

**THE 'NEW' AUSTRALIAN POETRY:  
MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST POETICS  
AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AUSTRALIAN POETRY**

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**July 1994**

D034679

Thesis

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This thesis discusses the poetics of modernism and postmodernism in twentieth-century Australian poetry. It challenges John Tranter's view, expressed in *The New Australian Poetry*, that the 'New Poets' of the late sixties and seventies were virtually the first Australian poets to incorporate modernism into their work. It reviews the tendency for critics to separate conceptual concerns from stylistic innovation when discussing the impact of modernism on earlier Australian poetry. It offers an alternative to the dominant reading of the 'modern' as reflecting the moods and themes of 'high modernism,' to incorporate more progressive elements, including the symbolist and 'neo-Romantic' literary avant-gardes and the political avant-garde. This expanded view allows discussion of poetics normally disregarded in discussions of modernism, including Christopher Brennan's views on consciousness, Lesbia Harford's feminist and socialist principles, the Vision group's program of the 'New Man,' and the Jindyworobaks' valorisation of Aboriginal culture. It suggests that the 'tradition of conservatism' of Australian poetry seen by Tranter was encouraged by the resistance to stylistic innovation of modernism's 'champions,' Kenneth Slessor and Frank Wilmot, and the anti-modernist attitudes of A D Hope and James McAuley. While the 'new' element of the New Poetry is seen primarily as their openness to stylistic innovation, an analysis of New Poetry poetics shows a diversity characteristic of 'sixties postmodernism.' This reflects the various influences of poststructuralism, symbolism, neo-Romanticism and the neo-avant-garde, reflecting differing attitudes towards subjectivity, language, the notion of the divine, and the role of poetry. Poets whose work is examined in the light of these poetics include Robert Adamson, Kris Hemensley, Bruce Beaver, Vicki Viidikas, Jennifer Maiden and John A Scott. Given the breadth of the New Poets' poetics, the question is raised as to why so few women are seen as New Poets, and suggestions are made for a revised New Poetry canon.

This thesis is submitted for the degree of PhD to the School of English and Linguistics, Macquarie University, July 1994. This work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

*Elaine Stone*

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to my supervisors, Mark McLeod, Ruth Waterhouse and John Stephens for their guidance and support; to my colleagues and fellow postgraduate students for their ideas, patience and encouragement, especially Marcelle Freiman, Yvonne Edgren, Nick Mansfield, Lee O'Brien, Margaret Bartholemew, Jane Mathieson, the 1987 Honours' year group and members of the postgraduate studies room; to Joan Kirkby, Tony Gibbs, Rosemary Colmer, Phillip Levine and Manfred Mackenzie for teaching and research opportunities throughout the course of my study, as well as general encouragement; to the secretarial staff of English and Linguistics especially Dale, Corinne, Mary and Suzanne, and the staff of Macquarie University library, especially Tim and the crew in the Inter-library Loans section, for their help, good humour and dedication. Thanks also to my friends, Barbara and Brian, for their love and support, and to my writers' group, Carolyn, Chris, Cindy, Isolde, and Delamere, especially for the comic relief.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, for their love,  
support and inspiration, especially to my husband,  
Philippe Maire, and my mother, Elizabeth Lhuede,  
whose encouragement, help and patience sustain me  
in all I undertake.