

Land of Heart's Desire: Inscribing the Australian Landscape

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Abstract

*European exploration and colonization of Australia was in large part a project of labeling, erasing, and re-labeling the continent's landscapes, flora, and fauna in order to take possession of the land. In the postcolonial era, the legacy of that project is reflected in conversations about multiculturalism and cultural equality whether in political or literary spheres. This paper explores how two contemporary novels (Aboriginal author Archie Weller's *Land of Golden Clouds*, and European-Australian Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*) employ differing representations of ecology and wildlife as a reflection of cultural politics, and how these novels offer different visions of the risks and possibilities of a multicultural Australia. It argues that metaphorical possession of the natural world is as crucial (and as problematic) to narratives of multiculturalism as it was to colonial narratives of discovery and conquest, and that competing political and cultural visions rely upon competing definitions of a natural or native Australian ecology.*

Midshipman George Raper of the *HMS Sirius* was one of only three artists to leave a visual record of the First Fleet's voyage to Australia in 1787, making his drawings invaluable as documentary evidence of that expedition (Mills). They are equally valuable as a record of the European imagination projected onto an unfamiliar environment. Raper's kangaroo, for example, features a neck resembling a snake with a rat's head perched atop it, and the proportions of its body bear little resemblance to the animal as we now may know it. Rather than a lack of skill from the artist, this barely recognizable creature highlights the difficulty of interpreting unfamiliar animals through an imagination grounded in an English vision of the world. Raper drew his kangaroo by combining zoological and physiological elements with which he was already familiar, and envisioned the newly-discovered through the comforts of the already known. Raper's kangaroo is just one link in a long chain of inscriptions cast onto Australia and its inhabitants, human and otherwise. As successive visions of national identity have been

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adopted and contested, battles have been waged in the arenas of politics, literature, and ecology, and contemporary articulations of Australia as a multicultural nation are no exception. Hodge and O'Carroll propose that conflicts of cultural identity are most effectively explored where identities and histories run up against one another and overlap, and that the stories a culture tells about itself can usefully reveal such contested cultural differences (5). By considering two contemporary novels in which the Australian bush and its animals play a major role (Archie Weller's *Land of the Golden Clouds*, and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*), this paper asks how imagined versions of Australia, written from two very different cultural and literary positions, reveal these overlapping and often competing projections of national culture, and how the ideals of a modern, multicultural Australia are entangled with the natural world that surrounds it in these works of fiction.

In his 1998 science fiction novel *Land of the Golden Clouds*, Archie Weller imagines a nuclear apocalypse in the near future, and begins his story three thousand years following that catastrophe in an Australia scraped clean of nearly all vestige of its colonial past and technological present. His future is populated by desolate, disparate groups representative of contemporary Australia's multiple populations -- Aboriginal, English, Greek, Chinese, etc. -- each living in relative isolation and for the most in part in tribal societies. Following the arrival of a group of Jamaican aviators in possession of far more advanced technology than anything remaining in Australia, representatives of these various societies temporarily band together to travel across the continent with the intention of eradicating their shared enemy, an apparently devolved, dehumanized species dwelling in large numbers underground and emerging in the dark to attack surface societies indiscriminately. In the course of his characters' travels, Weller explores the identity politics of contemporary Australia and raises questions about how well, if at all, divergent cultures can coexist in one landscape.

By setting his novel in the distant future, and by making that future drastically different from the Australian present, Weller is able, as an Aboriginal writer, to announce the failure of the invading colonial society that threatens his own indigenous culture. In lieu of an alternate colonial past, he is able to imagine an alternate future in which to critique past and present alike. Though *Land of the Golden Clouds* seems at first glance more dystopian than utopian, depicting the atomic destruction of multiple continents and countries, from the Aboriginal perspective the novel's dismantling of colonial power could be seen as less than disastrous. In that way, Weller achieves what Pordzik calls a "fictional strategy to disrupt the hierarchized relation between reality and fiction which dominates traditional utopian writing" (133). Creating a future through which to reimagine Australian colonial history allows him to do so from "a distinctly postcolonial cross-cultural point of view" (156), and to challenge the notion that looking forward in Australian culture necessarily means maintaining existing hierarchies.

Though grounded in the tradition of literary fiction rather than science fiction, Julia Leigh's 1999 novel *The Hunter* offers some striking similarities to Weller's epic. It begins with the arrival in Tasmania of a professional hunter, known only as "M," who has been employed by a pharmaceutical firm to kill what may be the last remaining thylacine (a species previously thought extinct for several decades) in order to collect its DNA. M alternates between trips into the mountains to hunt the tiger, and time spent below in the house where he rents a room and, in the course of his coming and going, becomes increasingly drawn into the lives of the family from whom he rents a room and at the

same time grows ambivalent about the hunt itself. While not as drastic or all-encompassing an erasure as Weller's apocalypse, Leigh suggests a new Australia drawn from biological and familial reserves of the past, and the possibility of creating new versions of lives thought to be lost. Despite the differences between these authors and their respective cultural viewpoints, both novels interrogate the implications of a multicultural society through the possibility of new beginnings, asking what positions will be available to earlier, indigenous inhabitants in a new world brought about through biology, technology, or policy.

In addition to new beginnings at a global level, both novels feature protagonists reinventing themselves personally, as well. Weller's story focuses on the journey of Red Mond Star-Light Moon Talker into manhood and his ascension to leadership of his clan. Soon after the story begins, Red Mond takes part in the rite-of-passage that marks him as an adult, a ceremony in which he learns the story that will distinguish him from all others for the rest of his life. "His story," Weller writes, "was the most important part of a man's life... It was a man's story that was his very heart and soul and made him different from any other Ilkari" (4). Leigh's anti-hero, on the other hand, is a professional hunter known only as M. Whereas Red Mond's story begins with his entry into the metaphorical landscape of manhood, M's starts with the approach of an airplane, the modern equivalent of Raper's *HMS Sirius* reaching Australia's shore. There is the slightest jostle of turbulence between his old world and his new, before "it is over, they survive, and... the eighteen-seater settles high above the rift of blue which separates the island from the mainland" (3). In that brief uncomfortable moment, M leaves the familiar behind and enters the realm of the tiger, his quarry, a realm through which he travels not as himself but as the conquering arm of a distant power. In fact, he goes so far as to give himself the alias of "Martin David, Naturalist" rather than travel under his own name, a name the novel never reveals beyond the initial "M" (5).

Both novels depict cultures occupying landscapes irrevocably altered by human action, and each focuses on characters attempting to further influence the environment for personal and cultural benefit, whether the eradication of a species for the safety of a character's tribe, or for personal financial profit. Weller and Leigh highlight the difficulties and dangers of projecting imaginations formed elsewhere onto a screen that is far from blank. Or as Prince Michael (a lunatic poet who joins Red Mond on his quest) says of the poems of W.B. Yeats,

'They are the words of a famous man who lived many years ago.
But are not words great, for they remind us who we once were in the
poems of those long since dead.'...

'William Butler Yeats. The Land of Heart's Desire. That is where
you are now,' he chuckled. (221)

Stories, in this case the ancient (by the time of the novel) verses of Yeats, allow characters, explorers, and politicians alike to project their own histories onto whatever landscape they find themselves in. Like Raper's misshapen kangaroo, Australia becomes whatever the most powerful gaze already expects it to be.

In the contemporary moment, that most powerful gaze envisions a multicultural Australia, a reinvention that encompasses not only the present but simultaneously redefines the history of cultural relations. This harmonious dream has emerged after two centuries in which the nation Europeans imagined left little -- if any -- room for bodies and cultures not their own. Australia's "whites only" immigration policy remained officially in effect until 1958, and residually for at least two more decades (Commonwealth of Australia). As Tavan writes, "Its durability reflected a number of deeply held beliefs and attitudes [including...] a strong social-liberal faith in the state's ability to create a cohesive and prosperous society through a program of active intervention in civil society" (111). On the other hand, despite this persistent racism in some quarters, there was a simultaneous drive for a generously and humanely intentioned multicultural Australia following World War II, a desire arising from concern for the welfare of arriving waves of refugees (Hodge and O'Carroll 17). The arrival at contemporary multiculturalism, then, was at least as complex as its implementation has proven to be, and perhaps that complicated past is cause for optimism in the difficult present.

Debates over Australian identity have often manifested themselves as arguments about the relative "authenticity" of successive waves of immigrants. Such discussions, however, tend to obscure the anxieties of Aboriginal Australians and the tenuousness of their position. When indigenous peoples are mentioned at all in conversations about multiculturalism, it is often to deny that they are "distinct nations, but with the assumption that they are a disadvantaged 'racial minority' or 'ethnic group' for whom progress requires integration into the mainstream of society" (Kymlicka 22), and such was the case with early attempts to define Australian multiculturalism ((Hodge and O'Carroll 109). Such policies and the cultural contexts from which they emerge force indigenous cultures into the monolithic mainstream, forgetting that "Aboriginal Australia is itself a multiculture, that years of schismogenic policy have not destroyed this, and moreover that this plurality is integral to any future Australian multiculture" (110). Rather than acknowledge the already diverse nature of indigenous Australia, policies have focused on blurring difference in the name of unity and shared heritage, and that blurring has been projected onto the landscape as well.

In 1973, Immigration Minister Al Grassby said of the White Australia Policy, "give me a shovel and I will bury it" (qtd Tavan 109). While the intention may have been progressive, this image of the "whites only" policy being obscured in the landscape points ironically at complications to come. Considering the troubled legacy of the names assigned by James Cook to features of the Australian continent, Paul Carter argues after Thomas de Quincey that Cook's labels failed to last because they were ungrounded in specific historical experience, whereas local names "are not inventions of any active faculty, but mere passive depositions from a real impression on the mind" (de Quincey qtd Carter 3). Nonetheless, Carter suggests, names such as "New Island" indicate that "For Cook, knowing and naming were identical... To know the world in detail meant preserving its particulars" (9). To convert *terra incognita* into *terra australis* requires the grafting of names onto anonymous features of geography, history, and ecology, by which Europeans consume the continent with markers of their own experience. In that light, Grassby's burial of the White Australia policy takes on chilling implications for whoever might already be living on the land where that shovel is to be interred. Likewise, the (re)conversion of European placenames to Aboriginal labels that has taken place since the 1970s appears less benign reparation and more the incorporation of

indigenous history and experience into a collective vision of Australia. By naming, non-indigenous Australians come to know their own landscape, and through that knowing they come to own it as completely as the Dreamtime spirits did while bringing the world into being by singing its names.

The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, adopted in 1989, sets out three requirements for a successfully multicultural nation. First, that all Australians have the right “within carefully defined limits” to embrace and express their own cultural heritage; second, that all Australians deserve equal treatment unhindered by race, culture, religion, or other differences; and finally, that a vibrant national economy requires the individual contribution of each resident, working to the best of their abilities (DIMIA). Multiculturalism, then, works not in the service of the individual but rather in the service of the nation. However multicultural Australians may be, they should be equally committed to their collective culture and feel an equal stake in promoting and preserving it. Indeed, the definition demands “an overriding loyalty to Australia and its people” (DIMIA). By situating all Australian heritage as equally important and equally shared, the Agenda incorporates Aboriginal cultures under the broad banner of Australian-ness. As Andrew Okolie has argued about contemporary Nigeria, multicultural ethnicities can be strategically defined and employed by states and their controlling elites, repurposing indigenous cultures as national culture while simultaneously devaluing -- or, at least, subsuming -- those cultures (68). In Australia, this deployment sometimes comes in the form of ambiguous performances of would-be Aboriginality by non-Aboriginal Australians, such as political and cultural agencies giving didgeridoos and other items as gifts to visiting dignitaries, often in contravention of the traditional and spiritual uses of those objects. It also comes, Povinelli argues, when “indigenous subjects are called upon to perform an authentic difference in exchange for the good feelings of the nation and the reparative legislation of the state” (6).

In *Land of the Golden Clouds*, Archie Weller highlights the absurdity of such performances, as his characters cross an irradiated southeastern Australia toward Melbourne. While traversing a wintry mountain landscape, his travelers encounter a band of men on skis who speak in a patois of cricket terminology, and “are called the Cricketeers and they believe in a being that is a crimson ball, a shining red light” (287). The Cricketeers speak reverently of a sacred site known as the Emceegee, a phoneticism of the Melbourne Cricket Grounds’ common abbreviation M.C.G., and ultimately lead the band of travelers to the Grounds under the assumption that whatever quest they are on, if it is an important quest, must involve the long-vacant but incomparably holy pitch. The absurdity of Weller’s Cricketeers recalls the insistence by English immigrants to Australia as early as the First Fleet and as recently as the present clinging to their familiar bastions of culture.

A culture built on the language and behaviors of cricket, Weller suggests, is as ridiculous as a traditional roast or artificial snow unrolled across a green yard on an antipodean Christmas. However, by projecting a stubborn vision of Englishness onto a landscape and climate in which it did not originate, the Cricketeers and the First Fleet before them take possession of Australia as Cook did with his names. That conflation reactivates English -- later Australian -- identity through specific and, eventually, traditional connections to topography. Kevin Dunn argues that, in reference to the politics of immigrant representation in Sydney, “Citizenship must be embodied and

materially exercised, and this necessitates control over space and buildings and physical expressions of culture” (153). Considering the significance of landscape to Aboriginal cultures -- existing as founding text of sorts, an ecological Magna Carta or Constitution -- this control of space becomes no less important in rural and wilderness areas, hence the tensions over whose stories can be inscribed on the continent.

In Weller’s novel, immigrant cultures connect themselves to Australia by claiming the landscape as their own throughout the story. As the members of his traveling party cross present-day Victoria, they meet cultures marked by specific pointers to Greek, Jewish, and Chinese traditions -- each of which accounts for a major immigrant community in Australia. Aboriginal cultures are represented in the novel by a group called the Keepers of the Trees, recognizably similar to contemporary indigenous Australians and to historical accounts. Of all Weller’s imagined cultures, the Violet Elk clan to which Red Mond belongs bears the closest resemblance to the Keepers of the Trees. The Violet Elk clan is a small, semi-nomadic culture with totemic beliefs that tie them closely to the land much as the Keepers are tied to it by the spirits of Echidna, Koala, and other native animals. However, the Violet Elk clan -- as is clear from its name -- worships totemic animals *not* native to Australia. Thus, while in a superficial sense the clan bears a cosmological resemblance to the indigenous Keepers, this difference is significant when one remembers that without their *particular* environment, there is no possibility of Aboriginal culture. Though Red Mond becomes a man by learning his story, in similar fashion to an Aboriginal youth learning the story of his animal totem at manhood, Red Mond’s story turns out to be “Thin and the Black Man,” an orally preserved version of *Huckleberry Finn* rather than a locally-specific narrative (59). Like Prince Michael’s poems and the Cricketeers’ patois, the Violet Elk clan originates with the projection of a foreign imagination onto an Australian screen presumed to be blank, however closely that projection may ultimately hew to indigenous culture.

Though her anti-hero M is more clearly European-Australian than the complicated Red Mond, the hunt in Julia Leigh’s novel echoes Weller’s concerns about the consumptive relationship between native ecology and native culture. In *Land of the Golden Clouds*, Red Mond and his companions lose all sense of their individual identities while delayed from their journey in the Silver City, trapped by a bureaucracy of telepathic Judaic caricatures committed to a society made homogenous through the violent elimination of difference. In similar fashion, M arrives in Tasmania with a fractured sense of himself, and through the course of the novel works to refashion his identity. Having appeared in a turbulent moment between the two spheres of his life, M only becomes himself while in the wild, on assignment. He does not fully exist at any other time, or at least lacks a complete sense of who he is without the subjected, subjugated body of an Other (human or otherwise) onto which he can project his psyche. His sense of self depends on sharing the forest with the tiger, on the two of them drawing closer together as M wonders, “does she have the same dream he has, the only dream he ever has or, at least the only dream that he ever remembers: the running dream, where he is being chased for hours by an unknown foe” (Leigh 45). Following this conflation of predator and prey, M’s desire overtakes him and he masturbates to a merged fantasy of the female tiger he hunts and the widow from whom he is renting a room, slowly coming to replace her vanished, apparently murdered, environmentalist husband.

In a further complication, the thylacine, first equated both with M himself and the

local (white) woman he struggles against desiring, is also inexorably linked to the destruction of indigenous Tasmanian culture. Early in his hunt, M's

attention is caught by a ring of blackened stones and he imagines they might have been laid by Aboriginal people, in the years before they, the full-bloods, were almost driven to extinction. He remembers reading that the government had once tried to make another island, De Witt, an Aboriginal sanctuary... Then in 1936, the year the last thylacine died in captivity... it was again suggested that De Witt Island could be put to use - - any tigers rounded up and sent away. (57)

The hunter enters into a bloody, discomfiting trinity with the hunted -- human and animal, white and Aboriginal -- and just as earlier arrivals to Australia renamed the landscape in order to rewrite history, M casts himself in the role of both colonizer and colonized. M's mission on behalf of a defense contractor, to harvest the genetic material of an animal both quintessentially Australian and famously lost to history (and, now, ambiguously erotic), underscores a desire both sexual and economic: just as earlier enslavements and removals of Aboriginal bodies served to bolster economies elsewhere, the conquest of the thylacine is justified by corporate need. M rewrites himself as native through a conflation with indigenous animals and humans, while serving as the local extension of an employer committed to recasting biological history to their own distant desires.

M recognizes, too, that the genuine extinction of the hunted means the end of the hunter as well, as the men who once tracked thylacines all through the forest to earn their living were without purpose after its disappearance, "and now the trappers themselves were near extinct [and] with the brutish old men will pass the best first-hand knowledge of their prey: first one, then the other" (38). After missing his first shot at the thylacine because "for no good reason the tiger has changed her path at the very last instant, side-stepping his bullet into the phalanx of pines..."

He is homeward bound end empty-handed. He never wants to travel the plateau again and he wonders if this is what it means to fail, to be a failure. He never wants to spend another day walking with the rain blowing in his face; he never wants to eat cold food; he never wants to sling on a pack or peg down a tent. He resents tightening his boots. To fail? This time it seems he will fail. He repeats this: I will fail. He says it out loud: I will fail. Then again, louder: I will fail. I will fail. The will to failure. Ha, at last he has found it, the world seen from within, it is the will to failure and nothing else. Suddenly everything makes sense. (120-121)

As he comes to identify his temporary lodgings as "home" and the host family as his own, M is increasingly ambiguous about his assignment -- he realizes that its completion would both erase his professional identity and destroy the delicate though false family life he has constructed while on the hunt. However, should the predator survive by becoming one with the prey, his story can continue indefinitely -- a myth capable of subsuming the respective heritages of both conquered and conqueror need not concern

itself with the possibility of identities lost even in the face of ecological and cultural extinctions.

In this light, the multiculturalist Agenda appears not so much to create space for a diversity of perspectives and histories as it makes European-Australian culture a permanent fixture on the landscape. Anxieties on the part of the dominant culture that they, too, will ultimately be erased can be assuaged by the comforting knowledge that so long as all variant cultures can be absorbed the dominant culture will self-perpetuate. That these anxieties about erasure and consumption are prevalent in the Australian mind is evident in the national relationship to ecology. With each wave of settlers, including Aboriginal groups who brought the dingo with them from Asia, native species have been forced to compete with newly appeared flora and fauna. Introduced species have in many cases eliminated or nearly eliminated native ones, such as the dingo driving the thylacine and Tasmanian devil out of mainland Australia. Often, these species have been introduced with the intention of using them to bring other, earlier misconceived introductions under control, such as attempts to control the verminous rabbit population with both intentionally spread diseases and the import of European foxes. More often than not, these measures have fared no better than the failures they were meant to rectify. For instance, the cane toad introduced to control destructive beetle populations has since become one of the continent's most problematic species (DEH; Lunter). Government agencies and environmentalists alike have responded vigorously to these threats, working to eradicate introduced plants and animals.

A novelist concerned with the consumptive threat of multiculturalism, then, could hardly find a metaphor more apt for and appealing to an Australian audience than the introduced species. In *Land of the Golden Clouds*, Weller's Keepers of the Trees -- like their Aboriginal antecedents -- navigate the landscape and their environment through stories about the geographic and biological features they have encountered in the past. Their survival depends on an awareness of all plants, creatures, and places that they might meet in a given area. The greatest threat to their culture, therefore, is the unexpected species, as is made evident when a foraging Keeper of the Trees

caught a slight movement from the side of his eye. Kangaroo, he thought. Meat would go well with fruit and the brothers could enjoy a good feast...

He ran forwards towards the place...

With a fearsome, squealing roar, a huge monster with flapping ears and a long snake where his nose should have been burst from the undergrowth, charging towards him -- grey and craggy like one of the rocks come alive...

The giant old bull elephant, known upon the Purple Plains by the Ilkari with fear and reverence as Loki, bore down upon the Keeper of the Trees. (102-103)

Ultimately, the threatened Keepers are rescued by a character with a rocket launcher, one of several Jamaicans who have traveled to Australia in a jet from an outside world apparently undestroyed by nuclear war.

This scene illustrates a number of points, not least of which is that when the Keepers of the Trees try to make sense of a changed landscape using terms that are familiar to them (as each successive generation of immigrants to Australia has done), they put themselves in the path of unexpected dangers. This danger is exacerbated by the Keepers' assumption that they are in familiar terrain -- the movement of an elephant (escaped from a long-ago circus, Weller explains) is mistaken for a native kangaroo because the stories by which the Keepers navigate do not include the possibility of elephants. In addition, after the Jamaican slays the elephant using foreign technology that attacks with "a roar from over by some ghost gums," the rescued Keepers clutch their wooden clubs tighter and realize that "someone who could destroy such a monster so easily would have little trouble getting rid of *them*" (104).

For the Keepers of the Trees, the appearance of dangerous new creatures and of technology literally capable of altering geography (such as the atomic weapons responsible for the novel's preceding apocalypse) offers only extinction. Red Mond's clan of Ilkari, on the other hand, the progeny of European Australians, are familiar with the elephant and know at least to avoid it if not how to defeat it, naming it Loki after the Norse deity. This makes not only the story of the new creature unavailable to the indigenous Keepers, but also the language and prior knowledge required to learn that story -- they are bound in a two-fold exclusion that can only result, ultimately, in their disappearance from the Australian landscape. The Violet Elk clan may also be totemically- and ecologically-oriented, but their totems and ecology are non-native. Rather than adapt to the world of the Keepers, Red Mond and his clan will (however unintentionally) supersede them; the similarities may make it difficult for outsiders to recognize the difference between one semi-nomadic culture and another, but the difference is crucial: actual Aboriginal culture will have been replaced by a performance of that culture as it is understood through a foreign imagination, one in which Huckleberry Finn replaces Echidna and the elephant trumps Kangaroo.

This erasure and recreation of Aboriginal culture is echoed in M's hunt for the thylacine. As described above, his project is not only to destroy the native Tasmanian tiger but to consume its genetic and cultural origins -- the persistence of M's own identity requires him to simultaneously replace the tiger, the indigenous Tasmanians, the vanished trappers, and the murdered husband of a contemporary Tasmanian woman. In short, to fold multiple layers of Australian history and heritage into a single, homogenous tapestry. His hunt is the multiculturalist project microcosmically: blinded by an anxious insistence on self-preservation and the persistent awareness that if the dominant culture could so easily displace and devour earlier traditions, contemporary Australians and their policies gather all "Australian-grown customs" under the umbrella of "an overriding loyalty to Australia and its people" (DIMIA). If it existed in this place as it was at one time, the Agenda insists, it belongs to the nation as it is now, and once the past no longer presents a threat to those anxious about themselves being made obsolete then the future cannot do so, either: time has been collapsed, and just as Marx argued about the treacherous persistence of capitalism, the contemporary historical moment becomes an entrenched, immovable machine capable of consuming all challengers whether past,

present, or future, historical, biological, or cultural.

Still, an old anxiety may well remain in the hearts of contemporary Australians, its persistence coming in the most unexpected of places. What makes the cane toad so deadly to its indigenous cohabitants is a toxin laced through its skin -- whatever consumes that poison soon perishes itself, wiping out populations of other animals as quickly as the toad itself reproduces. These other animals lack the evolutionary knowledge that allows creatures in the toad's native Venezuela to avoid eating its flesh, just as Weller's Keepers of the Trees have not yet learned to battle an elephant. Over time, however, some Australian birds have discovered that if the toad is flipped onto its back and eaten from the underside in, the venom in its back can be avoided. As natural selection weights the avian population toward individuals with that crucial knowledge, the balance of power will shift away from the toads. Given time, resistance has a tendency to emerge as surprisingly as a thylacine's reappearance after extinction, or an indigenous population whose "overriding loyalty to Australia" becomes overridden by something else.

Like George Raper, his shipmates, and successive waves of immigrants to Australia, and also like the travelers in altered, unfamiliar landscapes depicted by Weller and Leigh, these birds have made sense of strange elements and, in time, have turned those elements to their advantage. Those adaptations, like the borderwork Hodge and O'Carroll describe, are about making sense of change as it is encountered. Certainly definitions of multiculturalism are malleable and evolving, and already in the decade since the publication of these two novels changes have occurred. According to Joppke, there has been a "retreat" from multiculturalism by liberal governments and populations in recent years, in part due to the complications of determining what, exactly, a multicultural state is and what it is not. Povinelli suggests that true commitment to multiculturalism, with its required acceptance of divergent and sometimes disturbing cultural behaviors, is possible only until those differences cross ambiguous but inviolable boundaries. Boundaries are certainly crossed in both novels, and limits are reached. Weller's multiethnic band of fellow travelers can stomach only so much diversity, and must ultimately destroy the threateningly alien culture of their subterranean enemy, an enemy who devours and destroys all other cultures indiscriminately. Leigh's M, despite the success of his hunt, finds that the efficiently butchered corpse of his victim is not the key to a new life he thought it would be. He leaves the forest not empty-handed, but nonetheless empty:

When M walks away, he doesn't turn to see if he is being watched. He walks with his back straight, picking his way through the clumps of button-grass and swinging the oranges he still carries in each hand. The sun breaks from behind a reef of clouds and this cheers him, although he knows the sun does not shine for one man alone. (170)

Whatever profit he finds in the forest, the wild insists on its own existence beyond the projections cast upon it. The two novels have this final element in common: they are narratives that not only engage the persistent reconstruction of the natural world by political and cultural forces, but also make clear, ultimately, the intrinsic value and independent existence of the wild landscapes in which they take place. A multiculturalist policy or agenda might do well to take that as its model, instead of demanding the

reverse as is so often the case.

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