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THE RISE OF ‘WOMEN’S POETRY’ IN THE 1970s
An Initial Survey into New Australian Poetry, the Women’s Movement, and a Matrix of Revolutions

Ann Vickery*

In Paper Empires (2006), Diane Brown and Susan Hawthorne argue that until the late 1970s it was difficult to access Australian women’s writing in any genre. Certainly, the 1970s was a watershed decade for women in the poetic field, leading to greater visibility and legitimation than ever before. Brown and Hawthorne contend that the most important poetry publishing event of the 1970s was the first women’s poetry anthology, Kate Jennings’ Mother I’m Rooted (1975a) (2006, 263). Published in International Women’s Year, it was unlike No More Masks! (Howe and Bass 1973), Rising Tides (Chester and Barba 1973), and The World Split Open (Bernikow 1973)—women’s poetry anthologies that had been published in other countries only a year or two earlier—in that it did not map out a female tradition. Rather, it showcased poetry from one particular historic moment. Adrienne Rich has defined feminist poetry as challenging ‘not just conventional puritanical mores, but the hip “counterculture” and the male poetry culture itself’ (1993, 167–68).

While Jennings’ anthology might be viewed as a conspicuous—indeed inflammatory—feminist gesture, it is my contention that it, and the nascent recognition of ‘women’s poetry’ as a literary and marketable category in Australia, was as enabled as it was constrained by the counterculture that saw a similar emergence of the term ‘New Australian poetry’, or what has alternatively been labelled the ‘generation of ‘68’. In the following article, I begin to track the complex relationship between women’s poetry and the radical small press scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s.1

To date, scholarly work has tended to focus on Australian women’s involvement in the poetic field through a separate lens. This strategy has successfully counteracted the relative under-representation of poetry by women in Australian literary criticism.2 Yet Susan Stanford Friedman urges feminists to think of women writers as existing within a fluid matrix where the interactional, relational, and situational constituents of identity for both male and female writers are read together. Through so doing, feminist histories may exist as plural, localised narratives rather than one originary or totalising narrative (Friedman 1998, 226). Accordingly, this is not a story of the rise of women’s poetry against a ‘unitary foil’ of male cultural production (with its moral overtones of a battle waged between ‘good’ and ‘bad’), but rather a start in tracing how poets of both sexes were negotiating a revolution in terms of authorship and publishing. How gender was taken up and used within this discourse of transformation then becomes clearer. This is not to say that other elements such as age (generational agonism), ethnicity (the growing
recognition of some non-Anglo voices) and sexuality are any less important, for a focus on any of these would give rise to a quite different understanding about the workings of the Australian poetic field.

Both New Australian poetry and the recognition of women's poetry were reliant on a prior, but very important, revolution in print technology that occurred when offset production began replacing letterpress in the late 1960s. Where once there had been a restrictive reliance on conservative, large presses to become published, there was suddenly a freeing up of the poetry market. Robert Kenny suggests that the need for a poetry licence stopped in 1968:

If the poets could not find someone to publish their work (and they didn't really bother trying), they published themselves: they took the mystique out of publishing; it was no longer [...] the great success but just part of the process of poetry and from that the poem became a living thing: an inter-reaction became possible. (1974, 26)

Early poetry magazines included: Michael Dugan's *Crosscurrents*; Kris Hemensley's *Our Glass*; Charles Buckmaster's *The Great Auk*; Richard Tipping and Rob Tillett's *Mok*; Nigel Roberts, Terry Gillmore, and John Goodall's *Free Poetry*; Andy Jach's *Cat*; Garry Hyde-Cates' *Gruntled*; and John Tranter's *Transit*. As with American formations like the Beats or second-generation New York School, the little magazines were important in generating a sense of alternative community. For poets like Buckmaster from rural Victoria, to Tipping and Tillett in Adelaide, starting a little magazine was a way of overcoming a state of isolation. Indeed, the small press scene even brought together writers unknown to each other within the one city, with Hemensley and Ken Taylor only forming the acquaintance of Dugan through the publication of *Crosscurrents* (Hemensley 1974, 16). Tranter, too, met many people (including Tipping, Robert Adamson, Rudi Krasman, and Michael Dransfield) through the little magazines.3 Tranter notes: 'magazines are good for that, they're rather like a pub in that way' (Duwell 1977, 163).

As with the pub scene, the small press scene was primarily a site of male homosociality and a means to validate certain forms of bonding and self-definition. Hemensley notes that the resulting male-dominant community was not intentional: 'If anything one was encouraging whoever turned up in person or sent work. The “crime” is in the area of actively seeking out women' (Dobrez 1999, 265). *Crosscurrents*, perhaps more interdisciplinary than many of the other magazines, had a greater representation of women contributors and seems to have encouraged an understanding of itself as a friendly space for women poets. As Patricia Dobrez remarks, it was a ‘model of greater female involvement in the alternative press’ (1999, 265).

While there were other communal spaces such as the workshops at La Mama in Melbourne and various reading series, the little magazines were not restricted to particular times or locations. Hemensley raised ire when he suggested that 200 copies was about as high as the circulation of a magazine should get (see Wilding). Yet he was correct in assuming that a significant characteristic of the small press scene was its intimacy, which also included in-fighting and insularity. Cliques abounded and were often shaped by factors such as shared housing, friends, and education, as much as a common poetics.4 Informal and highly personal, the little magazines were a place where aspects of literature, politics, and lifestyle were synthesised and developed. The survival and size of a number of the early little magazines were often reliant on the goodwill of others within the scene. Thus, *Free Poetry* could increase the numbers of pages through donations from editors of
other journals such as Hemensley and Tipping. A custom of listing other magazines for readers to support further laid out the parameters of the community, nominating who was ‘in’ and, by virtue of their absence, who was ‘out’. This was reinforced by highly personal editorials on the poetry and broader cultural scene which, Kenny suggests, could be viewed as a kind of activism (1977, 205).

Little magazines often touted themselves as ‘free forums’ or ‘free areas’ and they showcased writing that overtly protested against surveillance and coercion of the liberal subject, including the Vietnam War, capitalism, imperialism, censorship laws, religious piety, and prudishness. A prominent topic was sexual liberation. John Sladden’s ‘Like I’m meaning’ is somewhat emblematic in marking the shift from the epistemic to the corporeal, a celebration of the physicality of sex, an absence of sentimentality, and lack of analysis or insight into the presented relationship:

And the boarding house, like it was a run-down creepy joint with old windows and her couch had all hard springs in it, and I’m meaning hard, hard like rocks on your arse falling down a hill fast; But I’m meaning bang bang baby and it was all over, you know. those things just happen, don’t they, huh, well, don’t they. (Sladden 1969 n.p.)

The revolt against institutional constraints would extend to the rules of syntax, grammar, poetic form, and genre. Sladden’s poem is formally radical in its lack of euphemisms and the captured rhythms of everyday speech. While Sladden sought to be as direct and politically accessible as possible, others like Tranter were more concerned with the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Tranter’s ‘The Room’ sets up tensions between containment and freedom, poem and the real:

he did. ask she came into the room slippery with oil, delightful [. . .]

here love battled about, awkward against the tangled vase of flowers broke the chair, soon, the whole room grew up like a rapid bloom. She plump with love. The warm room

The city through the clattering window grew like petrol jelly in a rage of heat. He did. ask. she came into the room. (Tranter n.d., n.p.)

While Tranter teasingly places anxiety around the issue of consent (through the increasing use of full stops in the phrase, ‘he did ask’), the slipperiness of representation itself is more important than the woman’s oily body; she, in effect, becomes simply a metaphor.
Surrealistically, outside and inside, love and prostitution, are turned upside down formally through simple phrase rearrangements and repetition.

The inaugural issue of Free Poetry featured John Heuzen Roeder’s gloriously camp comic strip on its front page, in which a busty cosmonaut escapes her imprisonment by her father only to discover—with pleasure—that a space ship is arriving full of ‘Big, gorgeous, handsome earth men!!’ (Roeder 1968 n.p.). Robert Orr’s ‘My Sweet Lady Jane’ challenges the conventional passivity of the female muse by having the beloved trash the speaker’s love letters but carry on a purely sexual relationship. The poem concludes: ‘Her green thighs / laugh— / and I have to’ (Orr 1969 n.p.). Yet while the beloved is empowered through bodily expression, she has not yet gained an actual right to speak. Both Roeder and Orr’s work depict women taking control, but only in terms of serving their impressive libidinal drive.

Roeder’s ‘The Cosmonauts [sic] Wish-Fulfillment’ flagged the influence of Pop Art and many contributors to the little magazines took their cue from American experimental writing, such as that to be found in Donald Allen’s The New American Poetry, 1945–60 (1960), which had initially been banned in Australia. Johnny Goodall’s ‘My Principle is No Monkey’, for instance, is framed as a homage to the cut-ups of William Burroughs:

(have no malaise voodoo trout vulva drips figs on Clara Buckingham)!!!
no monkey cool adding machine fangs like mad dogs shouted or uttered bursts of
BLUE FRIGIDAIRE encrusted with full firm breasts/Billy Hol
day/Baudelaire/recoil from the Communist Panic wet with saliva […]
My poet fellow vile thermonuclear Lazarus WE ARE SCREWED in ohmn
shadows like the lotus her thighs exploded in mescaline flak. (Goodall 1968 n.p.)

While the recontextualised material forces the reader to make associations between different forms of cultural dissidence, the gratuitous sexual emphasis seeks firstly to shock and then to desensitise the reader.

As much of the writing that appeared in the little magazines aligned revolution with violence, sexual violence sometimes stood in for linguistic violence. This extended to a feminisation of the violence of war and imperialism, such as in a Beat-inspired poem by Buckmaster, where

there is no love/done to our fair sister
ravished and tied her dragged her down:
in the land of light blue: plundered her
: in the side of the dawn: stuck her with
Knives: under time/we want the world
/it tolls for thee/and we want it/now. (Buckmaster 1968 n.p.)

While the poem transforms slogans of protest to those of consumption, the poet’s use of the ‘fair sister’ as metaphor merely adds to her abuse.

I selected these poems not only to demonstrate the diversity in treatment of sexual liberation but also to render apparent a pattern whereby the female body is emphasised over female voice and woman is treated more as a medium than a subject. Michael Wilding notes that critiques of chauvinism and sexism had not yet developed in the late 1960s (121). Women still existed primarily as canvases for male-authored aesthetics. Tranter, for instance, recalls organising a poetry reading in 1969 where ‘a beautiful naked woman was featured as a “living poem”‘ (1977, 128). Robert Adamson (1969) ensured that
the event drew headlines in the Melbourne Truth. As Wilding points out, another outlet for new writing on sexuality was the various men’s magazines like Squire, Casual, and Chance. Such magazines, he notes, ‘weren’t committed to the old outback tale and other formulae that the established quarterlies ran’ (121). Several writers, such as Wilding and Sladden, published in both arenas. Squire published a story of vivid social realism by Sladden in which the narrator’s sister performs a nasty backyard abortion upon herself with scissors. The facing page to the conclusion of this pro-choice piece was an introduction to ‘Trudy, the Girl of the Month’ who, as a ‘splendid example of the soulful blonde female loner’ is seen subsequently cavorting in sand-dunes in the all-together for the next five or so pages (Sladden [late 1960s], 21).

Arguably, there is a similar mix of female objectification and dismissal alongside highly politicised representations of gendered experience in the little poetry magazines. The Great Auk was often dotted with editorial marginalia such as ‘how are / YOU / off for female poets’ (September 1969 n.p.). Another declared: ‘Typing: as Michael dugar is sick & tired of typing Charlie buckmasters bloody stencils / he would appreciate it if / some typists would volunteer. Preferably young & beautiful birds. any one interested can / write [...] to the editor’ (September 1969, n.p.). Buckmaster saw nothing unusual in putting out such flippant calls for typists who could also act as eye candy while publishing early feminist poems like Margaret Randall’s ‘Because I love you this much I can tell you’:

I was strapped to a table face up legs spread
they inserted wires into my cunt
and turned the current on [...] Later [...] You are stroking my head one arm around my shoulder my head comes to your groin and I press my head my cheek against your familiar pants.
That I can imagine and imagine and feel
my whole body and the mind of my body going off on that forever.
Escape.
That was a dream dreamt awake in my hands my eyes open.
It really happens to Vietnamese women they cannot even speak of it.
The article ends ‘They didn’t confess you can’t make a revolutionary confess.’
What I can confess against your legs my sisters pain
Yes. (Randall 1969 n.p.)

The little magazines provided an ambivalent space for women to be published, a space which enabled visibility at the same time as it mapped out a still small set of positions available for women in the poetic field. Poets like Dorothy Porter and Gig Ryan, who both entered the poetic field later in the 1970s, recall feeling frustrated at finding the intellectual conversation being carried out by men while the poetry scene was segregated in such a way that women were not part of that conversation (Kelada 2005, 82). Arguably, it would be worse at the turn of the decade. In terms of taking part in the production of little magazines (and the network that formed around it), women were often either marginal or rendered invisible in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Grace Perry, who founded Poetry Australia after being dismissed from her job at Poetry Magazine, would be among the first to publish poets like Adamson and Dransfield. Yet she seems to have faded into the background the more she encouraged the work of ambitious male poets, cast in a
nurturing rather than leadership role. This was repeated elsewhere with a number of women undertaking the more invisible, supportive work such as typing and layout. The Great Auk and Free Poetry’s in-list of little magazines were all publications edited by men, and male editors dominated the lists to be found in others. Women seem to have had a brief or backseat role in editing a number of magazines. Mag, edited by Ingrid Frank and Anne Schumacher, lasted only for an issue while Perry, edited by Julia Savage, lasted for four. Another short-lived magazine, an offshoot of New Poetry, was Beyond Poetry, edited by Cheryl Adamson and Chris Edwards. While Ploughman’s Lunch was listed in Applestealers as being edited only by Gary Oliver, Carol Novack claims a co-editorship of it in her biographical note to her first collection of poetry (1974). She also co-edited an issue of My Friendly Fascist.

There were significant exceptions such as Pat Woolley, who founded Tomato Press in 1971 and was later joined by Jenny Doyle and Rennie van Dinterin in 1973. It published underground literature and comic books, along with other titles like Anne Summers’ book on trades unions and the construction industry, The Little Green Book: The Facts on Green Bans (1973). Woolley went on to found Wild and Woolley with Michael Wilding in 1974 (and much later helped establish the feminist Redress Press). The Saturday Club Book of Poetry began in 1972 and was edited by Patricia Laird. Stefanie Bennett and Margaret McMahon began Khasmik, a quarterly literary magazine in 1974 although it did not last long. In 1976, Anna Couani founded Sea Cruise Books with Ken Bolton and they co-edited Magic Sam, arguably the most outstanding poetry magazine of the 1970s, from 1975 onwards.

In her overview of women in the literary small press scene around 1975, Couani recounts how women editors were often discounted by male writers: ‘[they] simply could not take, for example, Patricia Laird […] seriously’ (Couani and Gunew 1988, 9). Given the lack of recognition and the transient and ephemeral nature of many of the magazines, it is exceedingly difficult to map precisely women’s involvement in poetry editing during the early 1970s. The majority of little poetry magazines of the 1970s are yet to be added to the AustLit database (although this may occur once the magazine subset is developed further); library archives are often incomplete, and first-hand memories are not always accurate.

Women’s liberation in Australia emerged around 1969, the year after the first wave of poetry magazines. Many of the initial participants were a similar age to those involved in the New Australian poetry formation, being between 17 and 25 years of age. Women’s libbers would also use advances in print technology to raise a sense of community. Anne Summers recalls first typing out 19 single-spaced foolscap pages of Juliet Mitchell’s ‘Women: The Longest Revolution’ (1967) ‘onto wax stencils; we then ran copies off on the Gestetner, bound them with staples in a heavy cardboard cover and sold each for 25 cents’ (2000, 261). Other leaflets and advertising material would follow. Lyndall Ryan also Roneoed chapters of Mitchell’s Woman’s Estate (1971), Shulamith Firestone’s The Dialectic of Sex (1970), Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1970), and Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics (1970), all before the books were readily available in Australia (Ryan 2004, 79). In her autobiography Ducks on the Pond, Summers distinguishes between material that focused on sexual liberation and that focused on women’s liberation, pointing out that the two movements sometimes diverged considerably (2000, 292). Among the former was Greer’s book as well as Anne Koedt’s ‘The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm’, which suggested that female sexuality was little understood and needed to be redefined (Summers 2000, 261).
In the latter half of 1970, Kate Jennings—then still an Arts student at the University of Sydney, a member of Women’s Liberation Movement and involved in left politics more generally—delivered her infamous ‘manifesto’ before the Moratorium march against the Vietnam War:

ALL POWER
And I say to every woman that every time you’re put down or fucked over, every time they kick you cunningly in the teeth, go stand on the street corner and tell every man that walks by, every one of them a male chauvinist by virtue of HIS birthright, tell them all to go suck their own cocks. And when they laugh, tell them they’re getting bloody defensive, and that you know what size weapon to buy to kill the bodies that you’ve unfortunately laid under often enough. (Jennings 1975b n.p.)

While Jennings’ demand for a complete cultural revolution would be reflected by Ryan and Ann Curthoys at the first Sydney Women’s Liberation Movement in January 1971, her speech was confronting in emanating a level of anger that seemed to some—like Summers (2000, 268)—to be at the extremes of the women’s movement. Yet it was a rallying cry that gave the movement further momentum. Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) and an anthology, *Notes from the Third Year* (New York Radical Women 1968), would confirm Jennings’ form of radical feminism.

Women’s liberation newspapers like *Vashti’s Voice* and *Mejane* soon began production. Feminist magazines followed suit a couple of years later with *Refractory Girl* starting in 1972, *Womanspeak* in 1974, and *Hecate, Scarlet Woman*, and the short-lived *Fin* in 1975. Poetry would appear only as a small part of a mix of analytical, documentary, and creative material. Summers discusses the rapidly expanding map of ‘woman-identified’ cultural production (writing, songs, paintings, film) increasingly being consumed (2000, 283). She also notes the insularity and aggression that sometimes occurred in women’s liberation groups (2000, 263, 298), thus offering a more complex, less sisterly picture of the movement with similar resonances in its community formation (certainly in terms of coteries and struggles over power) as the small press poetry scene.

Some of the most highly political poetry by women was appearing in the little poetry magazines, although women contributors remained in the minority. There remained a focus on the body; *Mok*, for instance, featuring Margaret Barry’s abortion poem (1969) and *The Great Auk* carrying Margaret Randall’s physically explicit anti-Vietnam poem (1969). There also remained a strong emphasis on sexual liberation. While *The Great Auk* featured Angie Mellor’s surrealist-inflected poem: ‘And we made love on bare floorboards / and my eyes exploded, / and trickled down the orange walls’ (1969, n.p.), Vicki Viidikas’s ‘Hot Poem’ appeared in *Mok*. It daringly described cross-racial casual sex through the metaphor of jazz (thus investigating the physical through both a content and form similar to the Beats):

```
honeycomb
  sweet
  you lolly
  pout

you black man you black skin you
SHINE
I said, SHINE . . .
```
Black man I kiss your solid agitating ease. (Viidikas 1969 n.p.)

While Mellor and Viidikas reflect writing by men in representing a woman revelling in her own sexuality, the female subject now assumes perspectival and narrative control.

Yet beyond these kinds of works there were poems that promoted female self-empowerment, such as a cartoon by Liz Sanderson in the second issue of _Free Poetry_ (1968) with the thought balloon, ‘Ladies with Babies / Lie in the grass / on your own / Remember being alone’ (n.p.). The concrete form of Katherine Gallagher’s ‘Expo-Aborigine—Melbourne Town Hall, 1967’ (1969) reinforced the content concerning the fragmentation of Aboriginal culture and the disintegration of collective memory.

After the Whitlam government came into power in 1972, many small publishers started receiving government funding. New presses proliferated, and some presses that had previously been publishing only magazines expanded into book titles. Although male writers were published predominantly, women received crucial support. Prism Books (an offshoot of _New Poetry_) published Robyn Ravlich’s _The Black Abacus_ (1971). Robert Kenny’s _Rigmarole of the Hours_ published Gallagher’s _The Eye’s Circle_ (1974) and The Saturday Centre published Joanne Burns’s _Ratz_ (1973). Tomato Press published Pam Brown’s _Sureblock_ (1972), _Automatic Sad_ (1974a), and _Cocabola’s Funny Picture Book_ (1974b). Khasmik published Colleen Burke’s _Go Down Singing_ (1974), and Stefanie Bennett and PiO’s _Shade_ (1974). Echoing the homosociality of the male-led small press network, Khasmik books (such as Gillian Hanscombe’s _Hecate’s Charms_) were sometimes published by Tomato Press. _Makar_, which had begun as a student-run magazine from the University of Queensland, was edited by Martin Duwell from 1968 onwards. The Gargoyle Poets series started in 1972, with Duwell replacing one of _Makar’s_ four issues per year with three small books of poetry. _Makar_ published Antigone Kefala’s _The Alien_ (1973), Carol Novack’s _Living Alone Without a Dictionary_ (1974), Stefanie Bennett’s _Madam Blackboots_ (1974), and Jennifer Maiden’s _Tactics_ (1974). Even this is a partial list up to the beginning of 1975. Of course, the production value and size of publications varied widely; Prism publishing full-length collections compared to the small, stapled chapbooks of Gargoyle Poets or the Saturday Centre Poets’ series. The presses that survived continued to publish titles by women in the second half of the 1970s.


Diane Brown and Susan Hawthorne point out that feminist printing and publishing co-operatives were only established in the second half of the 1970s, with the earliest being Sugar and Snails (which originally began as the Non-sexist Children’s Book Collective in 1974) and Sybylla Co-operative Press in 1976 (2006, 264). Yet Stefanie Bennett’s two
publishing ventures, Kasmik and Cochon, were strongly feminist in orientation, and she also helped to produce *Bee* (1975), an anthology by the Townsville Women’s Work Collective. Anna Couani would not be the only one who found her ‘world straddling the women’s movement and the small press scene’ (1995, n.p.). Feminist activism would often be channelled into activities other than poetry. During the 1970s, Pam Brown was a bass player for the feminist rock band Clitoris, while others like Joanne Burns had work performed by the feminist theatre group Lean Sisters.

Ironically (but not unexpectedly given the history of avant-gardes), institutionalisation occurred rapidly for a movement so outspoken in its condemnation of institutional structures. John Tranter argues that by 1973 the generation of poets that first published in the alternative little magazines of the late 1960s were exercising ‘a major influence on all the forms of poetry publications in Australia, as well as in the review columns of the newspapers and in the English Departments of our universities’ (1982, 103). As early as 1971, ‘the poetry explosion’ was registering in the mainstream consciousness, with Virginia Osborne covering it for *Vogue Australia* by showcasing six male Sydney poets (Osborne 1971). Anthologisation, too, occurred early. Thomas Shapcott’s *Australian Poetry Now* (1970) was, in many respects, a snapshot of the moment, featuring poets like Les Murray and Bruce Dawe alongside many closely associated with New Australian poetry. For that period, it had a relatively healthy representation of women contributors, including Harry, Alison Hill, Kantaris, Rodriguez, McMaster, and Viidikas. Tranter also published ‘Preface to the 70s’ (1970) as a special issue of *Poetry Australia*. The Poems Again (Anon. n.d.) appeared some time in the early 1970s and *The Drunken Tram*, Michael Dugan’s anthology of six Melbourne poets, was published in 1972. A *Package Deal Assembly Book* (ArtWorkers Collective) appeared in 1974, as did Robert Kenny and Colin Talbot’s *Applestealers: A Collection of the New Poetry in Australia including Notes, Statements, Histories on La Mama*. The latter was published by Outback Press, a small press begun in 1973 by Talbot, Mark Gillespie, Alfred Milgrom and Morry Schwartz, all still in their 20s (and of the same generation as Jennings). Schwartz notes that their role models were the small presses of the United States, particularly California (2006, 63).

From the outset, Outback Press was supportive of new poetry, women’s writing, and of projects that were feminist in outlook. *Applestealers* (Kenny and Talbot) was one of its first four titles published simultaneously mid-1974, along with Suzanne Holly Jones’ novel *Crying in the Garden*, Virginia Fraser’s *A Book about Australian Women* (with photographs by Carol Jerrems), and Mark Gillespie’s book on Fitzroy, *Into the Hollow Mountain*. Only three of the 17 contributors to *Applestealers* were women, but Robyn Ravlich’s ‘The Path of Poetry’ was included in the reflective section and photos of Ravlich and Viidikas were part of the small informal photo gallery. The photographs of Viidikas contrast a happy snap of her as a wide-eyed girl and then as a free-wheeling adult. Unlike the fully-clothed Garrie Hutchinson pictured on the facing page, Viidikas wears only a (very unfeminine) hat. Her uncovered female body (more daring than anything found among the pages of *Squire*) moves beyond Tranter’s ‘woman as living poem’ but represents the woman poet as still existing as both object and subject.

In 1975, Outback Press published a dozen titles (including a number of titles by authors closely associated with New Australian poetry), but its runaway success was Kate Jennings’ anthology of women’s poetry, *Mother I’m Rooted*. As already noted in statements by writers like Couani, there were confluences between the social worlds of women’s liberation and alternative poetry. In Anne Summers’ recollections of Alice B. Toklas-inspired
dinner with Kate Jennings and Kay Daniels (2000, 284) and house sharing with the poets Nigel Roberts and Mark Young (2000, 385), there is a kind of six degrees of separation occurring among a particular Sydney generation that shared similar education paths and political orientation. It is likely, then, that the editors of Outback Press knew Jennings socially as well as by reputation. They would publish her first collection *Come to Me My Melancholy Baby* (which included her Moratorium speech) the same year as *Mother I’m Rooted*.

The violent rhetoric of the Moratorium speech (which only mirrored the violent rhetoric of many male innovative writers of the time) had been designed to provoke outrage and, in the process, social change. *Mother I’m Rooted* was aimed at being a similar, highly provocative, political statement. The cover art by Ann Newmarch has a female thinker featured on the front, and on the back juxtaposes a half-naked female body displayed behind a window with a reproduced female gaze looking outward. Newmarch thus challenges the woman as spectacle while also suggesting that what was on offer was something raw and exposed. Newmarch herself was becoming an overtly political artist, influenced by Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* and at that time in a relationship with Brian Medlin who had strongly supported the student-instigated Women’s Studies course, giving it a home and a tutorship in Philosophy at Flinders University. She was one of the founding members of the Women’s Art Movement in Adelaide. Jennings’ title for the anthology was also eye-catching and highlighted the physical. Released in the summer of 1975, many shops refused to stock the book and some newspapers refused to review it. Alternatively, it would make the front page of the *Adelaide Advertiser*, and the *Melbourne Herald* featured an interview with Jennings explaining her title. Such controversy was unusual even for Outback Press, well known for its in-your-face promotional campaigns.

Jennings records that she was motivated to compile the anthology because ‘prejudice against women poets was monolithic; encouragement, scarce’ (1993a, 86). *Mother I’m Rooted* was ‘an attempt to question the standards of what is supposed to be good and bad poetry in the prevailing literary hegemony’ (1975a, n.p.). Rather than launch into an extended critique, Jennings seeks to achieve this through sheer force, by rallying an overwhelming sisterhood. Receiving over 1,000 contributions in response to an open call for contributions, she eventually narrowed it down to the still enormous number of 152 contributors and 300 contributions. Contributors would include those who had already published in specifically feminist newspapers and magazines (such as Helen Bansemer, Stefanie Bennett, Peggy Clarke, Joanne Burns, Barbara Giles, Wilma Hedley, Marjorie Pizer, and Jennings herself), those who had published primarily in the little poetry magazines, as well as some previously unpublished writers.

Jennings specifically sought poems that articulated an ‘authentic’ female experience, experience which had hitherto been deemed unpoetic. In this respect, the anthology became an exercise to map out areas of the field that had remained under-represented or invisible. Jennings notes that she received a good deal of support from the local lesbian community who wanted a space for representations of female experience that were still being largely ignored by the male counterculture. Selected poems touch on birth, motherhood, menstruation, housework, social conditioning, and female perceptions. As Kate Lilley points out, the envoi poem by Sylvia Kantarizis (Jennings 1975a n.p.) rehearses sexual difference through formal means. Lilley argues that the poem presents ‘poetry as sex; woman as “legs apart,”’ with the poem posing as pornographic object for the reader under its title, ‘By their poems ye shall know them: poem’ (1997, 267). Remembering,
however, that this was the era when some women’s libbers located their clitoris for the
first time in a supportive group environment, and female genitalia began to feature in
feminist art, the poem is not so much voyeuristic as intending to display some essential
femininity. Lilley is nevertheless correct in pointing out that Jennings deliberately frames
‘women’s poetry’ in cover, title, and frontispiece poem corporeally, marking out an
identifiable difference in women’s writing as related to a difference in their bodies.

Jennings develops this by choosing poems ‘on the grounds of women writing
directly and honestly’. Believing that ‘women use language and imagery in a distinctively
different way to men’, direct communication is essentialised as a specifically female
sensibility (1975a, n.p.). As Kay Schaffer discerns, by framing poetry as a subjective
experience, the writing of ‘one’s own voice’, both the writing and reading of poetry can
become a political act, setting ‘up the conditions which promote a radicalised
consciousness out of which the need for social change becomes apparent’ (1975, 48).
Such a view typified the poetry largely promoted by second-wave feminism in the United
Kingdom and the United States and was also the impetus of *Rising Tides* (Chester and
Barba 1973) (an anthology that Jennings cites approvingly in her introduction).

In this respect, a poem that simply stretched the boundaries of form was not
enough. Such an editorial policy may well have alienated some potential contributors who
felt that a politics of aesthetics was being overlooked. Rae Armantrout notes that in
enacting such policy, preference is usually given to poetry centred on a single image or
trope and narrated by a voice of both sincerity and authority (1992, 9). The poetic ‘I’
becomes emblematic of female experience, speaking for women beyond the text and
whose gendered difference is reliant on recognition. This recognition did not occur across
some cultural identities. While voices from second-generation post-war European women
can be heard, there is a striking absence of Aboriginal or Asian voices (although they
would also be absent from the little magazines and presses). Furthermore, Jennings’
emphasis on the body and authenticity meant that the anthology did not go much further
than the little poetry magazines in its repertoire of subject matter available to women.

The more extreme contributions to *Mother I’m Rooted* reflected the tenor of rage in
Jennings’ own writing. A poem by Helen Bansemer concludes:

Damn it
tight lips
Speak
tighter lips
Shoot lips
Shout lips
Bust lips
Bust mouth—
—Aha
The last man’s head
right off

CHOP. (Bansemer 1975, 30)

A poem by Chris Sitka declares her support of home-grown terrorism like the Symbionese
Liberation Army, an American paramilitary group infamous for their kidnapping of heiress
Patty Hearst. Another, ‘Witch Poem’ (Sitka 1975), echoes the earlier work of Margaret Barry
and Margaret Randall in *Mok* and *The Great Auk* by addressing the pro-choice debate as
well as proclaiming a sisterhood with Third World women like the Indonesian Women’s Movement.

For contributor Finola Moorhead, the collection was characterised primarily by affect, an affect of ‘passion, pain, anger’. She felt that in ‘[r]eading Mother I’m Rooted . . . one gets the sense of a huge female being’ (1975, 171). Jennings herself hoped the anthology would be ‘a collective statement about the position of women in Australia’ (Introduction, 1975a, n.p.; my emphasis). This was reinforced by the fact that there are no biographical notes about the contributors. Furthermore, the women in Jennings’ acknowledgements are referred to only by their first name (Introduction, 1975a, n.p.). Jennings may have taken this step to avoid being co-opted into structures of legitimation in the poetic field. Certainly, the contributors themselves are arranged alphabetically to avoid any apparent hierarchy. Yet by failing to refer to the proper name of individuals involved in the labour behind the collection, particularly those like her ‘unofficial co-editor’, Alison Lyssa, it redirects authority back to the one person of whom such information is known, Jennings herself. The photographs of Anne Roberts, Adrienne Martyn, and Gail Waldron sprinkled throughout the volume are also ambivalent in effect. Their female subjects cross age and ethnicity, and are involved in domestic activities like the washing or putting out the garbage, leisurely activities like taking a walk or a smoko, and more public activities such as meetings of women’s organisations. They are pictured in solitary reflection and in dialogue with one another. One gets a sense of the diversity of these women but also, because they remain nameless and unplaced, their anonymity. Another contemporary reviewer, Carl Harrison-Ford, agreed that form becomes ‘a servant, though an involved one, of strongly and clearly felt emotions’ in the anthology. Yet he believed that ‘published poets like Carol Novack, Stefanie Bennett, and Joanne Burns read better in the context of this collection than they have in any magazine in which I had read them previously’ (1975, 75).

While Moorhead was right in suggesting that a women’s poetry anthology was a ‘new phenomenon on the literary scene’ (1975, 171), my own reading of the contents is that its writing was by no means a departure from that being published in the little magazines, and, indeed, certain contributions had previously been published in such forums. Perhaps predictably, an earlier generation of women writers—like Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson, Gwen Harwood, and Dorothy Hewett—who were already achieving a degree of distinction through the established system of values, are absent from Mother I’m Rooted. Hewett declined to review the anthology,13 as did poet Fay Zwicky, who later commented:

[1n the younger women I find that, because they’re clamouring for their rights (which the older women don’t do because they never thought that they had any rights to clamour for), I find that note of grievance rather tiresome. In other words: reward me, notice me, is the cry. I find that a bit depressing. (1996, 100)

This is not to say that the earlier generation of women writers did not take an interest in the work of those who published in Mother I’m Rooted; Judith Wright, for instance, was in regular correspondence with Hanscombe, Sylvana Gardner, and Stefanie Bennett in the mid-1970s.

Both during and following the publication of Mother I’m Rooted, Jennings received extremely negative attacks from various male poets. Robert Gray declared that to ‘insist on the sex of the person is an irrelevance and an impertinence’ (Jennings 1993a, 87), and
some even went so far as sending in contributions under pseudonyms. Moorhead suggests that there ended up being four contributors who were actually male (1975, 179). While most of the little magazines were neither for nor against women’s liberation (merely publishing the odd poem touching on feminist issues as part of an agenda of broad radicalism), Your Friendly Fascist seems to have been deliberately provocative. While its editor, Rae Desmond Jones, notes that there might appear to be a policy to publish ‘bad things in poor taste’, in actuality ‘[w]e seek to make people enjoy a joke on themselves, to allow the delinquent or outlaw in them a bit of freedom’ (1977, 213). Sprinkled randomly throughout issues, then, were graphics like a pair of tits, a cartoon of ‘Nat’s Snatch Wagon’, and a cartoon in which a soldier says of a captured woman, ‘Hey Sarge, she hates with her voice as well as her eyes. She’s a real woman!’ Billy Ah-Lun’s poem ‘Vacancy’ also concludes ‘(no noise / or women / please)’ (Ah-Lun n.d., n.p.). Your Friendly Fascist would run somewhere between the early 1970s and early 1980s.14 The 10th issue featured ‘For Ladies’ Lib’, a poem by the magazine’s London editor, John Edwards:

[...] 
You say you’re gonna
use men as sperm factories
You say you don’t wanna
be told what to do
[...] 
You burned your bra and bridges
last year at the anti-sexist sit-in
and now wrap your boobs in red flags
for other women to love.
Sister,
How come you always RIGHT? (Your Friendly Fascist 10, n.p.)

Cassandra Grahame, a contributor to Mother I’m Rooted, responded in the next issue through a deft mimicry and revision of Edwards:

[...] 
Virgin births will make
Those sperm factories obsolete
And braburning was symbolic
Of course you wouldn’t
Understand,
But braburning is still being mouthed
By boob fetished men
While we discover the rest of our bodies,
And don’t care for your approval anymore.
alRIGHT brother? (Your Friendly Fascist 11, n.p.)

Issue 12 of Your Friendly Fascist featured Jones’ drawing of a pig (alluding, no doubt to male chauvinism) on its cover with the thought balloon, ‘I like Bum-burgers & porn’, and contained a further poem by Edwards subtitled ‘Unrepentant’:
women think they're magic
women think they're good
women think they're tragic
and that is all
that women think. (Your Friendly Fascist 12, n.p.)

Despite such sentiments, the next wave of women poets like Susan Hampton, Dorothy Porter, and Gig Ryan all published in Your Friendly Fascist. The contributions by Porter and Ryan focus on the relationship between female subjectivity and sexual performance. Porter’s documents the uneasy responses (particularly the uneasiness of a woman) to watching an ‘ultra hardcore’ sex show and concludes ‘final memory / camera fixing a vagina / like a reel / from a gynaecologist’s nightmare’ (Your Friendly Fascist 19–20, n.p.). Ryan’s ‘In the Purple Bar’ also focuses on spectacle:

She spreads her pale legs
out across the table
and the beer
while he, the last car accident
red and tight across his eyes
sucks her off, ungracefully.
But is she happy?
[...]
She kisses the man, his mouth smells
of another woman’s cunt
But nothing gets to you.

How well we cope. (Your Friendly Fascist 19–20, n.p.)

The sliding pronoun shifts the woman from being an object, to the addressee, and finally to the ‘we’ of inclusion. Both contributions are quite explicit and confronting, and thus in keeping with the combative nature that typified both the little magazines and Mother I’m Rooted. Both make the point that simply writing about female sexuality is not equivalent to female fulfilment and that agency is about degree.

Yet it was not only women’s poetry that focused on the dynamics of objectification. Your Friendly Fascist published Robert C. Boyce’s ‘Nude Poetess’, which linked the focus on direct communication and the body in much contemporary women’s poetry as ultimately limited strategies of self-exposure:

Day by day
And word by desperate word
She bares her soul
The lack of love
The crooked hat
The unturned mat
The two-for-a-dollar
When a dollar would do
[...]
The climate had change, of course
So, while Your Friendly Fascist published material that deliberately baited feminists, it also published material that formed a counter-attack (like Grahame’s) as well as men’s and women’s poetry that began to examine the construction of the female subject more subtly.

It is likely that Your Friendly Fascist’s provocative stance towards feminism was a response to the overwhelming impact of Mother I’m Rooted in the poetry world. The volume sold extremely well—Jennings notes that it sold over 10,000 copies as opposed to the 100 or 200 print run of most poetry collections (1993b, 65)—and it attracted readers far beyond the usual poetry book-buying public. Giles states that roughly one-fifth of the anthology’s contributors were still appearing in print over a decade later and it certainly launched the careers of many previously unknown or little known women poets (1988, 82). It was the first forum in which Gillian Hanscombe and Jennifer Rankin, for example, published. Hanscombe and other contributors like Jennifer Maiden, Sylvia Kantarizis, Antigone Kefala, Jennifer Strauss, and Jenny Brown all had collections (for most, their first) published in 1975. The anthology’s success meant that other women—those who were yet to be published—considered whether their own poetry might now have value and a readership.

Other women-focused editing ventures began, with the periodical Luna: A Literary Publication Edited by Women, kicking off in 1975. The popularity of Mother I’m Rooted also encouraged mainstream presses like Penguin and Oxford University Press to publish further anthologies of Australian women’s poetry.15 Significantly, it took the consolidation of second-wave feminism and at least a decade for this to occur. It is important that Jennings herself became sceptical about the anthology’s value in the late 1980s. For her, women-only anthologies were like ‘playing [. . .] in a different sandbox [. . .] the ascendancy of men remains unchallenged’ (1993a, 77). As Jennings saw it, an anthology of women’s poetry provided a smaller and separate sandbox from the boys, where throwing sand at the boys and generally calling attention to herself and her friends was bad manners rather than effective. Her imagery of the child’s sandbox neatly sets up a notion of the poetic field as enclosed territory where games such as ‘who’s the king of the castle?’ are played out. Her subsequent disavowal would not be unique, for it reflects the attitudes of other editors of women’s poetry anthologies. Fleur Adcock (editor of The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Women’s Poetry), Linda France (editor of Sixty Women Poets), and Maura Dooley (editor of Making for Planet Alice: New Women Poets) have all expressed regret at risking ‘ghettoising and separatism’ by editing such anthologies (Dowson 1999, 11).

To some extent, Jennings was correct. Tranter would use Mother I’m Rooted as a reason for including only two women in his 1979 anthology, The New Australian Poetry, which saw his selective, imaginary community of ‘new Australian poetry’ become the ‘new orthodoxy’ (Kirkpatrick 1990, 189). As Pierre Bourdieu discerns, ‘Assigning someone to a
group of superior essence causes that person to undergo a subjective transformation that contributes to bringing about a real transformation likely to bring him closer to the assigned definition’ (1996, 112). Being included or excluded in the anthology would have a profound impact in positioning a writer within Australian poetry, not least in identifying someone as falling within the scope of the defining term. Asked about the lack of women, Tranter would respond in a 1981 interview that women have ‘their own huge anthology’ although ‘actual poems in that book are mainly less than marvellous’. He adds, ‘I looked very hard through a lot of women’s poetry for that collection, and I honestly felt there just wasn’t enough successful women’s poems in the area I was looking at’ (1981). The two women selected, Jennifer Maiden and Vicki Viidikas, had both been contributors to Tranter’s earlier anthology, Preface to the 70s. While he considered featuring Robyn Ravlich (whose work also appeared in Preface), he felt that she did not have the sustained range of ‘strong, successful material’ (1999, npd). There is no sense of contradiction when he notes that he decided to anthologise an outstanding individual poem of Robert Adamson’s ‘The Rumour’) to save it from neglect (Lilley 2001, 12) while powerful individual poems by Ravlich are discounted on the grounds of an inconsistency of her overall poetic corpus. Tranter’s diagnosis for women’s lack of poetic success was that they suffered from ‘internalised doubt’. While women were encouraged to be domestic, co-operative, non-competitive and supportive of men, boys were taught to be competitive, individualistic loners and it was these latter qualities that led to a disposition likely to survive and endure (1999, npd). Women, then, are caught in a Catch-22 position, doomed if they stay quiet and doomed if they speak up aggressively or in a different forum as they do in Mother I’m Rooted.

Nevertheless, the next generation of women poets (writing from the late 1970s onward) would experience greater material and critical support of their work. While they received an increasingly better share of government funding and achieved greater institutional recognition in award processes and the academy, their collections were being published by mainstream presses, as well as specifically feminist presses and presses run by those associated with New Australian poetry (including Tranter’s). While the subsequent renunciation of many women’s poetry anthologies by their editors may suggest that they have had a limited impact (merely reinforcing a separation between the sexes in the poetic field), it may alternatively say something about the deep institutional change that such anthologies have wrought and the lessening need for such forums. Australian women’s poetry is now far more recognised and legitimated than it has ever been. Yet there is still far more to be done in consolidating its profile. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the gendering of poetry’s archive, criticism, and publication from the late 1970s to today. Jennings perhaps puts it best when she reflects:

There are times when I think that the lessons of the ’70s have been absorbed. Then I will experience or read or hear of some egregious example of sexism, and pessimism will overtake me. In that mood I think that those lessons sit undigested like prey in a python. (1993b, 65)

NOTES

* I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions.
1. I use the term ‘small press’ to cover publishers of both little magazines and non-mainstream poetry book titles. The distinction between little magazine and book series in
this context is often blurred as a number of magazine and imprint series are run under the same title. Furthermore, one may eventuate from the other or there may be changes in editorial make-up or direction that leads to a re-naming of magazine or series.

2. I am thinking here of landmark volumes such *Bridgings: Readings in Australian Women's Poetry* (Lucas and McCreddon 1996) and *Poetry and Gender* (Brooks and Walker 1989). Despite the broad title, the latter is a collection of ‘Statements and Essays in Australian Women’s Poetry and Poetics’.

3. Dransfield met Tranter only after submitting and having his work accepted for Tranter’s magazine, *Transit* (Dobrez 1999, 272).

4. Dobrez notes that a large number of poets (Robert Adamson, Nigel Roberts, Terry Gillimore, Vicki Viidikas, Richard Tipping, and Michael Dransfield) had Balmain addresses and it became a meeting space for many poets (1999, 275).


6. In the editorial notes of issue 5 of *The Great Auk*, Buckmaster acknowledges Judy Low Choy for typing Numbers 2 to 5. Trish Davies, Edna Wilson, and Denise Reid ‘worked hard behind the scenes’ toward achieving the transformation of *Poetry Magazine* into *New Poetry* (Dobrez 1999, 290). Retta Hemensley also ‘turned the handle of the duplicator’ for *Our Glass* (Dobrez 1999, 265).

7. My thanks to Colleen Burke for information regarding *Khasmik*.

8. Following *Mother I’m Rooted* (1975) in which she was a contributor, Barbara Giles began publishing *Luna* from 1975 onward. Edited by Chris Mansell, Joanne Burns, and Dorothy Porter, *Compass* began in 1978.

9. This also brought about a second wave of little magazines that included *Your Friendly Fascist*, *The Ear in the Wheatfield*, *etymospheres*, *Contempa*, *Fitzrot*, *Leatherjacket*, *Makar*, *Mere Anarchy*, *News and Weather*, *Living Daylights*, *Parachute Poems*, *The Saturday Club Book of Poetry*, *Khasmik*, and *Flagstones*.

10. Anna Couani suggests that the ratio of women published by University of Queensland Press in the 1970s was about 20% (1995, 2).

11. Further discussion of Newmarch’s development as a feminist can be found in Julie Robinson’s *Ann Newmarch: The personal is political*.

12. Kate Lilley also notes that Jennings is ‘at pains’ to assert her proper training but also undertakes strategies of self-authorisation such as constructing a maternal genealogy that includes Charlotte Brontë (1997, 268).

13. Hewett’s decision to decline reviewing the collection is noted by the editors of *Westerly* at the bottom of the first page of Carl Harrison-Ford’s review of *Mother I’m Rooted* (1975, 75).

14. It is unfortunately undated but the AustLit database records *Your Friendly Fascist* Number 9 as appearing in 1973, Number 13 circa 1975, and Number 23 in 1983.


REFERENCES


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