geography of New Guinea and Sydney, we see a poetry that is physically embodied. In throwing up possible connections between disparate elements, Brooks is the first to question his own motives and desires. He talks of Heyward ringing Stewart and asking about Floupette, to be told that Stewart had never heard of him, but follows up: “As I have asked before, how far should we believe the hoaxer?” And, by extension, the critic? Heyward? Brooks? The reviewer?

I’d like to have given the last word to Stewart’s late ‘hoax’ manifestation, “Ho-o,” but, not having a text to quote, will go instead with these post-Malley lines of McAuley’s quoted by Brooks:

For lucid Ern, ye penguins, weep no more:
Henceforth he is the genius of the shore.
If, unawares, you stumble into sense,
His arm shall save, and your own impudence.

—2012

Michael Dransfield: A Retrospective

In terms of world poetry in English, the work of Michael Dransfield is a possible junction between zones of expression and innovation. A confluence of very different ways of seeing, his poetry is often simultaneously streetwise and sophisticated, and intentionally ‘naive’. An engagement with issues of national identity and resistance to narrow, bigoted patriotism can go hand in hand with national pride. A poem might range across the field of perception, and then ‘close-up’ in a way that suggests form is directing content. Regardless, Dransfield is always innovative, often unique.

It has never been fully appreciated that Australian poetry of linguistic innovation does not sit on a Western timeline of historical change. It doesn’t fit the dialectic. Extending back tens of thousands of years through Indigenous habitation, it is a poetry of song, surfaces, paint, sand, the body, trees and plants, and texture. It is of water and air and fire, of a dreaming that works beyond the linear. Even in the often racist ‘settler’ and ‘convict’ poetry, songs, and ballads of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, there is an awareness of this difference. And in those poems where the strangeness and

uniqueness of the Australian landscape and environment are being examined, there is a recognition that a different set of rules of perception is required. Barron Field’s “The Kangaroo,” with its epigram from Virgil, “Mixtumque genus, prolesque biformis,” is an interesting example of this:

Kangaroo!, Kangaroo!
Tho’ at first sight we should say,  
In thy nature that there may  
Contradiction be involv’d,  
Yet, like discord well resolv’d,  
It is quickly harmoniz’d.

In his introduction to the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon (1876), Marcus Clarke uses the term “Weird Melancholy” to describe the strange and particular attributes of the Australian landscape; further on he says, “In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write….” This is the European take on the alienation of the individual within nature, that something larger is out there.

Dransfield, aware of how ‘settler’ culture has worked to ‘ringbark the dreamtime’, yet not sharing the Jindyworobaks’ tendency to patronizing appropriation, merged the Clarke view with an awareness of the problematical nature of such a view. Dransfield is a nexus, a coming together of sensibilities. This is not always specifically articulated; but a deconstructive (or even ‘paranoid’) reading of a Dransfield poem will often reveal such a meeting of sensibilities at work. In the ‘colonial poet’ behind the Courland Penders poems, and in many others, there ‘lurks’ not just guilt, but self-criticism. Though often called a neo-Romantic, when it comes down to it Dransfield is hard-edged and confrontative. It’s easy to be picked up by his sonorous lines, to be lulled into a sublimity of self, without recognizing this. It’s the hard-edged Dransfield, this innovative and radical late-modernist, verging on the postmodern, that is proffered in this selection.

If we detect the ‘anxiety of influence’ in the contradiction between Dransfield’s desire to become a major poet – even a ‘famous’ poet, known around the world – and his wish to undermine and challenge the canon, we should also recognize his genuine discomfort with the ‘official poets’. As a poet, and in terms of his own poetry specifically, he lived in a liminal world between the avant-garde and the establishment. He was a paradox; his best poetry thrives on apparent contradictions. These ambiguities, these ‘error zones’, bring a tension and complexity to even his apparently simplest poems. Dransfield knew the difference between history and mythology, brought the two to-