

Inner and Outer Worlds

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Inner and Outer Worlds

Gail Jones' Fiction

Edited by Anthony Uhlmann



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Introduction

Anthony Uhlmann

While fiction in general provides a crucial means for engaging with and understanding the worlds we inhabit, individual writers develop methods and techniques that are particular to their own body of works. In a recent interview in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* marking the publication of *The Death of Noah Glass*, when asked what she hoped her work might achieve, Jones responded that she hoped her novels would matter “in ways other than entertainment – that [they] might provoke serious thinking” about what things might mean.¹

Text, Pretext, Intertext, Context

In considering the kinds of methods and techniques Gail Jones develops, and the themes she returns to, it is possible to focus on the idea of levels of textuality. One of the first things that strikes readers of Jones’ work is the richness of the language; the surface text that is almost baroque at times in its interfolding of sound and sense infused by images that fork and play off one another. The opening line of the first chapter of her first novel, *Black Mirror* (2002), which interweaves the stories of Victoria Morrell, a dying artist who is engaging with a young biographer Anna Griffin, invites us into the tunnel of Victoria’s memory: “Let us say that her

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1 Robert Wood, “The Pleasure of Language Itself: An Interview with Gail Jones”, *BLARB: Blog//Los Angeles Review of Books*, <https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/interviews/pleasure-language-interview-gail-jones/>

memory is like peering into a night-dark tunnel and waiting for the circle of gold up ahead”²

The image of the circle of gold will reappear at the end of a short opening section, but transformed into a gold coin, emblematic of her mother. Firstly, however, it leads us to the entrance of a house:

She was born in a large house, *Kathleen*, named after somebody’s mother, and it is both immemorial and vague – portals, columns, a white space hollowed out which must be, she supposes, the grand entrance hall – and she remembers sounds, ringing sounds, ricocheting in its emptiness, and a spine of thin pale light slanting on a bright chequered floor, and a pair of chairs with curly legs upon which nobody sat, and an indefinable atmosphere of cold and constraint; yet with these few details *Kathleen* remains merely an incomplete entrance, as though time has confiscated the rest of the house and left it blurred into history. (*Black Mirror*, 7)

The complex sentence that leads us into the house has, in terms of function rather than grammatical categories, three parts. The first part offers us background information to the family house of the protagonist, Victoria Morrell: “She was born in a large house, *Kathleen*, named after somebody’s mother, and it is both immemorial and vague – portals, columns, a white space hollowed out which must be, she supposes, the grand entrance hall –” (7). Yet the fragment of the house is not simply described; the next part of the sentence functions to steep the memory with sensations:

and she remembers sounds, ringing sounds, ricocheting in its emptiness, and a spine of thin pale light slanting on a bright chequered floor, and a pair of chairs with curly legs upon which nobody sat, and an indefinable atmosphere of cold and constraint. (7)

Each of the four clauses here echo the others rhythmically, and are laden with assonance and consonance: the first alliterates *r*, repeats “sounds” and completes itself with a half-rhyme “remembers/emptiness”; the second plays on the sibilant “s”, the nasal “n”, the liquid “l” and the vowel “i” in “spine/light/bright”; the third rhymes “pair/chair” and stops the fluid alliteration of “c” and “l” with the plosive “t” of “sat”; the fourth plays the assonance of “a” against the consonance of “c”.

2 Gail Jones, *Black Mirror* (2002; Sydney: Vintage, 2009), 7. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

So too, the aural sensations are woven among images of a) sound, b) light, c) materiality (chairs), and d) the ethereal (atmosphere).

Finally, the sentence turns again, “yet with these few details *Kathleen* remains merely an incomplete entrance, as though time has confiscated the rest of the house and left it blurred into history” (7). This returns to the matter-of-factness of the first part, as if the middle section had been an involuntary flight of fancy. Or to put it another way, after Proust, the voluntary memory of sections one and three are at once drawn together and held apart by the shock of the involuntary memories of rich sensation.

The richness of language in her works in turn is associated with recurring images, which draw in readers in this collection, of the cosmos, the stars (see Lou Jillett’s chapter), colours (see Meg Samuelson’s chapter) and visual motifs from painting and film (see Robert Dixon’s chapter) and the splendour of days of every kind of weather in vividly imagined places resonating with their own special energy.

If surface text is important to an understanding of her works, then so are pretext, intertextuality and context. In the interview in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, asked about the importance of narrative to *Noah Glass Jones* replies:

My novels tend to be braided and multilayered in their form. At the centre of this one is the mystery both of a man’s death and a Sicilian art theft; but these are the pretexts, as it were, for a more dispersed and unpredictable meditation on art, families, and the mystery of time.³

Among the surface of her works, narrative events are folded into deeper reflections on larger themes. *Black Mirror* uses the pretext of a young woman writing a biography of an artist nearing death to explore ideas of memory and the role of art in preserving what might otherwise be lost. *Sixty Lights* (2004) offers the pretext of a young Australian photographer travelling within the nineteenth-century British Empire among tropes of Victorian fiction involving perception, phenomena, and felt understanding. Her next two novels might be more readily linked with Jones’ own experience, yet these frames are by no means merely autobiographical (academic research, a childhood in rural Western Australia) as the focus is shifted to allow a means of engaging with ideas. *Dreams of Speaking* (2006) focuses again on a young writer, this time undertaking academic research in order to think through the ideas she is imagined to be researching: the modern, modernity. *Sorry* (2007) follows a child who grows up in remote Western Australia with parents steeped in colonial understandings yet among friends, a young Aboriginal woman and a deaf boy, who urge her to escape

3 Wood, “The Pleasure of Language Itself”, n.p.

the narrow norms that seek to entrap her. In so doing it explores themes that continue to resonate with contemporary Australia and the world more generally: how does one live in the here-now? *Five Bells* (2011) is overlaid with the story of a lost child but uses this pretext to meditate on the nature of identity both at individual and collective levels. *A Guide to Berlin* (2015) too includes a drama – this time involving murder – to explore precepts of communion and group formation around ideas.

This method indicates an ambivalent attitude to surfaces. On the one hand, they cover and potentially hide or repress what is actually essential; what is genuinely at stake; what is the real site of conflict. The structure in this way echoes the structures of our lives: we project surfaces and exist among surfaces under and among which complex and at times turbulent experience unfolds. Yet the attitude to surfaces is ambivalent because while, on the one hand, they might seemingly hide, on the other hand, if one examines them intently, looking for and sensing the signs they convey, they themselves also reveal what might be at the tangled heart of experience. The motif of the visual, or looking and interpreting, then, haunts her works. The pretexts are looked at once, then examined more closely, so that the threads that are woven among them might be unravelled and re-sown so as to be understood. As with Nabokov, who insisted his texts needed to be read (for the surface), then re-read (for what was hidden and inter-involved among the surface), then re-re-read (to find fuller meanings), Jones' work requires intensive scrutiny, and it is one of the pleasures of editing this collection to be able to demonstrate how such scrutiny underlines the depth of her writing.⁴

Equally important to Gail Jones' method is mobilising the potential of intertextuality. Reviewing James Joyce's *Ulysses* soon after its publication, T.S. Eliot wrote a well-known essay concerning intertextual method called "Ulysses, Order and Myth" in which he considered how Joyce, and by implication other writers, might make use of early stories, such as myths and epics, to provide a structuring scaffolding on which other works might be built.⁵ This kind of intertextual method is made use of by many writers and might involve borrowing from any kinds of writing, not just myth. Yet Gail Jones' intertextuality is not simply of this kind, even when there are direct references to other works and writers, as in *Five Bells*, which refers to Kenneth Slessor's poem of the same name, and *A Guide to Berlin*, which refers to a Vladimir Nabokov story of the same name. Rather, Jones revisits the sites of these texts – the Sydney and Sydney

4 On Nabokov and layers of reading, see Brian Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 10–11.

5 T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth", *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harvest, 1975).

Harbour of Slessor's "Five Bells", and the wounded heart of the city of Berlin of Vladimir Nabokov's "A Guide to Berlin" – entering into and reinhabiting these haunted twentieth-century spaces in the twenty-first century, feeling again the meaning that resides within them.

Yet there is also a depth of allusion and resonances with other works, lives, and texts of many kinds. Showing her deep erudition and the research that goes into her writing, Jones constantly refers to, and draws out meaning from, works of literature, visual arts, philosophy, science, biography and history. A number of chapters in this book shed light on these intertextual references and their importance to her work. Elizabeth McMahon traces references to light and bioluminescence and the weave of allusion to scientific literature; James Gourley examines not only references to the history of photography, but to classics of Victorian literature such as *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*; Valérie-Anne Belleflamme uncovers Jones' deep research into Chinese aesthetics; Tony Hughes-D'Aeth examines affinities with psychoanalytic thought; Brigid Rooney as well as looking at Jones' engagement with literature, considers her interest in theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Georges Lukács.

Another crucial textual element in Jones' work involves context: that is, the importance of place, and the historical moments that interact with and shape characters' responses to place. Place for Jones is both internal and external, involving the inner lives of characters whose thoughts we visit, and the memories and experiences that form them, as well as the physical spaces in which the works take place. These physical spaces in turn are not merely elements that exist in the present, but also involve and carry with them past events and past experiences. *Black Mirror* connects Australia and the United Kingdom, the memory of an old woman and the life to come of a young woman; *Sixty Lights* takes us from Imperial London to colonial India through the eyes of a young Australian in the nineteenth century, in a world which is overlaid with various kinds of anachronisms reaching forward and back; *Dreams of Speaking* is cosmopolitan in scope, moving between worlds and focusing on ideas of time; *Sorry* takes us to an earlier period of Australian history, still steeped in colonial prejudice, trauma and violence, but brings it into stark juxtaposition with ongoing injustices; *Five Bells* takes place on one "glorious" day, but its protagonists carry with them the worlds of their memories and formations, reaching across the planet and across Australia; *A Guide to Berlin* too brings together a range of protagonists from a range of life experiences; *The Death of Noah Glass* (2018) moves between Europe and Australia and back into the complex folds of art history.

If pretext involves narrative surfaces engaging with thematic concerns, context involves the threads attached to characters and settings, being woven among narrative events, to add layers of complexity to the thinking through

of these themes. These themes include the nature of time and experience, the problems of history with the traumas and injustices that lie still visible (for one who looks closely) on the surface of events, people, and are folded into complexes that determine the very nature of the places that are inhabited. Intertext in turn situates these reflections among deep cultural history, which for Jones extends into engagements with Aboriginal Australian, colonial Australian, multicultural Australian, as well as Asian and European texts.

Themes: Time and Phenomena

Many critics have noted the importance of time to Gail Jones' works, and their connections to phenomenology.⁶ As Robert Dixon has pointed out, Jones' work as a critical thinker informs her work as a writer.⁷ She has written a number of essays on the nature of time and the experience of modernity.⁸ So too, as a teacher she taught a postgraduate unit on time and literature and philosophy for a number of years at Western Sydney University.⁹ She is a novelist of ideas and one of Australia's most philosophical writers in the sense that her works engage with themes that also deeply concern philosophy and aesthetic theory.

In reading Jones' works in relation to time and experience it becomes apparent that they enter into engagement with some of the key elements of temporal understanding from twentieth-century science and philosophy, as well as, as she does in *Sixty Lights*, playfully using methods from fiction, such as anachronism, to disrupt these models. Time is always *experienced* in Jones' fiction, but it is never simply a matter of a single line of duration inhabited by an isolated character. Rather, it is more like Einstein's model of inertial frames which was borrowed from insights first developed by Galileo in the seventeenth century. Here time is particular to each inertial frame, and even if it is clear that one is demonstrably moving through space one always "feels" that the frame in which

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- 6 See, for example, Norman Saadi Nikro, "Paratactic Stammers: Temporality in the Novels of Gail Jones", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–16; Tanya Dalziel, "The Ethics of Mourning: Gail Jones' *Black Mirror*", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 4, 2005.
 - 7 Robert Dixon, "Invitation to the Voyage: Reading Gail Jones' *Five Bells*", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 12, no. 3 (2012): 1–17.
 - 8 Gail Jones, "Growing Small Wings: Walter Benjamin, Lola Ridge and the Political Affect of Modernism", *Affirmations: Of the Modern* 1, no. 2 (2014): 120–42; "A Dreaming, a Sauntering: Reimagining Critical Paradigms", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, no. 5 (2006): 11–24; "Turnings and Overturnings in *Glebe*", *Sydney Review of Books*, 9 February 2018, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/turnings-and-over-turnings-in-glebe/>
 - 9 See https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/writing_and_society/postgraduate_study/ma_in_cultural_and_creative_practice/idea_time

one is positioned (be it a boat on the water for Galileo or a train moving past another for Einstein) is “still”, and the world is moving around it.¹⁰ One might argue for a play of inertial frames between characters in Gail Jones’ works, most obviously in *Five Bells*, but also throughout her fiction. Yet the experience of time is still more complex. If Bergson sees our consciousness as an unbroken duration, Jones wishes to complicate this further, demonstrating (as Proust had before her in answering Bergson) that we inhabit several time frames at once. But as with Einstein there is no simultaneity between inertial frames, and no simultaneity between our remembered and experienced times. That is, the hard edges of time past burst into time present, rupturing its surface.

Little Is Known of Her Life ...

Little by way of biographical information is currently on the public record for Gail Jones. She was born in the small town of Harvey, Western Australia, south of Perth, in 1955. She grew up in Broome (a coastal town built on the pearling industry involving rich mixtures of Aboriginal, Asian and European cultures) and Kalgoorlie (a rugged gold mining town), both vibrant, isolated communities, and memories of Broome in particular feature in her work. She briefly moved to Melbourne in the 1970s to study Fine Arts, underlining an interest in the visual arts that has never left her. She returned to Western Australia to undertake a BA majoring in English at the University of Western Australia. Her daughter Kyra Giorgi, who is also a writer, was born in Perth in 1977. Gail Jones completed her Bachelor of Arts with honours in 1980 and then worked for the University of Western Australia (UWA), Curtin and Murdoch universities in Perth as a casual tutor before being employed full time as a lecturer at Edith Cowan University in 1988. She began her PhD, entitled *Mimesis and Alterity: Postcolonialism, Ethnography and the Representation of Racial Others*, in 1990 and completed it in 1994 having also moved from Edith Cowan to a position of Lecturer in English at the University of Western Australia in 1993. Somehow at this time she also managed to emerge, almost fully formed, as a writer of fiction. She entered and won the T.A.G. Hungerford Award, an award set up to develop new writers in Western Australia who had not yet been published in book form, in 1991. The prize included the publication of the manuscript of *The House of Breathing*, a collection of fourteen short stories published by Fremantle Arts Press in 1992. Recognition of the quality of her writing soon followed as the collection won the F.A.W. Barbara

10 Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1961), 10–19.

Ramsden Award for book of the year, and the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction in 1992. This pattern has not altered, with many of her works winning major awards, including the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction for *The Death of Noah Glass*, the South Australian Premier's Award, the Age Book of the Year and the ALS Gold Medal for *Sixty Lights*, the Nita Kibble Award for *Five Bells*, and the Colin Roderick Award for *A Guide to Berlin*. Indeed, all of her works have been shortlisted or longlisted for major awards including the Booker Prize, the International Dublin Literary Award, the Prix Femina Étranger, and the Miles Franklin Award. She was awarded the Philip Hodgins' Memorial Medal (for a body of work) and the PEN Sydney Award in 2011.

She published her second collection of short stories, *Fetish Lives*, in 1997, and this began another series, wherein her works began to be republished in the United Kingdom and the United States, and translated into multiple languages, including French, German, Polish, Czech, Spanish and Chinese. Yet if her early works were highly regarded short stories she is best known as a novelist of the twenty-first century. Her first novel, *Black Mirror*, was published in 2002, and since then she has published seven others: *Sixty Lights* (2004), *Dreams of Speaking* (2006), *Sorry* (2007), *Five Bells* (2011), *A Guide to Berlin* (2015), *The Death of Noah Glass* (2018) and *Our Shadows* (2020). The idea of place is essential to her work, and her career as a writer and academic has seen her take up residencies in London, Berlin, Shanghai and Rome, and to have travelled widely through Europe and North and South America. This idea is further apparent in her travelling in Australia: in 2008 she moved from Perth to Sydney to take up the position of Professor in Literature at the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University (WSU). She retired from this position in 2020 but remains as a Professor Emerita at WSU.

Critical Reception

A good deal of critical writing has been dedicated to Gail Jones' work. At the time of writing, the AustLit Database lists sixty-three works of academic criticism focused on her works, and written by critics from Australia, Europe, North America, Japan and China. The first monograph dedicated to her work, by Tanya Dalziell, was published in 2020 by Sydney University Press. The novel that has attracted most international critical attention to date is *Sorry*, which has particularly drawn the attention of postcolonial critics through its engagement with problems of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, yet critics like Valérie-Anne Belleflamme (who has a chapter in the current book) and Christopher Eagle

approach the novel from different angles with Belleflamme considering questions of intertextuality and Eagle, who develops a comparative reading with the work of Philip Roth, examining the idea of “stuttering”.¹¹ That Jones is taken seriously as a novelist of ideas, that is, one whose works themselves force us to think through complex problems, is demonstrated by the critical attention given to themes the novels set out to explore. For example, critics have written on the theme of modernism, space, mourning and mirroring in relation to *Black Mirror*,¹² photography and perception in relation to *Sixty Lights*,¹³ modernity, time and

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- 11 See, for example, Jie Huang, “‘The Stolen Children’ and the Unspeakable Repentance: Language as Metaphor in Gail Jones’ *Sorry*” 不可言说的忏悔: “被偷走的孩子”与《抱歉》中语言的隐喻, *Foreign Literature Review*, no. 4 (2018): 135–52; Pilar Royo Grasa, “Looking for Othello’s Pearl in Gail Jones’ *Sorry* (2007): Symbolic and Intertextual Questioning of the Notion of ‘Settler Envy’”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 54, no. 2 (2018): 200–13; Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, “A Story Told in a Whisper, or the Impossibility of Atonement”, *Ilha Do Desterro: A Journal of English Language*, 69, no. 2 (2016); Liliana Zavaglia, *White Apology and Apologia: Australian Novels of Reconciliation* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2016); Xing Chunli, “Becoming Indigenous: A Comparative Analysis of Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* and Gail Jones’ *Sorry*”, *Australian Studies – Proceedings of the 14th International Conference of Australian Studies in China*, eds David Carter, Liang Zhongxian, Han Feng, (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2015), 123–31; Valerie-Anne Belleflamme, “Shakespeare Was Wrong: Counter-discursive Intertextuality in Gail Jones’ *Sorry*”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51, no. 6 (2015): 661–71; Diana Brydon, “‘Difficult Forms of Knowing’: Enquiry, Injury, and Translocated Relations of Postcolonial Responsibility”, *Postcolonial Translocations: Cultural Representation and Critical Spatial Thinking*, eds Mark Stein, Markus Schmitz, Silke Stroh, Marga Munkelt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 3–28; Christopher Eagle, “Angry Because She Stutters’: Stuttering, Violence, and the Politics of Voice in *American Pastoral* and *Sorry*”, *Philip Roth Studies* 8, no. 1 (2012): 17–30; M. Dolores Herrero, “The Australian Apology and Postcolonial Defamiliarization: Gail Jones’ *Sorry*”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 3 (2011): 283–95.
- 12 Robert Dixon, “Cosmopolitan Australians and Colonial Modernity: Alex Miller’s *Conditions of Faith*, Gail Jones’ *Black Mirror* and A.L. McCann’s *The White Body of Evening*”, *Westerly* 49 (2004): 122–37; Paul Genoni, “‘Art Is the Windowpane’: Novels of Australian Women and Modernism in Inter-war Europe”, *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 3 (2004): 159–72; Tanya Dalziel, “An Ethics of Mourning: Gail Jones’ *Black Mirror*”, *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 4 (2005): 49–61; Fiona Roughley, “Spatialising Experience: Gail Jones’ *Black Mirror* and the Contending of Postmodern Space”, *Australian Literary Studies* 23, no. 2 (2007): 58–73; Naomi Oreb, “Mirroring, Depth and Inversion: Holding Gail Jones’ *Black Mirror* Against Contemporary Australia”, *Sydney Studies in English* 35 (2009).
- 13 Peter Davis, “Double Gazing and Novel Spaces – Examining Narrated and Manifest Photographs in the Novel”, *Double Dialogues*, Winter, no. 7 (2007); Sukhmani Khorana, “Photography, Cinema and Time in Jane Campion’s *The Piano* and Gail Jones’ *Sixty Lights*”, *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* 16 (2007); Kate Mitchell, “Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction in Afterimage and *Sixty Lights*”, *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 81–109; Rosario Arias, “(Spirit) Photography and the Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel”, *Literature Interpretation Theory* 20, no. 1–2 (2009): 92–107.

transnationalism in *Dreams of Speaking*,¹⁴ and synchronicity and the sequential in *Five Bells*.¹⁵

The current collection is the first edited collection addressing her work and focuses almost exclusively on her novels. The chapters herein are arranged roughly chronologically in relation to her published works (although a few discuss several of her works). The collection draws on a range of critical expertise. Contributors include critics who have engaged with her work over many years (as the citations so far listed attest) in Tanya Dalziel and Robert Dixon; international critics in Valérie-Anne Belleflamme and Meg Samuelson; experts in Australian literature who have not previously published on her work in Elizabeth McMahon, Brigid Rooney and Tony Hughes-D'Aeth; and critics who have previously focused on modernist and contemporary fiction in James Gourley, Lou Jillett and myself.

Lou Jillett traces the motifs of space and time throughout Jones' fiction. She demonstrates how Jones works across different perspectives or concepts of space and time, to offer a kaleidoscopic representation of these fundamental themes. She particularly focuses on two ideas. First, the images of constellations in the night sky which are drawn into patterns of meaning that recur and resonate across Jones' body of works. Second, the image of phases of the moon which Jillett uses to situate the variable points of focus of each of Jones' novels.

Elizabeth McMahon also focuses on how Jones weaves metaphors through her works to generate meaning. McMahon focuses on *Sixty Lights* and the deliberately anachronistic concept of bioluminescence that Jones imagines back into the nineteenth century as the Australian character Lucy travels to London and India. McMahon argues that Jones' novel, in focusing on ideas of light, challenges the norms of our thought, unsettling the settled binaries that accompany standard accounts of Western "Enlightenment".

Tanya Dalziel chooses to examine a metaphorical logic that rarely comes to the surface in the manner of the metaphor of light. Sleep, Dalziel argues, is there, but often below the surface. She distinguishes sleep, as a kind of oblivion, from dreams, arguing that the former is not obvious in Jones' fiction while the latter

14 Robert Dixon, "Ghosts in the Machine: Modernity and the Unmodern", *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 8 (2008): 121–37; Lydia Wevers, "Fold in the Map: Figuring Modernity in Gail Jones' *Dreams of Speaking* and Elizabeth Knox's *Dreamhunter*", *Australian Literary Studies* 23, no. 2 (2007): 187–98; Timothy Steains, "The Mixed Temporalities of Transnationalism in *Dreams of Speaking*", *Journal of Australian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2017): 32–46.

15 Ella Mudie, "The Synchronous City: Aural Geographies in Gail Jones' *Five Bells*", *New Scholar* 3, no. 2 (2014); Bridie McCarthy, "Ringing Out: *Five Bells* and Its Feedback Loops", *Telling Stories: Australian Life and Literature 1935–2012*, eds Tanya Dalziel and Paul Genoni (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 44–50; Leigh Dale, "No More Boomerang? *Nigger's Leap* and *Five Bells*", *Journal of Australian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2013): 48–61; Dixon, "Invitation to the Voyage".

is. Yet the idea is nevertheless there, playing a crucial role. Dalziell begins by considering how this idea functions and hides in plain sight, in considering the cultural history of sleep. She applies this to readings of *Dreams of Speaking* and *The Death of Noah Glass*.

My chapter takes seriously the idea that literature is a kind of thinking and considers some of the ways in which Gail Jones' novels *Sorry* and *Five Bells* think about human experience and the idea of place. It traces points of resonance between these two novels which focuses on the difficulties of communication and the idea of coming to terms with past trauma. It draws upon ideas from Spinoza to set out a reading of the nature of fixation, and the problem of breaking away from fixation so as to again exist within a present moment that involves ongoing possibilities.

Valérie-Anne Belleflamme concentrates on the sections of *Five Bells* that concern the Chinese character Pei Xing, teasing out the complex sets of references to Chinese culture and aesthetics Jones develops in imagining this character. She demonstrates the depth of research Jones undertakes and the dialogues she enters into in relation to Chinese ideas of place and identity, which are contrasted with Western ideas in the novel.

Tony Hughes-D'Aeth turns to ideas drawn from the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan to shed light on Jones' work. He argues that Jones' idea of desire is fundamentally associated with ideas of difference, which leads to ambiguity and conflict, and shows how utopian ideals are in danger of collapse when faced with these forces of difference. He develops this in reading *A Guide to Berlin*, where a utopian and seemingly straightforward project of sharing responses to readings of the same books falls into chaos.

Brigid Rooney also reads *A Guide to Berlin* in examining still more closely the idea of communal reading. In *Sorry*, Gail Jones has a character claim that readers of the same book share a secret communion (144). Rooney considers the importance of literature itself to how we exist within and among communities and how we develop understandings of the world. She argues that this might challenge the dominant paradigms of global markets and commodities with the normative populist understandings they insist upon and impose.

Robert Dixon develops a detailed reading of ongoing relation between literary texts and art history in Gail Jones' work through a close analysis of *The Death of Noah Glass*. Dixon demonstrates that this text is steeped in forms of intermediality that already appear in certain of the works of Renaissance painting that are drawn into relation with this novel. He demonstrates how the novel applies and tests principles drawn from picture theory, showing how Jones is able to use fiction as a mode of theorising aesthetic ideas.

Meg Samuelson's chapter complements Dixon's and moves the ideas towards theories of light and colour, drawing us back to concerns McMahon underlines

as already present in *Sixty Lights*. Samuelson develops a meditation on the colour blue, which weaves its way through an understanding of Jones' idea of art, and perception itself.

The chapters demonstrate the layers of depth and meaning revealed in Jones' texts, which open themselves to and reward close reading. They show us how far Jones' novels lead us into resonant spaces of knowledge, which, when we pause and pay attention, open worlds of feelings and understandings to us that help us in turn to come to terms with the complexities of our own worlds.

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