaut to fly far from the earth observed Perth as a city of light, Australian poet Judith Wright detected a condition of vertigo among her compatriots on account of a peculiar geopolitical paradox and anxiety. “When East becomes North and West is under your feet, your compass swings frighteningly,” observed the poet, “To calm it, you must find yourself a new axis.”<sup>63</sup> Wright’s marker had been a statement by former Australian Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies on the eve of the Second World War that the “far east is to us the near north.”<sup>64</sup> Translated into a sixties idiom, Wright perceived Australia as a first world nation in a predominantly third world space.<sup>65</sup> For Western Australians, having west “under your feet” means standing steady and being at home. A reorienting cartography in the twenty first century defining the “East Asian Hemisphere” linked the west temporally though not spatially in a northerly direction with much of Indonesia, South East Asia, the Philippines and China, accounting for about a third of the world’s population.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Pini, Paula McDonald, Robyn Mayer, “Class Contestations and Australia’s Resources Boom: The Emergence of the Cashed up Bogan.” 46: 1 148

<sup>63</sup> Judith Wright (1962) cited in Bruce Bennett, *An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*. (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 1991). 163

<sup>64</sup> Robert Menzies, “Prime Minister’s Speech” 26 April 1939. <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/historical-documents/Pages/volume-02/73-broadcast-speech-by-mr-rg-menzies-prime-minister.aspx>

<sup>65</sup> Francis Maravillas, Un/settled Geographies: Vertigo and the Predicament of Australia’s Postcoloniality”. In Catriona Elder and Keith Moore (eds) *New Voices, New Visions: Challenging Australian Identities and Legacies*. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). 17-36.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Jennings, “Ken Henry’s Asian Century”. Policy Analysis No 104, Australian Strategic Policy Institute. 17 August 2012. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/161923/Policy\\_Analysis104\\_Asian\\_century.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/161923/Policy_Analysis104_Asian_century.pdf)

Quoting Wright in the front matter to his collection of essays, *An Australian Compass*, one of Western Australia's most respected literary critics and co-founder here of Australian Studies, Bruce Bennett had spent a professional lifetime negotiating Westralian exceptionalism with a simple question: "What difference does it make if I write, or speak, from Perth, Townsville, Melbourne or Alice Springs?" For the critic, this question turned on the full "metaphorical force" of place and location: "To what extent am I made of such places? To what extent do I make them?"<sup>67</sup> To committed exceptionalists the answer might appear to be relatively straight forward. For Bennett, it presented a riddle of deeper significance. "As a young Australian" who had travelled to as Rhodes Scholar to "Oxford struggling to come to terms with what he perceived there, as a colonial identity, he had gradually realised it was necessary to affirm through one's reading and commitment one's identity is indelibly coloured by where one lives," observed Harry Heseltine who had been an original co-editor of the *Winthrop Review* with Geoffrey Bolton in the early 1950s.<sup>68</sup> From her Glebe home in Sydney, Westralian novelist Gail Jones considered this question in terms of polarities: "Where the local and the global come together is often a place of strenuous feeling and a kind of instability and energy."<sup>69</sup> Presenting the opening keynote address at a "True North" conference at Townsville in November 2019, *Westerly's* editor, Catherine Noske, spoke about childhood memories gazing across the Southern Ocean from her Victorian home on the Great Ocean Road imagining Antarctica at the farther extent of the cold wash. From her more recently acquired westerly outlook, since 2015, Noske's research

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<sup>67</sup> Bruce Bennett, *An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature*. (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991). 11.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Heseltine, "Obituary Bruce Bennett, 1941-2012." *Australian Academy of Humanities 2012 Annual Report*. (Canberra: Academy of Humanities, 2012). 20. <http://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AAH-Obit-Bennett-2012.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> Maria del Pilar Roya Grassa, "In Conversation with Gail Jones", *JASAL*. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/viewFile/9828/9716>



on Randolph Stow directed her gaze northwards but only as far as Forrest River and the still largely unacknowledged but implicated history of frontier violence.<sup>70</sup>

### **First Wave**

Among the last of his generation of Australian scholars to voyage by sea in pursuit of higher learning in Britain, Bennett had spent three years at Oxford's Pembroke College completing a second Bachelor of Arts degree concentrating on European modernism before taking out a Master of Education from the University of London. He returned to UWA in 1968 and almost instantly began to explore the potential of teaching and researching Australian literature. The return of the native led to a lifelong friendships with UWA graduates John Hay and Tom Stannage who made similar pilgrimages though to Cambridge to complete postgraduate studies on Hackett bursaries before also returning home. Other bonds developed when Bennett assumed the co-editorship of *Westerly* between 1975 and 1992 and began to think through the potential of interdisciplinary Australian Studies. In the mid-1980, he became one of three members of the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education which recommended the Australianisation of Australian curriculum.<sup>71</sup>

As Bennett had found his way to Australian Studies via Oxford and modernism, Hay arrived by a similarly circuitously route via Cambridge and eighteenth century romanticism. Developing a lifelong in interest the life and novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard, Hay embraced interdisciplinarity and contributed the chapter "Literature and Society" to Stannage's *New History of Western Australia* in 1981.<sup>72</sup> Stannage had completed his PhD on

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<sup>70</sup> Chris Owen, 'Every Mother's Son is Guilty.' *Policing the Kimberley Frontier of Western Australia 1882-1905*. Nedlands; UWAP, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> CRASTE, *Windows onto Worlds. Studying Australia at Tertiary Level, Report of the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education*. (Canberra: Australian Government Printing Services, 1987).

<sup>72</sup> John Hay, "Literature and Society" in C. T. Stannage (ed), *New History of Western Australia*. (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981). 599-635.

interwar British politics before returning home and becoming UWA's most respected and influential teacher of Australian and Western Australian history. Lectures on Australian Literature had been part of the English curriculum at UWA for many decades, while the first full courses came into being in the 1970s under the auspices of Bennett with the support of Hay. Australian history had been taught over a longer period by Fred Alexander, Frank Crowley, Geoffrey Bolton and Brian de Garis, and was boosted in the 1970s with the arrival of Stannage who, with Bennett and Hay, constituted what might be reasonably claimed as the first wave Australian Studies in the west. Reflecting on this, Bennett later wrote, "I fancied I was establishing my rootedness in my local and Australian community. I felt 'responsible' for my local culture."<sup>73</sup>

Bennett emerged as a key figure in the creation of UWA's Centre for Studies on Australian Literature in 1982 which evolved into the Westerly Centre some twenty years later. The long stability of *Westerly* the journal has been underpinned by both and before that the presence of Peter Cowan as co-editor between 1966 and 1994, sharing responsibilities variously with Bennett, Dennis Haskell and Delys Bird<sup>74</sup> who co-edited the magazine between 1992 and 2014 before being succeeded by Noske in 2015. Drama lecturer and actor Colin O'Brien had been the first "contracted editor" of *Westerly* between 1962 and 1965,<sup>75</sup> though over time the journal became more closely associated with Cowan.<sup>76</sup> During Cowan's long tenure, *Westerly* gained a reputation for publishing quality short fiction and it catalysed poetry. "There were poets everywhere, all more or less

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<sup>73</sup> Bennett 137

<sup>74</sup> Delys Bird, "The Golden Years: 1986-1995." *Westerly*. 59:2 2014. Revised and amended: <https://westerlymag.com.au/the-golden-years-1986-1995-by-delys-bird/>

<sup>75</sup> Bird np.

<sup>76</sup> Bruce Bennett, "Peter Cowan's Landscapes of Silence" in *Australian Compass*. 113-121.

involved with *Westerly*,” recalled Stow.<sup>77</sup> In 1986 Bennett reported on the “Buoyant state of Western Australian writing” which, he maintained, had been significantly contributed to by a decade of publishing West Australian literature by Fremantle Press.<sup>78</sup> Four years earlier in 1982, Winton had published his Vogel Award-winning *Open Swimmer*, written while pursuing undergraduate studies in creative writing at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT now Curtin)—the first program of its kind in the country.

Sometimes overlooked in this narrative, Don Grant had set up the first Australian Studies Centre at WAIT in 1975. The first tertiary-level courses on interdisciplinary Australian Studies had also been introduced by Grant at who had, with Stephen Alomes at Deakin University, co-founded the Australian Studies Association (Austa) in 1983-4, the precursor to the current International Australian Studies Association which was established after a series of meetings ten years later at the University of Queensland where the secretariat of the new association was established.<sup>79</sup> Alomes has noted that Australian Studies had taken root, firstly, in the new interdisciplinary universities of Deakin, Griffith, Murdoch and Flinders (which along with La Trobe are colloquially referred to as the “gumtree universities,”<sup>80</sup> comprising the core institutions within the Innovative Research Universities Group<sup>81</sup>). The *Journal of Australian Studies* had been founded under the auspices of the Victorian Historical Association by La Trobe’s Bob Bessant in 1977, who remained editor for eighteen years, before the journal transferred to UQ and, subsequently Curtin.<sup>82</sup> The concept of an

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<sup>77</sup> *Cross Currents*

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Bird np.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Nile, “International Australian Studies Launch”. *Australian Studies Bulletin*. July 1995. 1

<sup>80</sup> Simon Marginson and Mark Considine, *The Enterprise University: Power Governance and Reinvention in Australia*. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000). 15

<sup>81</sup> See <https://www.iru.edu.au/>

<sup>82</sup> Don Gibb and Stephen Alomes, “Bob Bessant.” *Journal of Australian Studies* 37:4, 535-536.

international association had been mooted during breakout meetings at the 1992 Curtin conference on “Outside Images of Australia.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Second Wave**

In time, both Hay and Bennett gravitated eastward where they became major influencers on the development of Australian Studies nationally. After twelve years as Vice Chancellor at the University of Queensland to 2007, Hay reflected: “For as long as I can remember, literature, the arts and the challenge of new ideas have compelled my imagination, just as the aspiration to teach and undertake research shaped my life.”<sup>84</sup> Finding his forte in academic management, he had been a prime mover in the establishment of AustLit (<https://www.austlit.edu.au/>) and provided it with sustained institutional support during his Queensland years. Hay had also championed Australian Studies through Queensland’s Australian Studies Centre, and prior to that while holding down senior executive portfolios at Deakin and Monash during which time he served as the Chair of the National Key Centre for Australian Studies, firstly as the Dean of Arts and subsequently as Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor.

Stannage and Bennett had made an unsuccessful bid to establish an Australian Studies Centre at UWA in the late 1980s, thereby missing the zeitgeist generated on the east coast by the 1988 bicentenary. Partly out of disappointment, Bennett packed his bags for Canberra and, though he maintained close links in the west, was a significant loss. Still fired with an ambition for Australian Studies, Stannage took the concept to Curtin University following his appointment there as Executive Dean of Humanities between 1999 and 2006.

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<sup>83</sup> Proceedings published. Don Grant and Graham Seal (eds), *Australia and the World: Perceptions and Possibilities: Australia and the World*. (Bentley: Black Swan Press, 1994).

<sup>84</sup> John Hay. “Friendships: the Enduring Legacy of Twelve Exciting Years.” <https://www.uq.edu.au/about/professor-john-hay>

This led to the creation of the Australia Research Institute and my recruitment as Curtin's Foundation Chair of Australian Studies (I had been named as the preferred appointment on the unsuccessful UWA plan a decade earlier). A graduate of the UWA and former University Fellow I had grown up in Nyungar country, and was perceived by Hay, Bennett and Stannage as a second wave Australianists.

By 2000, I was beginning to feel that maybe I was coming into my own as the Director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland under the watchful eye of Hay. Prior to that, I had been Deputy Head of the Menzies Centre at the University of London where I had been mentored by Bennett. With the *Journal of Australian Studies* under my wing since 1996, I returned westward to work with Stannage, and was the editor additionally of two Australian Studies book series through the University of Queensland Press. These subsequently transferred to the Australian Public Intellectual Network which I had co-created in the mid-1990s.

Attempting to establish a new axis in Australian Studies, with other second wave Australianists Kate Darian-Smith Director of the Australian Centre University of Melbourne and David Carter who succeeded me at UQ, I embarked on an ambitious venture to triangulate Australian Studies across the continent through the co-production of a special issue each year of the *Journal of Australian Studies* dedicated to the work of postgraduates and early career researchers. Producing these publications would prove to be among the most fulfilling experiences of my professional life. After years of hard work these initiatives hit strong headwinds. UQ's Australian Studies Centre closed in 2006 as Hay began planning his retirement the following year. The Australia Research Institute at Curtin was disestablished three years later in 2009 following the departure of Stannage who had provided all important top cover. I was devastated by these developments and the

replacement of the Australia Research Institute by an Australia-Asia-Pacific Institute which I thought was on the wrong side of the continent. Seven years earlier, Brian Stoddart had noted that Curtin “closed unexpectedly and unwisely” the university’s Indian Ocean Centre which, from my west coast perspective, would have made for a better combination with Australian Studies.<sup>85</sup> With a sense of sadness, I left Curtin to take up the Chair of Australian Studies and the Directorship of the Humanities Research Institute at Murdoch. The API Network followed me and continued in a much reduced manner until 2012 when it too closed. In 2016, I left the west to take up the Chair of Australian History at James Cook University.

### **Third Wave**

The three Australianists I had admired most throughout my professional life took the last train to coast as the expression goes between 2012 and 2016. Funeral choirs might have rung out Australian Studies cries to the strains of Don McLean. Bruce Bennett died in 2012 at the age of seventy one. Tom Stannage passed later in the same year at the age of sixty eight. John Hay died in 2016. Many of their near contemporaries who had contributed so significantly to the development of Australian Studies were, by now, on the verge of retirement or had already left paid employment.<sup>86</sup> Their generation had been so very influential in shaping Australian Studies nationally and in the west. In the process they opened up spaces and opportunities for succeeding generations which is a cause for celebration and optimism. Inheritors and successors to Australian Studies in the west include Jane Lydon the UWA Wesfarmers Chair of Australian History and co-convenor of the Australian Studies Network, Kate Noske novelist and editor of *Westerly*, Tony Hughes-

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<sup>85</sup> Brian Stoddart, “Kenneth MacPherson, 1944-2010.”

<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/southasiamasala/2010/04/03/kenneth-mcpherson-1944-2010/>

<sup>86</sup> Graeme Hugo, “Academia’s own Demographic Time-Bomb.” *Australian University’s Review*. 48:1, 16-23.

d'Aeth, Andrea Gaynor, Shino Konishi, Chris Owen, Tanya Dalzeil and many others besides. This third wave of Australianists are every bit as curious about their place as their forebears but they appear less perturbed by the imagined dangers of sharks and dingoes. Rather, their tendency is to cast a confident gaze beyond deserts to the east, beyond Rottnest and Africa across the water to the west, and beyond China to the north towards a new cartography with Western Australia beneath their feet.