USE OF THESES

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'Me is not a stable reality':

Negotiations of Identity in the Poetry of Dorothy Auchterlonie, Rosemary Dobson, Dorothy Hewett and J.S. Harry

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STATEMENT

I, Marie-Louise Ayres, declare that this thesis has never before been submitted, either in part or in whole, to this or any other university for the purposes of a higher degree. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis is an original piece of research and, except where otherwise acknowledged, all conclusions are my own.

(Signed) M.-L. Ayres
NOTE

Referencing throughout this thesis conforms to the author-date (or Harvard) system as set out in the Australian Government Publishing Service’s *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, Fourth Edition.
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ABSTRACT

‘Me is not a stable reality’:
Negotiations of Identity in the Poetry of
Dorothy Auchterlonie, Rosemary Dobson, Dorothy Hewett
and J.S. Harry

In recent years, scholars have paid considerable attention to
Australian women’s fiction, resulting in a thorough re-assessment of
the canon. Many of Australia’s most accomplished women poets,
however, have not received adequate critical attention, and available
statistics suggest that there is still a marked bias in favour of Australian
male poets. This thesis considers the work of several poets who, while
recognised as significant in our cultural heritage, have not been the
subject of a body of sustained criticism. The four poets—Dorothy
Auchterlonie (1915-1991), Rosemary Dobson (1920-), Dorothy Hewett
(1923-) and J.S. Harry (1939)—represent a tradition which has seen
women publishing poetry of great quality over many years. This thesis
adds to an emerging body of criticism which has focused to date on a
small number of Australian women poets, notably Judith Wright and
Gwen Harwood.

The Introduction to this thesis outlines the critical bias in
favour of male poets, and proposes an approach to the poetry which
takes into account contemporary feminist and post-structural critical
practices. The four chapters examine the poetry of Auchterlonie,
Dobson, Hewett and Harry, in order of their dates of birth. Chapter One
considers Auchterlonie’s poetry, and in particular the ways in which it
problematises the more ‘public’ prose writing and the public persona of
Dorothy Green. Chapter Two traces Rosemary Dobson’s fifty years of
published poetry, arguing that her work has previously been
considered too narrowly as concerned with abstractions such as Art and
Time. I argue that her work can also be seen as a sustained meditation
on connection and the possibilities of translation. Chapter Three
examines Dorothy Hewett’s poetry, reading it particularly in relation to
her drama and prose. In this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which
Hewett’s writing across several genres sees her reworking and
reweaving material throughout her writing life. In Chapter Four I
show that J.S. Harry continues the tradition established by the other
three poets, especially in her preoccupation with connections between
writing and experience. Each of the chapters explores the concept of an
‘unstable’ identity, and the imaginative freedom which this allows.
Finally, my Conclusion draws together some of these threads, and
argues again that a body of critical writing on these women is essential
to a full understanding of Australian writing.