

AD Hope Award Report 2014

Judges: Professor Susan Martin, La Trobe University and Dr Bernadette Brennan, University of Sydney.

Shortlist:

Fiona Hile (Melbourne University): 'Unsettling Language: The Meaning of Punctuation in Michael Farrell's *open sesame*'.

Natalie Quinlivan (University of Sydney): 'Finding a Place in Story: Kim Scott's writing and the Wirilomin Noongar Language and Stories Project.'

Caroline Williamson (Monash University): 'Beyond generation green: Jill Jones and the ecopoetic process' (Winner)

Citation: 'Beyond generation green: Jill Jones and the ecopoetic process'.

This assured, intelligent and sophisticated essay begins by affirming the validity of critical readings contrary to, indeed in defiance of, the stated intentions of an author. The poem at the centre of the discussion is Jill Jones' 'Leaving it to the Sky'. After a sustained close reading of that poem, Ms Williamson examines, through the lens of Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History', 'the ways that time and place can be said to interact in a version of what it may mean for a poet to be environmentally concerned, that does not involve signing up to a charter of good behaviour, to certain political groupings, or even to labels such as "eco-feminist" or "eco-political"'.

In a highly original move, Ms Williamson re-examines the conventional interpretation of Benjamin's 'Angel of History' as a figure fixated by the wreckage of the past and unable to offer anything constructive for the future, by reading that image in conversation with Timothy Morton's discussion of the beautiful soul, or 'the Angel of Nature'. She notes that as Morton scours the past in search of a workable ecological aesthetic he refuses 'to allow terror or grief to get in the way of a persistent, deliberate, willed optimism'. Adopting Morton's approach she argues that Jones 'tackles the ecopoetic as process rather than category'. That process is evident in the way Jones 'reaches out to otherness, incorporating the languages of popular culture, journalism, politics, technology and the corporate: an experiment in contemporary consciousness, the human and the non-human inextricably entwined'.

Ms Williamson celebrates the unpredictability of poetry; the power of poetry to reveal the unexpected. She does not seek to label, and thereby constrain, Jones or her poetry as eco-feminist or as green. But, like Morton, she remains optimistic about the future and finds, in Jones' poetic method, a positive contribution to future awareness:

What a poet has to offer the twenty-first century as a poet, rather than a fixed political commitment to, say, the environment or to social change, may be an openness to what is new, to the precise observation of things that are in flux. Add to this an acute and unsentimental awareness of the difficult past.

Ms Williamson is to be congratulated on taking risks in this essay. Her original insights take our understanding of Jones' poetry and method into new, exciting territory.