



Mr James Spigelman  
Chair  
Australian Broadcasting Commission  
GPO Box 9994  
Sydney NSW 2001

15 December, 2014

Dear Mr Spigelman,

The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE), the professional teaching association representing English teachers and educators in Victoria, was appalled to hear of the axing of *Poetica* from Radio National. At our December meeting, VATE Council resolved to write to you about our objections in the hope that the Board will reconsider the decision.

Poetry is one of the most important forms of Australia's literary, cultural, even, one might say, emotional life and any program which celebrates and explores that deserves the ongoing support of Australia's cultural voice, the ABC.

While *Poetica's* audience of 60,000 may appear to be a small one, that audience is important because of its ability to disseminate awareness of the program's content well beyond that immediate audience. As the VATE member who exhorted VATE to protest the decision, a retired teacher, but one still passionately interested in Australia's cultural life, said, 'I introduced Ali Alizadeh at this year's state conference. He writes on themes ranging from parenthood to political violence, mortality to globalisation, philosophy to immigration, from the perspective of an Iranian Australian. Without a program such as *Poetica* I may not have heard of him.'

Shelley wrote that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. He did not mean that they entered directly into the worlds of politics and the law but that poets make us aware of the emotional and psychological dimensions of those worlds. And they can be 'world changing' in their impact. For example, Judith Wright's reimagining of Australia as a female landscape was critical to the identity of women:

*I looked and saw under the moon's cold sheet  
your delicate dry breasts,  
country that built my heart;  
and the small trees on their uncoloured slope  
like poetry moved, articulate and sharp*



Victorian Association for  
the Teaching of English

In its recent retrospective edition of *English in Australia*, celebrating 50 years of its publication, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) republished Wright's 1966 article 'The Role of Poetry in Education'. In it she spoke of her role as a poet in 'the making of a community in which children and young people and adults alike shall not only be able to enjoy poetry and other arts, but also recognise their meaning and importance in the making of full and imaginative lives'. It is a vision of 'community' VATE wholeheartedly endorses. We are committed to the ongoing study of poetry because it is language at its most succinct, distilled and emotionally powerful. Wordsworth called it 'memorable speech'. Ted Hughes said of its emotional power, in 'The Thought Fox', 'Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox /It enters the dark hole of the head'.

Language is at the heart of any culture and, at this point of time in Australia, a coarsened language of 'macho' political discourse dominates: to wit, 'sook', 'wimp' 'man up', 'shirt front', 'girlie man'. By contrast, poetry offers language which is emotionally alert and nuanced, subtle, reflective, meditative, while remaining, in Wright's words, 'articulate and sharp'. An altogether different discourse of 'power'.

A program such as *Poetica*, which promotes and nurtures that discourse, deserves support. If the ABC is not going to defend the worth of poetry in our cultural life who will? VATE urges the Board to reconsider the decision. It is a small action, with a thousand consequences.

Yours sincerely,

Monika Wagner, President

On behalf of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) Council