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## editorial

As the list of papers presented at ACSANZ '88, included in the last pages of this issue demonstrates, the most recent conference of the Association was a forum for discussion of wide ranging issues, debates and theoretical interests. It was also the case that in Canberra in June the wider cross-national ambit of the Association was in evidence. The decision to fund and so encourage New Zealand members to cross the Tasman bore fruit in that the New Zealand voice was well and truly in play; not only quite formally in the context of conference papers, but also in the discussions which sprang up in the sessions, coffee breaks and bars. We hope that the next few issues of ACS will draw on the conference proceedings in ways which keep this tripartite basis of our critical enterprise in view. As Aynsley Kellow comments in his article in this issue, the basis and context for comparison needs to be carefully thought out in relation to the topic under scrutiny and, in the past, Australian scholars have tended to overlook the particular benefits of comparisons between New Zealand and Australia and Canada.

As editors we are now in the happy position of having a series of excellent papers to consider in compiling the future issues of the journal. The first of a number of Canberra papers appears in this issue: Smaro Kamboureli's analysis of *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World*. We also feature as a Review Essay Elizabeth Grosz's commentary on *A Mazing Space*. *Writing Canadian Women Writing*, a collection of feminist essays edited by Smaro Kamboureli and another Canadian participant at the Canberra conference, Shirley Neuman. Smaro's study of Susan Swan's novel stands as an exemplar of the kind of re-reading and re-conceptualisation of Canadian writing 'from the margins' as it were which is celebrated in *A Mazing Space*. As Grosz points out, their own marginal location, outside the imperialist centres of learning of the United States, Britain and France, allows both Canadian and Australian feminists to seek an independence and originality which can be a positive benefit of distance and 'de-centredness'. Betsy Struthers' poems from her visit to Australia contain some of these elements also.

Thinking about women, gender and nation continues to emerge as an important theme in this issue in Beryl Langer's interview with Margaret Atwood. Perhaps the best known Canadian author in Australia and New Zealand, Atwood's writing has been the focus of much academic work in that it is open to both national and gender-based modes of reading. In this interview, Atwood is rather dismissive of what are in her view overly academic and theorised ways of reading literary texts. However her comments on the less provincial nature of the so-called provinces, Australia and Canada, as opposed to the isolationist and self-centred tendencies of the larger imperial centres, such as the United States and

Europe, take us back to Grosz's point about the benefits of our shared outsider status. They also point forward to what Coral Ann Howells, in her review of the McDougall and Whitlock edition *Australian/Canadian Literatures in English: Comparative Perspectives*, identifies as the focus of post-colonial literary approaches: uninventing the grammar of binary oppositions, finding a way to speak from the margins.

The final element in our focus on gender and nation in this issue is Beryl Langer's reading of Margaret Atwood's fiction with an eye to the 'new class'. The process of marginalisation on the basis of nation, gender, race, class produces more often than not complex intersections. Langer reminds us that Atwood's protagonists tend to be privileged, middle class, independent women who are located ambiguously in the structure of the urban societies in which they live. In an analysis which draws fully on the terrain of both the humanities and the social sciences, literary and sociological disciplines, Beryl Langer cautions us that reading women's writing requires finely tuned analysis of relations between sexual and economic inequalities.

As this issue goes to press Australians have just rejected four referenda to change the Australian Constitution. In this issue we have three papers relating to questions of constitutional change and the dynamics of federalism. Constitutional referenda are rarely successful in Australia and Peter Russell's article explores the history and contrasting dynamics of constitutional change in Australia and Canada. The pressures for constitutional change spring from different sources and, in Canada, are affected by intergovernmental negotiation rather than popular referenda as in Australia, but these differences do not make the achievement of change easier in either case.

Gwen Gray's paper examines the impact of each federal system on the dynamic of innovation and change in health policy in Australia and Canada. It makes use of comparative method to make a critical assessment of conflicting theories of federalism which, alternatively, portray federal systems as obstacles or facilitators of progressive policy change. As with other comparative work in this field, she finds that that Canadian experience provides a useful balance to Australian theoretical orthodoxies. Jim Struthers' review article of Rob Watts' new book gives a Canadian view of the historical assessments of policy innovations in this area. Aynsley Kellow's paper, on the other hand, draws our attention to the comparative logic of policy comparisons of this type and reminds us of the need to consider the dynamic of change in New Zealand's different unitary system.

Finally, as 1988 is the bicentennial anniversary of European occupation of Australia, we are pleased to be able to feature a cover design by Brisbane artist, Ron Hurley to remind us of the richness and vitality of the Aboriginal cultures that European occupation has displaced.