

Title:

Where does poetry take place?



Abstract:

In *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (1994), Jacques Rancière takes issue with twentieth century French historians for their practice of explaining peoples' actions in terms of the habitual practices of those of their milieu and point in time. His particular target is Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's micro-history of Montailou (1975), a medieval village in the Languedoc region in the midst of the Cathar heresy. Through Ladurie's encyclopaedic account, the villagers' strange actions become understandable in terms of the social forces acting upon them at that point in time. "The history of mentalities," Rancière acidly comments, "is possible insofar as heresy is put back in its place, assigned to its time and place" (67). My paper extends a similar consideration to the dishabituating and at times even heretical which contemporary poetry so often embodies and effects. Why, I ask, do we so frequently resort to national labels and locations ("One of Ireland's best contemporary poets", "An American poet of the 1950s", "Born in Spain in 1927, in the province of Cádiz") when discussing the work of poets? Why, in particular, do we do so when discussing artists whose work seems most to subvert "nationalness" (Anderson 1991: 145) itself? In this fashion I try to put some pressure on the adequacy of titles like *The New Oxford Book*

of Australian Verse (1986) and *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2009). Are such titles really true to where the poems in their table of contents take place?

Bio:

Paul Magee is a poet and researcher in poetics at the University of Canberra. He is author of *From Here to Tierra del Fuego* (University of Illinois Press 2000), *Cube Root of Book* (John Leonard Press 2006) and *Stone Postcard* (John Leonard Press 2014). Paul is currently working on a monograph entitled *Thinking by Speaking: A Study of Poetic Thought*. Based on research interviews with 30 contemporary Anglophone poets, the book is an exploration of the relation between poetic composition and practices of extemporisation in everyday conversation. This paper explores strands in those same interviews to do with poets' relation to place and place-making.