Reframing the Picturesque in Contemporary Australian and Canadian Nature Writing

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of English

September 2016

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Graham Huggan, who has taught me so much, for his generosity, guidance, and tireless support throughout this process. I am also grateful to the Centre for Canadian Studies, University of Leeds, and the Canada-UK Foundation for the doctoral studentship supporting this work, and for the travel awards enabling me to spend time in Canada.

There are numerous people internationally who have given up time and energy to help me both with this project and with my academic and professional development. In Australia, I owe thanks to Professor Julianne Schultz and David Winter for their encouragement while I was working at the *Griffith REVIEW* and for introducing me to a lot of contemporary Australian literature. I would also like to thank Mark Tredinnick and Ashley Hay for taking the time to talk to me about my project and their work. Thanks also go to Dr Bridie McCarthy and Dr Caitlin Nunn at *The New Scholar* for their editorial support on writing that now forms part of Chapter One of this thesis.

In Canada, I am very grateful to staff and students at the University of Ottawa for supporting me during my Visitorship in 2013. Particular thanks go to Dr Cynthia Sugars for supporting my application, and to Breanna Keeler and Jenn Baker for their welcoming spirit, laughter, collaboration and friendship. Many thanks go also to Dr Roy and Jacquie Ballantine for their generous hospitality. In the Maritimes, I am grateful to Professor Christl Verdun and Dr Renee Hulan for their support, and in the prairies thanks go to Sharon Butala, Dr Alison Calder, and Professor Aritha van Herk for their advice, encouragement, and warmth. Thanks are also due to Scott and Teresa Reesor and the staff at the Reesor Ranch, Saskatchewan, for sharing local and family stories with me, and to fellow guests David Kidd and Leanne MacMillan for taking me on an unexpected and extremely generous road trip to Eastend.

Abstract

This thesis explores aesthetic representation in Australian and Canadian nature writing from the turn of the twenty-first century to the present day. I analyse nine representative texts to explore the relationship between aesthetic representation of the so-called natural environment and the texts' central themes, which I identify as (i) belonging (in place) (ii) digging (uncovering colonial history), (iii) walking (pilgrimage), and (iv) working (ecological rehabilitation). In connection with each theme, I examine how the environment is perceived, how notions of aesthetic value are constructed around it, and how aesthetic language contributes to the narrative and argument of the text. In so doing, I seek insight from contemporary environmental aesthetics as developed by philosophers including Allan Carlson, Yuriko Saito, and Arnold Berleant.

I argue that recent nature writing from both Australia and Canada shows an increasingly self-conscious engagement with the politics of representation that is often characterised by anxiety on the part of the narrator about representation and the possibility of the 'truthful framing' of place. This leads recent writers to enquire (albeit with different levels of success) into the discourses that drive beliefs about the natural environment. Some writers put pressure on popular modes of perception such as the picturesque by disrupting conventional representational styles, while others use those popular modes as the basis for a normative model of aesthetics and a spur to action. I suggest that one of the distinctive features of recent Australian and Canadian nature writing is its critical engagement with ways of seeing and describing nature that were developed during the colonial period, in particular in debates surrounding picturesque aesthetics, which in turn influenced travel and nature writing. In this way, much of contemporary Australian and Canadian nature writing can be seen as engaging, either explicitly or implicitly, in a critical project of reframing the picturesque.

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Introduction

Framing Place

About halfway through his 2009 book, *Lakeland*, Allan Casey describes his experience climbing the Tablelands in Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. Faint from thirst, he gives up on the ascent and turns around to take in the view, where 'glinting like mica flecks in the mountain rock, were dozens of small lakes, glittering on the lower plateaus of Long Range Mountains, shining on the green coastal flats'.[1] It is this scene that convinces Casey that Canada was misnamed by its founders: 'This country, its story, was written in the shapes of these million shorelines. This was not Vineland or Markland. This was not a Land of Lost Souls. This was Lakeland'.[2] For Casey, this is a moment of clarity where he has found some semblance of a truthful frame for his Canadian landscape: 'The true essence of things', he muses, 'depends on the right vantage point, the strength in your legs to get there'.[3]

This passage introduces a key tension in contemporary nature writing in Australia and Canada, the subject under scrutiny in this thesis. First and foremost, there is an ongoing and intense wish by writers like Casey to find the 'quiddity' or 'essence' of place: the writers I study over the following chapters are all self-

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[1] Allan Casey, *Lakeland: Journeys into the Soul of Canada* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009), p. 106.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] Ibid., p. 107.

consciously involved, in one way or another, in trying to 'frame place' in writing as a landscape artist would in paint.[4] Though the works vary in many ways, they are all aesthetic constructions: literary constructions of specific environments, from a field in Saskatchewan to a UNESCO world heritage site in New South Wales. However, these representations are also tied to questions of truth, and to what one philosopher has called the 'central problem' of environmental aesthetics: how is it possible to represent or 'frame' a natural environment if it is by definition infinite?[5] Other questions follow: Is it possible to be truthful or complete when framing place, especially so-called natural places? What tools or skills should the writer have in order to represent place appropriately; and what makes that writer a legitimate perceiver of place?

The act of framing poses both an aesthetic and an ethical dilemma because it is necessarily a product of selection and prioritisation: in early psychologist William James's famous description, 'the noticing of any *part* whatever […] is an act of discrimination'.[6] This perennial perception problem has led, in turn, to a heightened anxiety for authors about how and whether places, particularly non-human places, can be framed 'truthfully'. Casey suggests that what is needed is the 'right vantage point, the strength in your legs to get there', but there is a

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[4] Sometimes this is explicitly the case: Tredinnick refers to *The Blue Plateau* as a written version of a landscape painting. Mark Tredinnick, *The Blue Plateau: An Australian Pastoral* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Publications, 2009), p. 239.

[5] Allan Carlson, *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 22.

[6] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 462.

concurrent and uneasy understanding that this vantage point will always be relative and exclusive, and that as a consequence any representation is inherently partial. As the Australian author and critic Mark Tredinnick puts it, 'not all facts run straight, and nothing much is certain'.[7] Furthermore, not only is any framing partial, but it is also potentially misleading — repeating received ideas of nature and place might simply reiterate unhelpful models of the human relationship to environment, or still worse participate in an ongoing project of aesthetic colonisation phrased (and framed) in dominant human terms.

Land, as is abundantly clear in the formerly colonised territories of Australia and Canada — the two countries on which this thesis will be focusing, — is weighed under by competing claims, multiple histories, and competing values. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, legal ownership of land has always been in tension with cultural ownership of place. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out, 'the prosecution of land rights in postcolonised societies is part of the ongoing attempt to counteract a colonial history of dispossession that has had a disastrous impact on indigenous peoples, not just in terms of loss of land but deprivation of cultural connection. […] the contest over land [is] one of definitional, not just territorial, control'.[8] The ability to represent, narrate, and define different places is part of a cultural ownership of place; and the way place is aesthetically constructed matters. Contemporary writers are right, then, to be wary of claiming any 'truthful' framing of place and 'correct vantage point': all

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[7] Tredinnick, *Blue Plateau*, p. 238.

[8] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 137.

the more so when the place in question has been manipulated in particular (dominant) interests or exploited to particular (colonialist) ends.

Perhaps it is little wonder that if, as the Australian historian Peter Read suggests, the close of the twentieth century brought a confrontation with the reality of colonial dispossession and a 'long overdue restraint and reflection to our national history', it also caused many writers and painters to question their ability to interpret and represent place adequately.[9] The Australian painter Geoff Levitus poses this problem by describing his difficulty in painting a NSW landscape, held up by the realisation that, despite his 'yearning to belong', as a white Australian his relationship with place is simply not 'deep' enough.[10] This yearning to belong, for Levitus as for many others, is tied to a feeling of fundamental illegitimacy for any who are not indigenous. For many contemporary Australian writers and painters, legitimate representation is intertwined with feelings of personal legitimacy within place — with the persistent problem of *belonging*. Read suggests that many writers now find themselves at something of an 'ideological impasse', leading to 'self doubt' and even 'potential paralysis'.[11] Writing about Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Terry Goldie further suggests that white settler writers' desire to belong can only be satisfied by the 'impossible necessity of becoming indigenous'.[12] Attempts to 'indigenise' place abound in such texts,

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[9] Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

[10] Geoff Levitus, quoted in Read, p. 4.

[11] Read, pp. 4–5.

[12] Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 13.

but these too are problematic, overridden as they are by concerns (sometimes voiced by the writers themselves) that 'belonging might somehow provide the moral grounds for illegitimate ownership'.[13]

More difficult still for would-be nature writers in the first decades of the twenty-first century is the fact that social injustice is not the only problem when thinking about natural environments. Concern about continuing environmental problems that result from, e.g., land clearing, invasive species, logging, mining, chemical pollution and urbanisation has been joined in recent decades by growing anxiety about anthropogenic climate change. Both Australia and Canada still rank in the top fifteen countries for carbon dioxide emissions per capita.[14] This is a material issue, but also one of perception and representation — a question of frames and framings. Val Plumwood, for example, links environmental problems to ongoing histories of rationalism and the continued propensity towards a human/nature dichotomy in which the natural continues to be perceived and represented as separate and distanced from the human (and the cultural), thereby 'creat[ing] ideals of culture and human identity that promote human distance from, control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature'.[15]

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[13] Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. ix.

[14] The World Bank, World Development Indicators (2015), *CO2 emissions (kg per PPP $ of GDP)*. [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PP.GD> [accessed 10 January 2016].

[15] Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.

The concept of 'nature' is of course inherently complex and problematic, leading some exasperated critics to argue that the term should be avoided entirely.[16] This thesis insists, on the contrary, that retaining the term is useful as long as it is used in a non-essentialist and open way. Indeed, an appropriately critical consideration of the term is vital, not least in environmental aesthetics. As Timothy Clark writes,

> [f]or an environmental critic, every account of a natural, semi-natural or urban landscape must represent an implicit re-engagement with what 'nature' means or could mean, with the complex power and inheritance of this term and with its various implicit projections what of human identity is in relation to the non-human, with ideas of the wild, of nature as refuge or nature as resource, nature as the space of the outcast, of sin and perversity, nature as a space of metamorphosis or redemption.[17]

Intertwined with these issues, aesthetic considerations and representative strategies have long been part of debates about environment and land use in both Australia and Canada, from former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott's attacks on 'ugly', 'noisy', 'visually awful' wind turbines to the Minerals Council of Australia's 'Little Black Rock' campaign's glitzy presentation of shimmering

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[16] See Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 21.

[17] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 6.

close-up images of a lump of coal.[18] Aesthetics often drive politics; or political

positions find themselves expressed through or associated with aesthetic

positions. As I will explore in this introductory chapter, such aesthetic judgements

and strategies are largely inherited. More specifically, I will suggest that popular

aesthetic models of nature today can be traced to founding developments in

modern British aesthetics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which

took nature as a paradigmatic object.[19] Of these developments, theories of the

natural in close association with the picturesque, and the modes of viewing and

representing they produced, were integral to the colonisation of both Australia and

Canada.[20] Picturesque modes of viewing were characteristic of early settler

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[18] Tony Abbott, quoted in Latika Bourke, 'Awful and noisy: Tony Abbott slams wind farms during interview with Alan Jones', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 2015 <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/awful-and-noisy-tony-abbott-slams-wind-farms-during-interview-with-alan-jones-20150610-ghl7m0.html> [Accessed 1 February 2016]. The Minerals Council of Australia's advertising campaign can be found at 'Little Black Rock', Minerals Council of Australia, <http://www.littleblackrock.com.au> [Accessed 1 February 2016].

[19] For an excellent history of British aesthetics, see Timothy Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For links between picturesque and modern popular viewing habits, see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), vii; also Allan Carlson, *Nature and Landscape,* p. 2.

[20] For a discussion of picturesque aesthetics and colonial Canada and Australia, see Susan Glickman, *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); also Caroline Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits: Colonial Women Artists and the Amateur Tradition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005). For a more general discussion of dominant aesthetics in colonial travel writing, see Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 1770–1840 (Oxford: Oxford University

representations in paintings, photographs, and travel writing, and they persist today in those modes associated with the contemporary tourist gaze.[21] While it would be misleading to suggest that these modes and models remain essentially intact, in many significant ways eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British writers would invent enduring aspects of the 'nature' that we (as putative and actual consumers of twenty-first century nature writing) still inhabit. Attempts to find more appropriate, inclusive ways of viewing and valuing nature have dominated contemporary environmental aesthetics, as I will now examine in more detail below.

Nature Writing

The subject of study in this thesis is contemporary Australian and Canadian nature writing. More specifically, the thesis offers a critical study of aesthetic constructions of place in a wide range of works written since the millennium. These include Germaine Greer's *White Beech* (2014), Tim Winton's *Island Home* (2015)*,* and Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart* (2000), along with works by Candace Savage, Mark Tredinnick, Karsten Heuer, Charlotte Gill and Maya Ward. All of these works would usually be classified as 'nature writing', but this has long been a contested label and the genre remains notoriously difficult to define. Perhaps the best that can be said is that the term 'nature writing' is generally used to refer to creative non-fiction, often written in the first person as a memoir or travel account (but often also combining science, history, or poetry),

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Press, 2004); also Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[21] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 4.

which seeks to document the protagonist's experiences of largely non-human environments: the so-called 'natural world'.[22] Broadly speaking, the works in this study fit this generic description: all are memoirs; all are set (for the most part) within environments that are sparsely populated by humans; and all are actively involved in the literary construction of place.

Nature writing is also often described as involving a pastoral element of retreat and return. In the literary works to be examined in this thesis, this tends to manifest itself in a variation on the transformation narrative in which the protagonist undergoes the shift from a detached outsider to a person with more knowledge about — and connection to — the land and its history, and a more defined sense of belonging to the place or places where he/she lives. This transformation also takes place at the level of aesthetics. Frequently this takes the form of a text whose narrative is initially motivated by the narrator's dissatisfaction with the pre-existing relationship between subject and

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[22] Useful discussions hallmarks of the genre in Canada and Australia can be found in David Boyd, Ed., *Northern Wild: The Best Contemporary Canadian Nature Writing* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2001); Harry Thurston, Ed., *The Sea's Voice: An Anthology of Atlantic Canadian Nature Writing* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2005), and Mark Tredinnick, Ed., *A Place on Earth: An Anthology of Nature Writing from Australia and North America* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003). Further afield, full-length studies of American nature writing include Don Scheese's *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* (New York: Routledge, 2002); while a study of contemporary British and Irish nature writing is due to appear soon from Jos Smith, *The New Nature Writing: Rethinking Place in Contemporary Literature* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming).

surroundings, but then proceeds by way of a transformation in the subject's mode of perception — including perception of the environment itself.

Much contemporary nature writing, however, is confronted by a paradox. As suggested above, some nature writers may continue to search for a 'truthful' framing of place that depends on the 'right' vantage point, but at the same time they are uncomfortably aware that the 'right' vantage point is indefinable, and that any representation of place is inherently partial and potentially manipulative as a result. This constitutive tension has been a major preoccupation of recent nature writing in Australia and Canada. The texts I will examine in this thesis all give self-conscious attention to the question of how their respective author-protagonists' relationship with the land should be envisaged, asking in the process what an appropriate way to interpret and construct place might look like: what might constitute the appropriate aesthetic vantage point. As we will see later, this attentiveness is not just a feature of the texts, but in several cases becomes *the* central concern and subject of the text.

Such concerns are a manifestation of the wider understanding within environmental aesthetics that finding an appropriate way to configure natural environments is crucial to advocating for material decisions made about them. This concern also haunts ecocriticism: as Jenny Kerber writes, 'for ecocritics, an ethical commitment to act on behalf of a material world perceived to be in considerable environmental trouble rests (sometimes uncomfortably) alongside

the belief that we live in a world inevitably shaped by discourse'.[23] This is a problem of specific relevance to the texts to be studied in this thesis. Much recent work in ecocriticism and related fields has focused on bridging the material/discursive divide, from Richard Rorty's anti-representationalism and Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' and 'naturecultures' to Susan Whatmore's notions of 'hybridity'.[24] This thesis builds in part on the collective argument that, in Kerber's words, 'it now makes little sense to ground environmental politics using rhetoric based on an idea of the natural as wholly discrete from culture and technology'.[25]

Nature writing genres from Canada and Australia appear, at first glance, to emerge from very different traditions. Canadian nature writing has a long history linked to some extent to autochthonous traditions (e.g. the early work of Catherine Parr Trail and other Anglo settlers), but also to the dominant American tradition of nature writing that is usually associated with Henry David Thoreau.[26] Indeed, writers in Canada have been, and to a large extent still are, overshadowed by those in the US: as the Canadian anthologist David Boyd ruefully comments, '[nature] writers are much less famous even in Canada than their counterparts to the

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[23] Jenny Kerber, *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), pp. 12–13.

[24] See Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers,* Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Susan Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

[25] Kerber, p. 13.

[26] See David Boyd, 2. See also Harry Thurston, p. 3.

south'.[27] Nature writing in Canada has tended to spring from, and seek support in, local and regional traditions (e.g. prairie writing or Atlantic Canadian writing), though more recent texts have a national purview (e.g. Allan Casey's *Lakeland*). In Australia, by contrast, contemporary nature writing is an emergent genre. Picturesque *travel* texts abounded during the colonial period, but as late as 2003, Mark Tredinnick suggested that Australian *nature* writing is 'hardly known'.[28] However, thanks to Tredinnick and several others, some of whose works will feature in this thesis, nature writing in Australia has been transformed over the last couple of decades, and it is now increasingly seen as one of Australia's most important non-fiction genres.[29]

While I recognise these and other equally significant differences between the two national traditions, I argue that a comparative approach to nature writing has much to offer. Australia and Canada, superficially at least, share *histories* that are bound up with their *geographies*. Both had similar colonial settlement patterns, both enjoy similar income per capita levels, and both face many comparable social justice issues (in particular regarding indigenous rights). The two countries share some physical characteristics as well: large landmasses with

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[27] Boyd, 2.

[28] Tredinnick, *A Place on Earth*, p. 29.

[29] Notable recent examples for which space cannot be found in this thesis include Don Watson, *The Bush: Travels in the Heart of Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2015), and Nicolas Rothwell, *Journeys to the Interior* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2010)

low population densities; populations concentrated along the coast; and large, relatively inaccessible tracts of less-inhabited land.[30]

Such broad parallels allow for a comparative study that is not overridden by major cultural dissimilarities. More than this, though, a closer examination of nature writing from Australia and Canada clearly shows that representations of the local (long thought to be the staple of nature writing) are connected to wider international issues. In a comparative study of images of the indigene written nearly twenty years ago, Terry Goldie noted that 'many of the issues we tend to deem innately Canadian are also Australian'.[31] This is all the more the case in contemporary nature writing from Australia, Canada, and for that matter other formerly colonised countries, where a new engagement with the politics of representation has seen writers self-critically engage with inherited colonial modes of viewing.[32] Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that one of the distinctive features of recent Australian and Canadian nature writing has been its critical engagement with ways of seeing and describing nature that were developed during the colonial period, in particular in debates surrounding picturesque aesthetics, which in turn influenced travel and nature writing.

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[30] More details of the similarities between Australia and Canada can be found in Kylie Crane, *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Prose Texts: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 7–8.

[31] Goldie, p. vii.

[32] As Goldie observes, not entirely accurately, '[w]hether the context is Canada, New Zealand, or Australia becomes a minor issue since the game […] is all happening on one form of board, within one field of discourse, that of British imperialism'. Goldie, p. 10.

In this context, it becomes possible to see contemporary Australian and Canadian nature writers as involved in the task of reframing the picturesque, whether explicitly or implicitly. Typically, their texts take some of the familiar tropes of picturesque travel writing (the wandering solo traveller, notebook in hand; the distanced observer; the watercolourist's pleasant landscape; the amateur philosopher's contrastive conceptions of 'new' and 'old' environments) and consciously or unconsciously rework them. Some conventionally picturesque practices are preserved or reclaimed, while others are actively challenged or qualified. Implied readers of the texts are expected to undergo a similar transformation, of attitude as well as perspective; and it seems reasonable to suppose that many 'real' readers also do so, though without detailed empirical research this is difficult to prove.

Aesthetic Construction and Aesthetic Politics

Notwithstanding, this thesis is motivated by the belief that aesthetic, in this case literary, constructions of largely non-human environments can help create alternative — potentially though not necessarily more equitable and/or sustainable — models of viewing and valuing places; as such, whether for good or for ill, aesthetics is tied to real-world demands. As David Orr writes in a different context, 'we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by *the experience of beauty* in all its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty or even fear'.[33] Aesthetic literacy — which relates not just to the beautiful, of course, but to aesthetic value more widely — is thus crucial to

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[33] David Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.

avoiding a tacit acceptance of the status quo.

In this thesis, my primary aim is to compare contemporary Australian and Canadian authors' different conceptions of frame and vantage point. I am interested, that is, in *how* places are aesthetically constructed, but also in *what* aesthetic frameworks and values lie behind these constructions. I am also interested in the relationship between them. To put this another way, the thesis offers a study of literal and metaphorical views of 'nature' and how these both inform and are informed by the various environmental models that have over time contributed to people's complex, often contradictory understandings of belonging, ownership, land rights, resource extraction and conservation in a manifestly divided and uneven world.

More particularly, this study aims to provide a detailed analysis of its respective authors' aesthetic construction of place, whereby specific places are described alternatively (sometimes simultaneously) as beautiful, ugly, grand, terrifying, inviting, homely and hostile. Authors are described seeing (and, less often, hearing, smelling, feeling), inspecting, mapping, visualising, dreaming and experiencing. In moments of reversal and learning, or simply in more mundane accounts of learning and experience, the texts describe the moment where one worldview or 'way of seeing' rubs up against another, with confusion or conflict often being the result.[34]

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[34] See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972).

A second objective of the study is to consider the ethical and political implications of these aesthetic constructions. In works of nature writing, perhaps even more than in other genres, the 'ecopolitical' cannot be separated from the 'ecopoetic'. [35] Indeed, this thesis holds as one of its core assumptions that aesthetic autonomy, the putative separation of art from everyday life and politics, is untenable. Aesthetic production and contemplation are, as Elizabeth Bohls puts it, 'inextricable from the intricately articulated interests, conscious or unconscious, of the individuals who use and modify symbolic systems even as they are produced as subjects in and by them'. [36] In other words, authors, whether knowingly or not, necessarily engage in a form of politics in their writing. This is acutely the case in nature writing, which directly confronts the complicated relationship between writing as protest, writing as commercial endeavour, and writing as art. This is not to suggest a purely instrumental view of art and literature, but rather to claim that political and aesthetic functions can be held in productive tension; or, as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin put it, 'postcolonial and eco/environmental writing, even if it is directed towards specific goals e.g. the desire to protect wilderness, or to promote the rights of abused animals and/or peoples, is always likely to transcend its categorisation as "protest literature", while not even in its most direct forms is it a transparent document of exploitation or a propagandistic blueprint for the liberation of the oppressed'. [37]

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[35] See Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 42.

[36] Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818,* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 80.

[37] Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism,* p. 14.

Colonial and Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics

The purposes of this thesis offered so far are relatively general intentions motivated by the view that questions of frame, truth, and vantage point are integral to nature writing. As suggested above, however, I set these issues in a multidisciplinary context, taking a philosophical and literary-historical approach to explore how recent Australian and Canadian nature writing engages with both contemporary and historical environmental aesthetics, seen especially though not exclusively in colonial and/or postcolonial terms. In so doing, I want to explore the aesthetic frameworks and strategies behind particular authors' construction of place, as well as the potential implications of these strategies; and I want to set these strategies in the context of some of the theories developed within environmental aesthetics — a subset of analytic philosophy — over the last fifty years. The questions of 'frame' and 'vantage point', which as explained above are central to contemporary nature writing, find striking echoes in the field of environmental aesthetics.[38] Writers and thinkers in this field have worked towards developing aesthetic frameworks for so-called natural environments, with a particular focus on how environments can be appreciated 'appropriately', and what these appropriate appreciation skills might look like. For example, within the popular framework of scientific cognitivism, aesthetic appreciation of natural landscapes should be informed by knowledge of natural history, geology, biology and ecology.[39] Many of these frameworks are put together with the express intention of influencing policy on land use and conservation: aesthetic questions are, for many aestheticians, explicitly political. As I will discuss in more detail

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[38] See Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, pp. 22–24.

[39] Ibid., p. 11.

below, there has also been a move by a number of theorists towards an explicit normative discourse of aesthetics that might be used towards pedagogical or political ends — in Marcia Eaton's terms, the development of an 'aesthetic ought': 'Creating sustainable environments necessitates asking not just what people do find beautiful but what they should find beautiful'.[40]

I also treat as foundational some of the theories of modern British aesthetics, particularly those surrounding the picturesque. These discussions, which were characterised by an intense focus on the meaning of nature and its representation, underpinned colonial travel and landscape writing in Australia and Canada, and have remained influential in the nominally postcolonial period. As Susan Glickman asserts, 'Just as the exploration and occupation of [Canada] by Europeans coincided with the scientific revolution, so the writing of English poetry in Canada coincided with another revolution that saw "Nature" become the chief term of aesthetic and moral approval'.[41] Glickman is referring here to the philosophical developments of modern British aesthetics, which took 'nature' as a paradigmatic object. These developments reached their peak in debates regarding the picturesque, which may be defined as that particular 'set of theories, ideas and conventions which grew up around the question of how we look at landscape' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[42] The aesthetic values developed, systematised, and popularised during this period were formative for

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[40] Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 176.

[41] Susan Glickman, p. ix.

[42] Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, *The Politics of the Picturesque* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. iv.

generations of white settlers in Britain's colonies, and they remain encoded in our aesthetic language and our habits of viewing and representing 'nature' today. Glickman argues accordingly that imported notions of the sublime and the picturesque have directed 'home-grown' representations of Canadian landscape (as it appears in English-Canadian poetry, for instance) for the last two hundred years.

Still, more work is required on the historical and, especially, colonial contexts for contemporary nature writing in both Australia and Canada. As I aim to show, picturesque heritage relates to those accoutrements of picturesque theory that are characterised by a two-dimensional, 'scenic' view of nature — a view which, as Alison Byerly and others have described, remains influential in the modern industry of landscape tourism, has some say in national parks management, and still affects some conservation decisions.[43] As I will in turn describe below, the key questions raised in eighteenth-century debates on the picturesque about the meaning of 'nature', associationist aesthetics, and the transformative power of aesthetic strategy are still influential in contemporary aesthetic models that have nominally rejected their picturesque heritage, and certainly they underlie questions of frame and vantage point posed in contemporary nature writing. Neither contemporary environmental aesthetics nor contemporary nature writing, with the former colonies of Australia and Canada providing ample illustrative examples, can be separated from these aesthetic

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[43] Alison Byerly, 'The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 52–68.

models, and the political and ethical questions they raise still need to be answered today.

Two particular illustrations of how these frameworks manifest themselves in contemporary nature writing are useful here. First, while some aspects of contemporary nature writing can be seen as perpetuating picturesque modes of viewing, others seem to be reacting against certain of these values. For example, the attempt on the part of contemporary nature writers to develop a multi-sensory engagement with their environment, with non-Cartesian frames of viewing, and with natural/cultural notions of hybridity, can be seen as a useful space in which to test the limits of frameworks offered by aestheticians. One characteristic and frequently recurring strategy in these texts is the construction of a kind of 'provisional omniscience': a repeated layering or superimposition of multiple viewpoints and disciplines directed — in theory at least, though generally with full awareness of the impossibility of its fulfillment — towards a complete 'map' or 'archaeology' of an area of land and its human and natural histories. A version of this technique is referred to by Jos James Owen Smith as 'archipelagic literature' and by Susan Naramore Maher as 'deep mapping'.[44]

I use the term 'provisional' because of a characteristic uncertainty displayed. As the hoped-for omniscient frame is impossible, authors respond by

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[44] See Susan Naramore Maher, *Deep Map Country: Literary Cartography of the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), and Jos James Owen Smith, 'An Archipelagic Environment: Re-Writing the British and Irish Landscape, 1972–2012' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2012).

expressing a certain contingency or open-endedness in their representations of place, and of their own position within it. This contingency may be thought of in turn as a type of non-violence: a deliberate refusal to subscribe to and promote a single view that would necessarily efface alternatives. It would be possible to fall here into the kind of postmodern circularity where all claims to reality are discarded in favour of relativistic representations that ultimately appear insular, even nihilistic. This reflects Read's previously mentioned concern that, in the face of potentially overwhelming complexity, the 'safe boundaries of self doubt' may lead to paralysis. However, while not always successful, these works do open up a space for questioning the notion of truth, enquiring critically into the nature of the discourses that drive beliefs about land and land use.

Second, an emergent strategy consists of the attempt to negotiate between 'academic' and 'popular' ways of viewing, whereby writers appear to use picturesque or other conventional aesthetic devices to lure the reader, before exposing fatal flaws within those devices or using them towards non-conventional ends. This strategy engages with the perceived 'translation' power of associationist aesthetics, which underpins both the picturesque and some contemporary normative aesthetic models.[45] This is in some ways opposed to the approach described above, i.e. it is necessarily provisional but also overtly pedagogical, enacting an 'aesthetic ought'. There are both historical and contemporary examples here: for example, the Australian environmental historian

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[45] Yuriko Saito, 'Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics', in *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground*, ed. by Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 25–40 (pp. 34–35).

Tim Bonyhady has shown how colonial art in Australia was deployed in aid of early conservation efforts for gum trees that were seen by some as alien, unvaried, and un-picturesque;[46] while, more recently, Susan Herrington has argued that picturesque associations can and have been explicitly used to represent landscapes traditionally considered 'ugly' in a more positive light for conservation purposes.[47]

I have been attempting so far to outline the critical focus of this study, isolating its central questions and its theoretical contexts. To repeat, this thesis is interested in the aesthetic construction of place: whether it is possible to represent place in a way which avoids absolutes — or which does little more than entrench the values of a privileged minority — and yet maintains the capacity to distinguish between more and less appropriate modes of viewing and representing, showing further how these representations might help shape alternative environmental relations or provide alternative views of place. As might be expected in this context, my analytical approach to the texts covers multiple planes. On the one hand, this is a literary study informed by some of the ecocritical and postcolonial critical approaches that have developed over the last half-century; on the other, it is equally informed by both contemporary and historical environmental aesthetic philosophies. At this point, I want to set out a more detailed account of the most important concepts in this study and show their

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[46] Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), pp. 8–9.

[47] Susan Herrington, *On Landscapes* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 92–93. Further discussion of the importance of picturesque theories on contemporary landscapes can be found in Susan Herrington, 'Framed Again: The Picturesque Aesthetics of Contemporary Landscapes', *Landscape Journal,* 25.1 (2006), pp. 22–37.

relevance to my readings. First, I will give a general account of the history and influence of picturesque theory, and of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century loco-descriptive writing more widely; and second, I will give an overview of contemporary environmental aesthetics, outlining its most relevant concerns.

The Picturesque

In a thesis about Australian and Canadian writing in the twenty-first century, it may seem obscure to turn to debates, happening far from either of these places, about an aesthetic category that was already widely considered to be hackneyed by the mid-nineteenth century. While the popular meaning of the term 'picturesque' has been relatively stable since its early (eighteenth-century) British appearances — broadly, 'suitable for representation in a (landscape) painting' — a technical definition has never been agreed upon. As Walter John Hipple explains in his 1957 treatise, the term was 'fitted into a variety of systems of aesthetics', and 'acquired a corresponding variety of meanings' in which these 'differences [were] never reconciled'.[48] Its four most vocal and influential theorists — Reverend William Gilpin (1724–1804), Sir Uvedale Price (1747–1829), Richard Payne Knight (1715–1824), and gardener Humphry Repton (1752–1818) — developed the theory through a series of often contradictory essays on the meaning of the term, as well as through published accounts of picturesque tours and guides for the picturesque gardener or tourist. However, as Stephen Copley and Peter Garside note, 'it can be argued that the cultural

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[48] Walter John Hipple, Jr, *The Beautiful, The Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 188.

importance of the picturesque is in direct proportion to the theoretical imprecision of its vocabulary'.[49]

As mentioned above, the influence of the picturesque on 'scenic' views of nature is well recognised, being associated with the sorts of pictorial stereotypes we see again and again today: on postcards, on Instagram, and in travel magazines. Travellers search out particular viewing areas, take a photo, send it home, with part of the enjoyment being familiarity: as Malcolm Andrews points out regarding the phrase 'pretty as a picture', 'we hardly bother to ask "*what* picture?" We just accept that the scene has been accorded a high aesthetic status, since it evidently conforms with standard pictorial representations of beauty'.[50] As Alison Byerly and others have suggested, modern scenic tourism, national parks management, and conservation are all indebted to some extent to this picturesque legacy.[51] I am interested in it, too, but there are further considerations that this thesis seeks to engage with. Let me look now at four key points where historical debates surrounding the picturesque parallel contemporary environmental concerns.

First and foremost, early theories of the picturesque were explicitly designed to find an aesthetic category for the 'natural'. Initially, the picturesque was intended to expand the Burkean category of the 'beautiful' so as to allow for an appreciation of the more rugged and varied forms of beauty associated with

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[49] Copley and Garside, p. 1.

[50] Andrews, *Searching for the Picturesque*, p. vii.

[51] Byerly, pp. 52–68. See also Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, pp. 16–18.

nature (in time, the category was allowed its own individual short-lived place alongside the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime'). These early theories of the picturesque were a reaction against the Lancelot 'Capability' Brown school of landscape improvement, which was felt to advocate landscapes that were too smooth, too unchanging, too 'beautiful'; and that were lacking in the roughness, irregularity, and variety that had become the hallmarks of the picturesque. Capability Brown's landscapes were a 'rape' of nature, so critics argued, whereas the picturesque was closer to and more representational of nature, associated with 'real landscape' rather than 'ideal beauty'.[52] For William Gilpin, nature was the archetype: 'If we are unable to embody our ideas even in a humble sketch, yet still a strong *impression of nature* will allow us to judge of the *works of art*. Nature is the archetype. The stronger therefore the impression, the better the judgement'.[53]

Second, like many of the writers and aesthetic philosophers discussed in this study, these discussions were from the first tied to *practical* concerns, linked to questions about how environments should be treated, in this case through landscape gardening. If nature was for Gilpin the archetype, that need not (and absolutely did not) mean *untouched* nature. Instead, advocates of the picturesque emphasised the importance of judicious improvement (either when gardening or when painting or writing a particular scene). The picturesque ought to look more 'natural', but only via human improvement: a constitutive paradox whereby

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[52] Ann Bermingham, *Nature and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 67.

[53] William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travel, and on Sketching Landscape: to which is added a poem, on landscape painting* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), p. 53.

improvers sought, in Costelloe's words, 'to make the landscape […] look more like its natural self'.[54] The problem for many contemporary commentators was the level of artifice involved in creating a so-called 'natural scene' (artifice that continues to be involved, as Byerly shows, in some aspects of modern national parks management). At the peak of picturesque gardening theory, Repton advocated that the picturesque 'landscape gardener' — a perfect combination of landscape painter and practical gardener — should create an image of ideal nature, but hide any signs of improvement: 'the perfection of landscape gardening, depends on a concealment on those operations of *art* by which nature is embellished'.[55] In other words, the picturesque gardener's task is to create a form of 'ideal nature' that does not, 'in nature', exist.

While these were not fully designed landscapes like Brown's, they involved, as Malcolm Andrews puts it, 'careful management of nature's spontaneous developments […] an adumbration of a later century's conservation'.[56] In other words, the picturesque, with its interest in (and sometimes unalloyed enjoyment of) the evidence of human presence, is very different from, even in opposition to, nineteenth-century North American conceptions of wilderness — the legacy of John Muir and the Sierra Club, which favoured a 'positive aesthetics' whereby 'pristine' natural environments, untouched by human hands, should have only or mainly positive aesthetic

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[54] Timothy Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 138.

[55] Humphrey Repton, quoted in Costelloe, p. 160.

[56] Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 70.

features.[57] This positive aesthetics can be linked to the preservationist ideologies particularly popular in the third quarter of the twentieth century, which sought to protect areas of 'untouched' nature and resist human change. As I will go on to show (see especially Chapter Four), Australia and Canada share a dual legacy of conservationist and preservationist ideologies.[58]

Among other things, this legacy has implications for the way nature writing is approached today, and also how it is seen historically. Contemporary nature writing — at least in its non-fictional prose form — is most often regarded as having emerged from the North American tradition of Thoreau, Emerson, and Muir, and is associated with notions of wilderness, positive aesthetics, and a relationship with preservationism. This is certainly true, but one of the suggestions this thesis makes is the need to acknowledge the wider contexts for modern nature writing in English, which includes the many picturesque versions of Australia and Canada to be found in early European settler accounts.

This brings me to my third key parallel. The picturesque engages specifically with how practical issues of land use are tied to *representational* questions. Eighteenth-century debates surrounding the picturesque often focused, for example, on the transformative power of the aesthetic in a way that explicitly foreshadowed current moral considerations of the 'aesthetic ought'. The

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[57] On positive aesthetics, see Carlson and Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 16; also Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 6.

[58] See for example William Mark Adams and Martin Mulligan, eds, *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2003), p. 8.

'improvements' suggested by the early proponents of the picturesque were not only physical, e.g. genuine changes to a landscape, but also representational. In the heyday of picturesque tourism, travellers sought out views to be painted according to picturesque guidelines. Nature would provide a model that, as Gilpin advised, is 'seldom so correct in composition, as to produce a harmonious whole'; it was therefore the role of the artist to make any necessary picturesque improvements to the original.[59] As Costelloe explains:

> Gilpin's picturesque is a development of the thought dominant from Hutcheson onward that representation bring its own kind of pleasure and does so through creating a species of beauty — in this case, "picturesque beauty" — that can exist nowhere but in the artifice of fictional wholes that lack corresponding originals. Objects and scenes in the "natural state" cannot be picturesque because the species of beauty they involve exists only in a world conjured through paint on canvas or words on a page, constructions composed of elements that the lens of the "picturesque eye" has isolated, rearranged, and combined.[60]

Ultimately, then, picturesque is not just a descriptive aesthetic category but also a mode of representing, even a mode of viewing. As Costelloe suggests, the picturesque in this guise gives 'imagination free rein' to make changes to any given scene.[61] For Gilpin meanwhile, the imagination was a mode of 'active

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[59] Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye* (London, 1782), p. 31.

[60] Costelloe, p. 142.

[61] Ibid*.*, p.144.

power [that] embodies half-formed images, which it rapidly combines; and often composes landscapes, perhaps more beautiful, if the imagination be well-stored, than any that can be found in Nature herself'.[62] Eventually, the viewer would not see the physical scene before him (or in his Claude Glass), but instead what his imagination made of it.

This theory can be better understood in the context of influential theories of associationist aesthetics, e.g. those of Archibald Alison (1757–1839), from which the picturesque emerged. In Alison's theory of association, while some objects might be 'naturally expressive', others became so through human understanding of them, through their cognitive connections: 'MATTER is not beautiful in itself, without reference to the MIND; and that its beauty arises from the expressions which an intelligent mind connects with, and perceives in it'.[63] For the contemporaneous picturesque theorist Richard Payne Knight, this association was often something largely unconscious, developed early in life: 'those ideas, which we have once associated, associating themselves again in our memories of their own accord, and presenting themselves together to our notice, whether we will or not'.[64] Knight, like Gilpin, emphasised the transformative power of the picturesque eye. Talented viewers were thus enjoined to render 'un-picturesque' views picturesque by improving them in accordance with their ideal, rejecting unsuitable versions. Going one step further, Knight and others suggested

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[62] Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, p. 64.

[63] Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (Edinburgh, 1790), p. 411.

[64] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London, 1805), p. 132.

that educated and literate viewers, who were familiar with such moves, would find more pleasure in the 'imperfect' objects of nature through their unconscious association with their 'ideal' representations in art and literature. In Knight's words, '[t]he spectator, having his mind enriched with the embellishments of the painter and the poet, applies them, by the spontaneous association of ideas, to the natural objects presented to his eye, which thus acquire ideal and imaginary beauties'.[65] One example of the transformative power of the picturesque can be seen in early picturesque writing in Australia: thus, while early settlers saw few signs of picturesque association in an environment almost invariably seen as 'unvaried' and 'uninteresting', examples of picturesque language use were used to rehabilitate an alien landscape into a valued one considered worthy of conservation.

As we will see shortly, the links between the transformative power of the picturesque association and that of the contemporary 'aesthetic ought' are clear; but before moving to present-day theories, I want to make one final parallel in this brief excursus into the history of picturesque thought. This concerns, once again, the quandary of how to 'frame place' appropriately. As proponents of the picturesque would have it, the 'correct' view could only be seen by those who had an 'appropriate' set of associations, who knew the paintings and writings necessary to enjoy it properly. In other words, they had to be educated and literate, a classical education being the necessary 'piece of intellectual equipment' with which to appreciate a landscape.[66]

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[65] Ibid., p. 154.

[66] Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 3.

Those able to 'see' and 'represent' landscape properly must, therefore, come from a certain background (again, this parallels some contemporary positions that have nominally rejected associationist thought). In practice, this meant aesthetic appreciation was a fully acknowledged class, gender, and race privilege. As Elizabeth Bohls has described it, eighteenth-century theorists were 'fully aware that comfortable material circumstances are needed to appreciate art, beauty or sublimity in the specially valued ways they describe'.[67] Critics like Bohls and art historian John Barrell have argued that this class privilege originated in the underlying tenet of disinterestedness, as developed by (among others) the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and especially Immanuel Kant.[68] In theory, this concept provided the basis for critical objectivity: those who did not have a vested interest could acquire a disinterested, rational view, and thus make decisions for the public good. However, Bohls points to a 'consistent pairing' of 'a distancing and abstracting impulse, nominally disconnecting aesthetic reception from practical affairs, and a careful specification of the aesthetic perceiver's social identity'.[69] As a result, disinterested aesthetic judgement and representation — then as now — could be seen to entrench class, race, and gender privilege.

One particularly pernicious example of this can be seen in historical accounts of the picturesque. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside discuss how

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[67] Bohls, p. 69.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., p. 71.

'picturesque habits of viewing, representing, or constructing aesthetically pleasing subjects […] have been seen to rest on the suppression of the interpretive and narrative signs which marked earlier representation'.[70] The associations relied on by the picturesque viewer are literary, historical, and formally artistic; and, like other aesthetic attributes, they are set up in explicit opposition to moral value. It becomes easy to see how the transformative power of the picturesque could be used to dubious ends. For example, a focus on the artistically pleasing aspects of a view could disguise indicators of poverty: a dilapidated cottage might show picturesque ruggedness, disguising the signs of the social inequality that was its root cause. Once we bear in mind that the picturesque is tied up with the natural, this has further ramifications: poverty is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also 'natural'. The inequality inherent in aesthetic discourse generally, and the picturesque particularly, is also implicated in colonial history. Writers like Mary Louise Pratt and John Berger have shown how aesthetics colluded in a variety of colonising practices, in part via the process of metaphorical appropriation, taking literary and artistic possession of landscapes;[71] while Bohls has described the 'aesthetic [donation] of legitimacy' to colonisation and even slavery in eighteenth-century travel writing.[72]

How are these issues still relevant today? The aesthetically pleasing is still largely associated with inherent value: we are more likely to donate to causes

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[70] Copley and Garside, p. 6.

[71] See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2008); also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972).

[72] Bohls, see particularly pp. 55–7.

featuring scenic landscapes or cute animals.[73] Aesthetic collusion in dispossession is also still, unsurprisingly, apparent: in one of many possible examples, a 1997 study of protests against desegregation in the Western Cape (South Africa) shows how these protests were framed using the language of environmental aesthetics, with the black settlement representing a 'blot' on the natural landscape.[74] These issues also feed into many questions in aesthetic philosophy today.

Environmental Aesthetics

The locus within philosophy where these questions have been crystallised is environmental aesthetics, a subset of analytic philosophy developed over the last fifty years or so. Emerging initially as a discipline in which to explore the aesthetics of natural environments, the field has more recently expanded to consider urban and other environments, up to and including the aesthetics of the everyday. Like its literary cousin, ecocriticism, environmental aesthetics is a relatively young discipline, which has only recently been seen as having come of age. The history of the discipline is parsed by those in the field as follows: while early European development of aesthetic theory (as partially surveyed above) focused primarily on nature as '*the* paradigm of aesthetic experience and judgment', from the end of the nineteenth century to the last third of the twentieth,

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[73] See Yuriko Saito, 'Future Directions for Environmental Aesthetics', in *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground*, ed. by Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 25–40, (p. 30).

[74] John Dixon, Steve Reicher, and Don H. Foster, 'Ideology, Geography, and Racial Exclusion: The Squatter Camp as 'Blot on the Landscape'', *Text and Talk*, 17:3 (1997), 317–348.

analytic aesthetics was dominated by art theory.[75] Contemporary models of analytic aesthetics were considered inappropriate and misleading for natural environments, which should be seen, as Ray Hepburn argued in a seminal 1966 article, as 'nature' rather than as a form of 'art', and that while current models were ineffective, formal philosophical aesthetic theory could still distinguish between 'trivial' and 'deep' ways of appreciating nature.[76] (One of the ongoing challenges for environmental aestheticians, as I will discuss below, is that the definition of 'nature' still needs to be more adequately addressed). Further, as J. Baird Callicott has since argued, 'a sound natural aesthetics [was] crucial to sound conservation policy and management'.[77]

Research since the 1970s has largely been working towards filling in this perceived 'theoretical vacuum',[78] responding to a felt need for an updated framework of environmental aesthetics that viewed nature appropriately (that is, 'as nature'), and that would consequently allow those involved in decision making about land use to have an alternative, either to reject the validity of aesthetic appreciation entirely, or to rely on outdated models 'unduly influenced by

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[75] See Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz, eds, *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground,* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 1; also Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 8.

[76] Ray Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', in *British Analytical Philosophy: International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method*, ed. by Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 195–209 (p. 199).

[77] J. Baird Callicott, quoted in Drenthen and Keulartz, p. 4.

[78] See Jay Appleton, 'Landscape Evaluation: The Theoretical Vacuum,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 66 (1975), 120-12.

traditions such as that of picturesque landscape appreciation' and fixated on scenery, scenic beauty, and formal aesthetic properties. [79] While most contemporary aesthetic philosophers agree that there *is* an appropriate way to approach environmental aesthetics, the jury is out on what form that approach should take. As Emily Brady puts it, if the artistic context is discarded, 'What frames our aesthetic interpretation and evaluation of buttercups and seascapes?'[80]

The multifarious responses to this question have generally been divided into two opposing camps, variously labelled as cognitive/conceptual (or occasionally 'science' positions) on one side, and non-cognitive/non-conceptual on the other.[81] Those in the cognitive camp, like Allan Carlson and Marcia Eaton, point to the importance of intellectual concepts — mainly science-based, though some models allow more holistic frames of reference for their interpretative knowledge pool, for example myth and folklore.[82] The non-cognitive thinkers, for their part, 'hold that something other than a cognitive component […] is the central feature of the aesthetic appreciation of environments'.[83] One of the most

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[79] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape,* p. 17.

[80] Emily Brady, 'Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56.2 (1998), 139–147 (p. 39).

[81] Carlson, p. 11. See also Allan Carlson and Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, and Susan Herrington, *On Landscapes*.

[82] Allan Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*; Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical.*

[83] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 12.

influential non-cognitive theorists, Emily Brady, focuses on the importance of imagination, while others like Noel Carroll stress the role of emotional arousal.[84]

There is a great deal of crossover between these two 'camps', and the distinction is not necessarily a useful one. While few if any current aestheticians could be pointed to as truly formalist (i.e. in the mould of Clive Bell), it is 'generally agreed among environmental aestheticians that context matters, as does genesis'.[85] It is worth stressing that nearly all models within environmental aesthetics are broadly aimed at defining an appropriate mode of looking or appreciating. There are few if any of what Jonathan Maskit labels 'empirical' or 'descriptivist' approaches to the field — i.e. approaches interested in purely phenomenological study.[86] All theorists, Yuriko Saito argues, 'agree that *something* more than mere sense perception is needed for aesthetic appreciation of nature'.[87] As Saito further points out, the debate focuses on the form of the correct view, not on whether there should be some distinction between better or worse appreciations. For example, while non-cognitivist Brady argues strenuously against the necessity of scientific knowledge for aesthetic response as being 'too limiting', her focus on the role of imagination nevertheless distinguishes between

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[84] Brady, p. 143; Noel Carroll, 'On Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History', in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts,* ed. by Salim Kemal (Dundee: University of Dundee Press, 1993), pp. 244–266.

[85] Jonathan Maskit, 'On Universalism and Cultural Historicism in environmental Aesthetics', in *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground*, ed. by Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 41–58 (p. 44).

[86] Ibid.

[87] Saito, pp. 33.

'imagining well' and 'trivial or irrelevant imagining'.[88] In other words, like their eighteenth-century forebears, nearly all take a normative view of aesthetics, and often, as Maskit points out, a universalist one.

This can be seen particularly acutely in Allan Carlson's 'natural environmental model' a.k.a. 'scientific cognitivism', one of the longest standing and most influential frameworks for environmental aesthetics today. While Carlson strongly rejects the picturesque inheritance of scenic framing and 'artistic' associations, his cognitive approach draws on the same fundamental tenet that knowledge/education is key to aesthetic appreciation. His is a model that subscribes to the concept of disinterestedness, but seeks to replace the set of artistic and other associations inherited from the picturesque with another 'scientific' set deemed more appropriate. As Carlson writes, 'just as the serious, appropriate aesthetic appreciation of art requires knowledge of art history and art criticism, the aesthetic appreciation of nature requires knowledge of natural history — that provided by the natural sciences, especially geology, biology, and ecology'.[89]

Another prominent proponent of a normative aesthetics, the Japanese American philosopher Yuriko Saito, argues that environmental aesthetics should take on a pedagogical role so as 'to cultivate aesthetic literacy and to promote vigilance regarding the ramifications of our aesthetic responses'.[90] Saito, among

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[88] Ibid., pp. 33–34.

[89] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 11.

[90] Saito, p. 31.

others, puts forward an argument for an essentially pragmatic use of aesthetics, labelled by David E. Cooper as 'the unashamedly "instrumentalist" approach'.[91] According to this approach, the pedagogical role of aesthetics is to use 'the power of the aesthetic for non-aesthetic purposes', like environmental sustainability.[92] Saito describes the process by way of the visually appealing but environmentally damaging 'perfect green lawn'.[93] While being aware of the harmful effects of a 'perfect green lawn' will not make it ugly rather than beautiful, she suggests its appearance may still alter in some way: 'for example from innocently beautiful to morbidly gorgeous or somewhat garish'.[94] Alternatively, viewers may recognise as a part of their aesthetic response the tension between the 'beautiful appearance' and 'invisible toxicity'.[95] Here again, the 'right set' of learned external information is needed for an appropriate aesthetic response, which has a transformative — here generally described as a 'translation' or 'fusion' — effect on the way a scene or object is aesthetically comprehended.[96] Both the transformative power of the aesthetic, as described by Saito, and the translation process between the cognitive and the sensuous have clear links to the associationism of the picturesque. In some cases, this is explicitly the case: as professor of landscape architecture Susan Herrington has argued, picturesque associations can be explicitly used to represent landscapes traditionally considered

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[91] Quoted in Saito, p. 38.

[92] Saito, p. 38.

[93] Saito, p. 34.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

ugly in a more positive light — for example, the transformation of 'swamps' into 'wetlands'.[97]

While there are clear potential benefits to this line of thinking, its underlying adherence to disinterestedness and universalism needs further consideration. Jonathan Maskit argues convincingly that one reason for this skewed emphasis is inherent in a long-held and somewhat fruitless division between analytic and continental philosophy: one characterised by 'a dispute about the role and import of culture and history for our understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit';[98] or, in Maskit's terms, between a 'universalist' approach which sees human beings and nature as stable concepts and a 'cultural historicist' approach which sees these concepts as historically and culturally fluid.[99] For Maskit, environmental aesthetics as a field would benefit from including figures writing outside English-language analytic philosophy, in particular Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger and, more recently, Adorno. An ongoing challenge for advocates of normative aesthetics is that any 'aesthetic ought' needs to contend with a definition of 'the natural' that might prove too rigid or unquestioning, too western-centric or anthropocentric. For example, while Carlson rejects the picturesque as an aesthetic category, it seems worth asking whether his attempt to create an aesthetic to fit environmentalist requirements involves the potential construction of similarly manipulating, privileged, and appropriative views, replacing the 'classical education' of the usually wealthy,

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[97] Herrington, *On Landscapes*, pp. 92–93.

[98] Maskit, p. 47.

[99] Ibid.

white, male picturesque viewer with the relatively unquestioned 'scientific education' of the modern-day one.

One attempt to bridge this divide can be found in the aesthetician Arnold Berleant's series of essays and books on the 'aesthetics of engagement'. Berleant rejects disinterestedness and the distanced gaze, claiming that these 'wrongly abstract both natural objects and appreciators from the environments in which they properly belong', and pushing instead for 'multisensory' experiences of place. In so doing, he aims to challenge traditional dichotomies 'between subject and object, beckoning appreciators to immerse themselves in the natural environment and to reduce to as small a degree as possible the distance between themselves and the natural world'.[100] In *Aesthetics and Environment* (2005), Berleant focuses explicitly on bridging the divide between universalism and relativism by developing a notion of 'generality' that recognises 'the singularity, the ultimately uniqueness [and] irreducible pluralism of cultural forms', and that 'acknowledges [that] whatever common structural pattern we may identify will be necessarily abstract and non-legislative'.[101] More recently, he has attempted to develop an 'ecological perspective' which considers environment as a 'system of interacting, interdependent and participating factors'.[102]

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[100] Carlson and Berleant, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment,* pp. 16–17.

[101] Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing: 2005), p. 110.

[102] See Arnold Berleant, 'The Cultural Aesthetics of Environment', in *Environmental Aesthetics: Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground*, ed. by Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 61–72.

Saito, too, while she bases her model largely in scientific cognivitism, acknowledges the potential anthropocentricity of western science and its basis in Baconian notions of progress and Cartesian dualism. She also notes that in many social constructivist arguments 'science organises, interprets, and analyses nature by means of our all-too-human conceptual scheme and vocabulary', saying that while she believes scientific frameworks are necessary, they alone are not adequate for aesthetic appreciation of nature.[103] Elsewhere, Saito argues that 'aesthetic disinterestedness and distancing, as well as aesthetic formalism, encouraged the aesthetic realm to be disconnected from the rest of life', a connection which she attempts to recover in her 'aesthetics of the everyday'.[104]

Despite her concerns, Saito argues that a normative aesthetics, allied to an instrumental approach, is still a necessary and viable option. She suggests that it is precisely because aesthetics can be used towards political ends that an 'aesthetic ought' should be discussed: '[i]f we do not promote an alternative "aesthetic ought," we are in effect supporting these existing "aesthetic oughts" by default'.[105] Saito argues that aesthetic dimensions are hugely influential in 'directing our thoughts and actions' and in 'determining the quality of life and the state of the world', pointing to the role of an instrumental environmental aesthetics in advertising and political propaganda (e.g. the eradication of non-

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[103] Yuriko Saito, 'Appreciating Nature on Its Own Terms', in *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, ed. by Allan Carlson and Arnold Berleant, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004) pp. 141–154 (p. 147).

[104] Saito, 'Future Directions', p. 30.

[105] Ibid., p. 36.

native plants in Nazi Germany).[106] For Saito, 'our aesthetics regarding everyday environment' has major ecological consequences on a number of levels: many people are still more attracted to the visually appealing, leaving areas more aesthetically unappealing less likely to receive attention or protection. By the same token, the 'dramatic aesthetic effects of environmental disaster [eclipse] the equally serious environmental harm resulting from the invisible effect of our daily activities'.[107] Saito points out that we continue to rate the aesthetically appealing as morally 'better', which also influences our behaviour — from environmentally deleterious 'perfect' green lawns to complaints against the 'eyesore' of wind turbines. Part of the pedagogical role of aesthetics, for her, is revelatory: 'to reveal this power of the aesthetic, both in its intentional utilisation for a certain purpose, such as a political agenda, and in the unintended and sometimes unforeseen consequences of our collective and cumulative aesthetic decisions'.[108]

Saito argues, moreover, that aesthetics cannot solve nor be expected to solve debates about an ideal life or society, but suggests rather that certain values be accepted (she lists 'a sustainable future' among these), and that aesthetic 'strategy' might be mobilised towards these goals.[109] She points to Arnold Berleant's proviso that this ought not be 'a call for a rigid plan or a prescriptive order […] Humane environments require time to develop and they must reflect local needs, conditions, and traditions'.[110] The aesthetician Arto Haapala extends

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[106] Ibid., p. 29.

[107] Ibid., p. 30.

[108] Ibid., p. 31.

[109] Ibid., p. 37.

[110] Berleant, quoted in Saito, 'Future Directions', p. 37.

this further by emphasising the need for cultural histories and cultural bridging in developing models for the aesthetic evaluation of place.[111] He contends that the aesthetic judgements of strangers are 'not any more objective than the judgment of those who see the environment as familiar'; that belonging or feeling 'at home' is part of aesthetic evaluation, and, as Maskit puts it, 'requires working out connections with place, which is a very different enterprise from trying to understand the place using the resources of science, where natural or social'.[112]

Language, Stories, and Place

Nature writing, as Berleant and Carlson suggest, 'receives less attention by philosophers concerned with aesthetics of nature than it deserves'.[113] Arguably, it can provide a more flexible and potentially dynamic space in which to explore the complex interrelationship between human stories and human language, and material environments. As the examples treated in this study show, nature writing is frequently concerned with the bridging of scientific and political concerns with cultural histories and feelings of personal legitimacy and belonging. Some reasons for this have been suggested in a large body of work in cultural geography that links language and narrative to the understanding of place. The cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, for example, advocates a 'narrative-descriptive' approach to place in which language is central: 'it is simply not possible to understand or

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[111] Arto Haapala, 'On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and Meaning of Place,' in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. by Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 38–55.

[112] Maskit, pp. 52–53.

[113] Carlson and Berleant, p. 24.

explain that physical motions produce place without overhearing, as it were, the speech — the exchange of words — that lie behind them'.[114] Narrative, for Tuan and others, is seen as central not only to the meaning and nature of place, but also to the 'lived experience of human-environment relations'.[115] Allan Pred's 'time-geographical' approach further suggests that place is not only always 'a human product', but is never static, fixed, or fully measurable: 'It is not only what is fleetingly observed on the landscape, a locale, or setting for activity and social interaction. It is also what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilisation of a physical setting'.[116]

These suggestions have obvious repercussions for nature writing, particularly in the formerly colonised territories of Australia and Canada where dominant narrative constructions of place have had devastating effects on indigenous populations and the environment. This supports the argument, well understood by postcolonial critics, that dominant narratives and other aesthetic constructions of place are not universal: nature cannot just be 'seen as nature' without in some way reflecting a particular language, culture, and vantage point. To recognise this contingency provides openings for possible alternative views: non-orthodox ways

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[114] Yi Fu Tuan, 'Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 81.4, 684–696 (pp. 685–686).

[115] See Andres Di Masso, John Dixon, and Kevin Durrheim, 'Place Attachment as Discursive Practice', in *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications*, ed. by Lynne C. Mazo and Patrick Devine-Wright (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 75–86 (p. 78).

[116] Allan Pred, 'Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 72:2 (1984), 279–297 (p. 279).

of speaking, writing, painting, interpreting. There remains an urgent need to listen to non-dominant narratives and modes of thinking.

In Australia and Canada, this requires paying close attention to indigenous stories and worldviews. Within the genre of nature writing (at least those full-length works that are marketed by contemporary publishers), works by indigenous authors are scarce.[117] Nonetheless, many of the writers in this study seek to listen to and learn from a multiplicity of indigenous worldviews, albeit with varying levels of success. The idea of the indigenous, along with generalised and (less commonly) individual accounts of indigenous worldviews, remains a common feature of contemporary Australian and Canadian nature writing. For some writers, like Candace Savage, this involves seeking help through extensive conversations with individuals to whom she also offers help in return. (These include Piyêso kâ-pêtowitak, also known as Jean Francis Oakes, whom Savage helps write and publish her own book).[118] For others, like Sharon Butala, the engagement is occasionally in person but more often at a distance, a largely imagined relationship with long-gone peoples.

For all of the writers in this study, there is an inherent danger that indigenous peoples remain as romanticised and unrealistic as they have ever been. Even in more culturally sensitive (e.g. postcolonial) re-framings, the image of the 'noble savage', common in nineteenth-century picturesque writing, continues,

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[117] There are exceptions, particularly within texts that might better be described as memoirs. See for example Warren Cariou, *Lake of the Prairies: A Story of Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2002).

[118] Jean Francis Oakes, *Stories From My Life*, was published privately in 2008.

often in the guise of the 'ecological Indian': the Native American or his/her Aboriginal counterpart who is seen to be in harmony with nature.[119] As the historian Daniel Francis describes, the 'vanishing Indian' of the nineteenth century has more recently been given a new role as 'spiritual and environmental guru, threatened by the forces of consumer culture'.[120] Despite the often well-meaning intentions behind these stereotypes, they are stereotypes nonetheless, and capable for that reason of perpetuating negative discourses of 'otherness' with concomitant negative material implications.

This is not to suggest that these writers' attempts to re-engage with indigenous voices and worldviews are in vain. For example, in North America, the re-indigenisation movement can be seen in terms of 'vigorous cultural revitalisation and renaissance', but it also extends, as Jenny Kerber observes, to new alliances and potentially a new ethic 'by which all North American residents can commit to living on this continent in ways that are responsive to the rhythms of the land and its creatures'.[121] Attempts by writers studied in this thesis, like Maya Ward and Sharon Butala, to learn about alternative indigenous approaches to landscape and change their own are honourable (particularly, for example, Butala's decision to donate a section of her land to become a heritage reserve). However, as Kerber and others warn, re-indigenisation should not be 'construed as a naive return to the land […] in which settler culture plays out fantasies of

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[119] See Shepard Krech, *The Ecologial Indian* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

[120] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), p. 56.

[121] Kerber, p. 16.

ecological primitivism'. [122] A further risk is that of conflating issues of indigeneity: while many indigenous peoples may share similar concerns and injustices, some of the writers in this thesis risk levelling out differences between individuals whose cultures, outlooks and worldviews are not the same. Any call to re-indigenise should be wary, too, of a model that seeks a shared future but does not address material change, reparations, and concrete actions: for as John Saul Ralston writes, 'reconciliation without restitution would be meaningless'. [123]

'True Essence' of Place

I now want to return briefly to Casey's notion of the 'true essence' of place. In the literary works to be examined in this study, concerns with framing place also constitute a search for quiddity, whether this apply to a field, a bioregion, or a nation. This is still often seen as a local problem, and local (sometimes national) knowledges and languages are considered crucial to it. Allan Casey thus refers — counterintuitive as it may seem — to the truly 'Canadian landscape', and New South Wales based writer Mark Tredinnick, to the truly 'Australian Pastoral'. For Tredinnick, truthful literary framing, which he sees as 'truthful advocacy', is connected to finding an 'authentically Australian' use of

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[122] Ibid.

[123] John Saul Ralston, 'Truth and Reconciliation is Canada's last chance to get it right', in *Globe and Mail*, (5 June 2015),< http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/truth-and-reconciliation-is-canadas-last-chance-to-get-it-right/article24826036/> [accessed 3 January, 2016].

language that develops not from imported aesthetic and literary models, but from an Australian experience of the land.[124]

Essentialism aside, one potential problem with the works to be studied in this thesis is that there is an apparent mismatch between their local/regional/national interests and a theoretical approach that draws on aesthetic models that are either (questionably) universal in their applications or (uncritically) global in their concerns. I should probably make it clear, though, that while I strongly believe in the value of context, it is not my aim in this thesis to join the authors in searching for the quiddity of regions, or to locate the aesthetic qualities or linguistic turns required for 'uniquely' Australian or Canadian, coastal or prairie literary voices. In his 2005 study *Australian Literature*, Graham Huggan observes that 'to see Australian literature in a postcolonial context is to recognise the dialectical interplay between one, frequently mythologised location (e.g. 'Australia') and another (e.g. 'Europe', 'Asia', 'America')'.[125] My aim, similarly, is to adopt a transnational approach that acknowledges the importance of local frames and knowledges but also looks to global connections and interplays.

In so doing, I am indebted to the cultural theorist James Clifford, who argues that even the most 'locally rooted' communities have never simply been

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[124] Mark Tredinnick, 'Under the Mountains and Beside a Creek: Robert Gray and the Shepherding of Antipodean Being', in Robert Zeller and C. A. Cranston, *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and their Writers* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 123–144 (p. 126).

[125] Huggan, p. viii.

local, but instead have a wide array of connections and associations ('rooted and routed in particular landscapes, regional and interregional networks');[126] and to the literary critic Ursula Heise, who has observed an ongoing tension between an 'ethic of proximity', seen in place-oriented discourses associated with notions of 'dwelling' and 'bioregionalism', and an attempt by philosophers and literary critics to recuperate a notion of cosmopolitanism 'as a way of imagining forms of belonging beyond the local and the national'.[127] These latter share 'the assumption that there is nothing natural or self-evident about attachments to the nation [and] strive to model forms of cultural imagination and understanding that reach beyond the nation and around the globe', while the former emphasise 'the value of local and national identities as forms of resistance to some dimensions of globalisation'.[128] This thesis follows Heise in attempting to take an approach that acknowledges the co-dependency of the local and the global. One of the surprising results of this approach is that in engaging with the fundamental aesthetic questions of frame, vantage point, and aesthetic politics, the texts to be studied in this thesis are more often characterised by similarities than differences. At the heart of this is a shared if non-identical set of transnational concerns.

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[126] James Clifford, 'Diasporas', in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Migration*, 2nd edn, ed. by Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), pp. 321–327 (p. 326).

[127] Ursula K Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 33, p. 6.

[128] Ibid.

Chapter Summaries

No single method, however broad-based, can solve the environmental problems stated at the outset of this Introduction, or successfully unravel the paradox of representation faced by writers trying, for whatever reason, to 'frame' place. In particular, there is the risk that 'legitimate' viewpoints may simply serve to entrench privilege or even continue a project of colonisation. Recent and current attempts to challenge traditional dichotomies between subject and environment, to recognise the value of multi-sensory or embodied engagement, and to acknowledge multiple frameworks are all salutary. But equally necessary is a dynamism that understands that 'the places out of which stories of place are constructed also exist in a continual state of becoming'.[129] The acceptance of multiplicity and dynamism, however, is emphatically not the same as saying 'anything goes'. As Saito writes, however squeamish we may feel in face of an 'aesthetic ought', its peremptory refusal may be tantamount to accepting the status quo.[130] If, as I believe, any ecopoetic product is also an ecopolitical one, a thoroughgoing aesthetic literacy is crucial. Since the 1990s, conservationists have had to 'rethink the idea that nature could be preserved by maintaining representative sections of it free from human interference', and to search instead for 'new, more ethical, forms of engagement'.[131] This thesis attempts to understand aesthetic engagement in this light, through an analysis of the aesthetic construction and evaluation of place in the literary works under study. After all, the ethical and political implications of a 'managed nature', as I have only just

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[129] Kerber, p. 33.

[130] Saito, p. 36.

[131] Adams and Mulligan, p. 19.

begun to describe in this Introduction, are tied to philosophical considerations of aesthetic literacy as much as they are to physical intervention in the 'real' world.

As will be seen in the following pages, the authors in this study effectively 'rewrite' landscapes that have previously been invoked in support of very different versions of regional and national identity, in defence of very different policies of land use, and in petition for very different versions of the beautiful. In so doing, many of these authors challenge dominant views and destabilise traditional (often colonial) conceptions of aesthetically valuable landscape; they also engage in complex forms of aesthetic politics themselves. In this introductory chapter I have tried to look at some of the common ground underlying the texts, but in truth there is great variation within and between them. The remainder of the thesis adopts a structure that responds productively to these differences. In the following four chapters on 'Belonging', 'Digging', 'Walking' and 'Working', each chapter looks at what might be described as a subgenre of nature writing (namely home writing, prairie writing, pilgrimage narratives and working narratives). Each chapter also considers in detail a central question or theme of nature writing that moves the thesis in a deliberate arc. The thesis begins by considering fundamental questions about what a postcolonial mode of viewing and representing place might look like (chapters 1 and 2), before going on to consider more explicitly the relationship between environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics and activism (chapter 3). The final chapter (chapter 4) considers active human interference as it features in nature writing, focusing on conservation projects.

The first chapter begins by considering the aesthetic, literary and ethical challenge of the frame in two memoirs by Tim Winton (*Land's Edge* and *Island Home*) and one by Mark Tredinnick (*The Blue Plateau*). For both of these writers, the focus is on finding an appropriate mode of perceiving and framing place, and on the relationship between that mode of viewing and identity, home and belonging in Australia. I suggest that for these as for other Australian writers, the representation of home is viewed as a moral concern, and that their quest to belong is linked to the search for an appropriate mode of viewing. Drawing out some of the differences between cognitive and non-cognitive modes of environmental aesthetics, I argue that both Winton and Tredinnick configure a model of belonging where cognitive aesthetics is associated with European Enlightenment rationality, and its non-cognitive counterpart with a 'truly antipodean' appreciation of landscape as it is experienced and felt.

If the first chapter aims at framing what can be seen, the second chapter, 'Digging', seeks to account for what *cannot* be seen. Here, I respond to two recent works of Canadian prairie writing set in southeast Saskatchewan: Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart* and Candace Savage's *A Geography of Blood*. Focusing on the two authors' respective portrayals of the physical signs of history like artefacts, stone circles, fossils rock formations seen (or more likely, unseen and apparently absent) in landscape, I analyse their respective attempts to 'unearth' memory from a landscape traditionally portrayed as unvaried and empty. The two works in question are considered as part of a regional (prairie) tradition of imaginative speculation and 'deep mapping', but also as part of recent attempts to reframe nature writing on both a national and a transnational scale.

For each of these writers, in different ways, there is an implicit suggestion that a 'right' mode of viewing and representing place exists that might cause humans to treat land and humans in a better way. With this in mind, the third chapter, 'Walking', considers more explicitly the relationship between nature writing, environmental aesthetics and environmental (and, to a lesser extent, socio-political) activism through analyses of the first-person expeditionary accounts of Australian writer Maya Ward (*The Comfort of Water*) and Canadian writer Karsten Heuer (*Being Caribou*). While the first two chapters engage in various ways with the notion of 'home', the works under scrutiny in this chapter are involved in journeying away from it. Both Ward and Heuer come to their writing as activists, expressly setting out to change readers' views. In my analysis, I consider each narrator's use of descriptive details to emphasise moments of dissonance between places as they 'ought' to appear (i.e. in accordance with the narrator's initial framing of the quest) and places as they are actually perceived and experienced. I argue that aesthetic representations can be used for emotive effect in support of both texts' activist message; however, I also suggest that the normative aesthetics they deploy might be at risk of creating an overly simplistic division between 'untouched' and 'human-made' landscapes that obscures ongoing connections between people and place.

The final chapter, 'Working', shifts emphasis from seeing and thinking about landscape to *managing* it. If, as I have argued thus far, one of the fundamental motives for nature writing is that 'seeing right' might lead to 'doing right', the chapter moves to consider the aesthetic implications of this. The

chapter focuses on Germaine Greer's *White Beech* and Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt*, two very different accounts of two very different conservation projects: for Greer, a rainforest rehabilitation project on the Gold Coast (Australia); and for Gill, work as a tree planter in British Columbia (Canada). Both authors concentrate on the practical issues at stake in making changes to their respective environments, but they also link these to broader — colonially rooted — aesthetic, philosophical and ecological concerns. For Gill, this involves putting pressure on the popular image of the Canadian tree planter as a 'green warrior', while a normative aesthetic campaign is developed by Greer in order to encourage the replication of her existing project. In both cases, the chapter seeks to gauge the potential to 'see right', but also the practical difficulties involved in 'acting right' in landscapes that are both made and unmade by humans, often in keeping with all too narrowly defined sets of individual interests and collective (often commercial) concerns.

In this and in other respects, the final chapter both draws out some of the fundamental tensions that underlie this thesis, and synthesises many of the key analytical oppositions explored in earlier chapters. These include in particular the tensions between cognitive and non-cognitive models of understanding; between subjectivity and normativity; between imported (colonial) vocabularies and more localised (postcolonial) ways of seeing and understanding the two-way relationship between people and the places they inhabit; between theoretical and practical considerations; and between the individual's right to call a place home on the one hand, and the social justice implications of that claim to belong for wider communities. This thesis argues that the imagery and discourse of the

picturesque have an important constitutive role in mediating responses to these inherent tensions, and that the work of the authors studied in 'reframing' that imagery and discourse, reframing the picturesque, shows the transformative power of aesthetic categories.

Belonging

Introduction

This chapter takes as a starting point that the notion of home is both an aesthetic concern and a social justice issue: after all, to say that one belongs in a particular landscape, or that a particular place makes one feel 'at home', is to make a political claim. Many contemporary nature writers are acutely conscious of this, and it inevitably affects what and how they write. In post-colonised Australia, for example, the aesthetic issue of representation can be read as part of a wider political and philosophical question about belonging, with the ability to represent the landscape legitimately being seen by many Australian writers as a major moral concern. As I argued in my introductory chapter, in much colonial writing — in Australia and elsewhere — the picturesque process of framing was seen as converting 'nature's unmanageable bounty into a frameable possession'.[1] Similarly, to classify a view as 'picturesque' was associated with finding a sense of possession as well as confirming a feeling of being at home.[2] For many Australian writers in the first decades of the twenty-first century, these interrelated concerns of possession, colonisation, aesthetics and representation are still very much a live issue: perceived belonging in a landscape is often intricately linked

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[1] Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 81.

[2] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 243.

with the perceived ability to value and represent it.[3] However, in at least some of their writings this ability is complicated by what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have described as 'the crisis of belonging that accompanies split cultural allegiance, the historical awareness of expropriated territory, and the suppressed knowledge that the legal fiction of entitlement does not necessarily bring with it the emotional attachment that turns 'house and land' into home'.[4]

This chapter focuses on three Australian landscape memoirs in which both the truthful representation of place and the accompanying concern with finding an appropriate way of viewing it are made central to the text.[5] The first, Mark Tredinnick's *The Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir* (2009), is set in the Blue Mountains, near the east coast of New South Wales.[6] The second and third are by Tim Winton. *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir* (1993) covers Winton's relationship with the littoral zone of the Coral Coast in Western Australia, while the more recent *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (2015) is an expanded memoir documenting his experiences across Australia as a whole.[7] For both

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[3] Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3–5.

[4] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 98.

[5] The notion of 'landscape' memoir already implies a framed view. As Jonathan Bate points out, 'a land-scape means land as shaped, as arranged, by a viewer'. See Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 132.

[6] Mark Tredinnick, *The Blue Plateau: An Australian Pastoral* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2009).

[7] Tim Winton, *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir* (London: Picador, 2012) and *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2015).

authors, as we will see, the notion of belonging is linked to the search for an appropriate relationship with the Australian landscape that brings together personal, political, and moral concerns.

The Picturesque Frame and Possession

Before analysing the texts, there is a historical aesthetic context that needs to be appreciated. At first glance, the picturesque aesthetic seems incompatible with Australian literature. As most histories of Australian landscape aesthetics relate, early white settlers considered Australia decidedly un-picturesque.[8] The imported aesthetic vocabulary and picturesque modes of viewing that were so popular in Europe came under pressure in the 'alien' environment of the Antipodes.[9] This perceived aesthetic deficiency also fed into the enduring conception of 'new' countries like Australia as providing a site of Adamic rebirth (or Edenic return) for western settlers.

However, as previously discussed (see Introduction), the picturesque mode of viewing is distinctly versatile, and has long been a crucial part of homemaking in different contexts. In some of the earliest Australian settler writing, in fact,

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[8] See, for example, Caroline Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits: Colonial Women Artists and the Amateur tradition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005).

[9] While picturesque might translate very well to the 'antique' lands of India and the East, the so-called 'Edenic' lands were not so easily assimilated by the picturesque mode of viewing. In Australia, the landscape was considered 'too wild', 'too unvaried', or simply lacking in built or recognisably historical elements to be deemed picturesque. See, for example, Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 1770–1840 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 47.

picturesque views were not so much missing as unpredictable: picturesque vocabulary was deployed in unexpected areas for an unexpected cause. Paul Carter, in his spatial history of Australia, has shown that picturesque aesthetics played a crucial part in early travel and settlement. Carter argues that picturesque views were diverse and contradictory, with writers bestowing picturesqueness on two very different landscapes: first, as a place of easy travel, characterised by 'openness and freedom of movement'; and second, as a place of home, 'an attractive backdrop' to the settler's house. As Carter writes:

> The picturesque in Australia made the space of travelling visible to the traveller. It realized for him his own historical destination — to travel or to settle down […] The screen of vegetation, the trees one would not wish to see cut down, might, in other contexts, be a bar to physical and imaginative progress. To call them picturesque was to attribute to them the observer's own heightened sense of possession, his sensation of suddenly being at home in the world.[10]

In the Australian context (as in the Canadian, as will be seen in future chapters), it is abundantly clear that such aesthetic constructs colluded in the project of colonisation. Part of this is down to picturesque aesthetic practice. The picturesque mode of viewing relies on a vantage point, or point of view, that tends to rely more on the viewer than the land itself. Those in search of the picturesque sought out raised viewing points — much like those in contemporary national parks — and a distanced view, to be interpreted only by the properly educated —

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[10] Carter, pp. 242–243.

usually male, wealthy, European — viewer. In such poses, as Jonathan Bate describes them, 'the spectator stands above the earth, looking down over it in an attitude of Enlightenment mastery'.[11] The key element of this vocabulary of possession derives from the characteristic picturesque relationship with the *frame*. The main focus of the picturesque aesthetic was on the ability to 'unite' within a single scene the 'variety' of nature. Picturesque composition, as William Gilpin advised, was simply 'uniting in one whole a variety of parts', or, to repeat Malcolm Andrews' alternative phrasing, it was intended to convert 'nature's unmanageable bounty into a frameable possession'.[12] According to this schema, the picturesque eye looks for, or creates, a framed scene that divides the land into neat portions, visual packages that a number of scholars have argued participate in the commodification of landscapes.[13] As Elizabeth Bohls argues, 'The process of

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[11] Bate, p. 132.

[12] William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel, and On Sketching Lansdscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), p. 19; Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 81. My focus in this chapter is not so much on the multiple interpretations of picturesque theory and practice that dominated eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debate, but rather on the relatively stable primary role of the picturesque as a framing impulse.

[13] See Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 93. John Berger argues more generally that 'European means of representation refer to the experience of taking possession. Just as its perspective gathers all that is extended to render it to the individual eye, so its means of representation render all that is depicted into the hands of the individual owner-spectator. Painting becomes the metaphorical act of appropriation.' John Berger, 'Past Seen from a Possible Future', in *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things* ed. by Nikos Stangos (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 215.

framing and composing constitutes an exercise of power, a non-reciprocal mode of vision whose effect is to display and reinforce mastery'.[14] The ability to synthesise a large, unclear mass into a unified, understandable whole, whether by painting, writing, or simply perceiving, was (and is) a valued skill. But this framing is also an act of cultural possession in which, as Bohls puts it, 'the picturesque substitutes imaginative for real possession as a central principle in aestheticising land'; and this act is in turn part of a 'long-standing cultural nexus of vision [and] power'.[15]

Framing Belonging

Framing, in contemporary environmental aesthetics, has remained for many a primary way of deriving meaning and showing what we ought to value. In order to appreciate a natural environment, many aestheticians suggest, it must not only be framed or unified but also looked at with the knowledge and intelligence needed to 'transform raw experience by making it determinate, harmonious, and meaningful'.[16] While most of these aestheticians reject the 'landscape model' (the literal descendant of the picturesque in that it 'requires dividing nature into scenes, each to be viewed from a specific position by a viewer separated by appropriate […] distance'), for many in the field the characteristic goal of the picturesque remains: that of unification, informed by an appropriate education or

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[14] Bohls, p. 87.

[15] Bohls, p. 92.

[16] See, for example, Allan Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 49.

knowledge set with which to value the composition.[17] Others, however, like Arnold Berleant, argue that 'not only are we unable to sense absolute limits in nature; we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves'.[18] For Berleant, the 'aesthetic mark of all such times' is not the frame but 'total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world'.[19]

As I aim to show in this chapter, the aesthetic question of the frame has become of central concern in literary attempts to represent places, particularly natural landscapes, truthfully and justly. This is both a postcolonial concern (in so far as it reflects on the relationship between framing and ownership) and an ecocritical one. For Jonathan Bate, the picturesque approach to environment, where the viewer stands at a distance, framing his view in a Claude Glass, is the result of an extreme form of Cartesian dualism.[20] It contaminates the relationship between figure and natural landscape, Bate suggests, by allowing only for a mediated experience of nature. Bate argues that a less mediated approach would be one that 'begins in feeling and not in judgment', and that tries to replicate what Theodor Adorno has called 'the immediate apprehension of nature'.[21] For Bate, this is the difference between the 'ecopoetical' approach and the 'picturesque'

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[17] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 27.

[18] Arnold Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of Art and Nature', in *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, ed. by Arnold Berleant and Allan Carlson (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 82.

[19] Ibid., p. 83.

[20] Ibid., p. 139.

[21] Ibid. Theodor Adorno, quoted in Bate, p. 148.

approach.[22] In the former, an emotional connection is made; in the latter it is deferred via the gaze's distancing mechanism. This returns to questions of belonging: the 'picturesque gazer' is a tourist who merely *beholds*, the 'ecopoet' a dweller who wants to *belong*.

In Tredinnick's and Winton's works — albeit to differing extents — supposedly unmediated, unframed responses to landscape are similarly put forward as aesthetic experiences that approximate to belonging, in contrast to the distanced view of the outsider. This duality also reflects a distinction in approaches to contemporary environmental aesthetics, which are often broadly split into cognitive (also referred to as conceptual or narrative) and non-cognitive (non-conceptual or ambient) positions (see also Introduction). Carlson describes cognitive positions as arising from the conviction that 'knowledge about the nature of an object is central to its aesthetic appreciation', while non-cognitive models instead take as central something other than formal knowledge.[23] The central feature of the non-cognitive is an emotive or even transcendental connection with environment, and is usually related to feeling, with emotional responses including 'arousal, affection, reverence, intimacy, engagement, wonder, and ineffability'.[24] These non-cognitive positions are often presented in contrast to the cognitive stereotype of a disinterested, distanced, or educated approach.[25]

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[22] Bate, p. 149.

[23] Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 11.

[24] Allan Carlson, 'Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism.' in *JTLA: Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, Aesthetics* 34 (2009): 1–21 (p. 15).

[25] Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Towards an Aesthetic of Environment* (Lawrence,

While this contrast is a long-standing trope in English-language pastoral literature, in Tredinnick's and Winton's works it is mapped onto an autochthonous/settler binary, where European Enlightenment rationality is held against an indigenous (or 'truly Australian') animated landscape. For both writers, formal education appears to be linked primarily with an English or European background, while experience is connected viscerally to a claimed Australian 'truth'.

Thus, for both writers, the emphasis on modes of viewing is nominally put forward as part of a larger project of epistemic decolonisation (see also Introduction). Each writer is explicit about trying to find new ways of viewing which do not suffer from the flaws of original colonial perspectives (or, put more sceptically, each writer is attempting to differentiate himself from the original colonisers, and other contemporary Europeans, so as to assert his own right to belong). Their responses to these challenges again centre on the frame. For Tredinnick, a repeated narrative strategy is to set out a cognitive interpretive model or scenic story, only to reveal its falsities or limitations. Winton more explicitly deconstructs traditional modes of viewing landscape in order to promote an alternative relationship with landscape that is fully felt, immersive, and overwhelming. For Winton in particular, that Australia is 'un-picturesque' is both its defining characteristic and its saving grace — instead it is immense, forceful, often dangerous, and as such it forces an 'unmediated' response.

In their respective works, Winton and Tredinnick offer sophisticated

Kansas: UP of Kansas, 1997).

'solutions' to a perennial problem. The turn from Enlightenment rationalist framing to multi-sensory, non-Cartesian frames of viewing, and in particular the turn to indigenous worldviews and sources of knowledge as bases for decision-making about the Australian environment, are to be celebrated. However, there are still questions to be asked. If, as I have argued in my introductory chapter, the ecopoetical is also always the ecopolitical, there is an inherent danger in presenting an immersive relationship as somehow existing outside the politics of entitlement. As Jenny Kerber has pointed out in her study of Canadian prairie nature writing:

> The illusion of unmediated access to nature is something that ecocriticism has wrestled with from its beginnings, with the result that issues of aesthetics, identity, and power have sometimes been sidestepped in favour of an attachment to realism and the mimetic function of language.[26]

A fully unmediated response to nature — such as one exists — is not without its own problems. As an aesthetic response, a rejection of the subject/object dichotomy in favour of immersion answers the question of what to value in nature by saying 'everything', which runs the risk of being no answer at all.[27] As I aim to explore in this chapter, positing belonging as *merely* an aesthetic problem (which can be answered by a so-called unmediated relationship) runs the risk of sidestepping ongoing material issues of contested land rights and

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[26] Jenny Kerber, *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), p. 80.

[27] See Allan Carlson's comments in *Nature and Landscape*, p. 30.

environmental degradation. In Winton's work in particular, the supposedly unmediated experience of nature is eventually conflated with an experience of redemption, where experiencing the Australian landscape necessarily results in a better relationship with it, culminating in a feeling of being 'truly at home'. In some passages, a text that is explicitly aimed as part of a decolonising project ends up, paradoxically, by repeating standard colonialist tropes.

Mark Tredinnick's *The Blue Plateau*

Tredinnick, perhaps more than any other author under examination in this thesis, confronts these representative questions directly in his quest to write a version of the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. A corporate lawyer turned publisher, poet, and essayist, Tredinnick describes himself as 'a fool for places […] deeply attached to the physicality and mystery of landforms and language'.[28] His 2009 publication, *The Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir*, defies obvious classification. Tredinnick is explicit that *The Blue Plateau* is his attempt to frame a natural environment, 'fathom[ing] a place' through 'an accretion of fragments of true stories that seemed to want to come together'.[29] In his Afterword to the text, Tredinnick refers to the *The Blue Plateau* as a written version of a landscape painting. In essence, what he is attempting to do is to write a piece of creative non-fiction that frames the mountains in the same way that a landscape painting would. It is the act of framing itself that is his artistic contribution: 'the only thing

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[28] Mark Tredinnick, 'Credo', 2007

<http://www.marktredinnick.com.au/index.php/mark/more/credo/> [accessed 25 April 2016].

[29] Tredinnick, *Blue Plateau*, p. 238.

I made up was the way I put the book together'.[30] However, he is also highly self-conscious about the partial, fragmented nature of his attempt to frame a natural landscape. As he notes in the Afterword, 'I've got the facts as straight as I can get them, but not all facts run straight, and nothing much is certain'.[31] Allan Carlson's paradox of environmental aesthetics — which jointly asserts the need to frame the natural environment and the impossibility of doing so — is a defining characteristic here. Tredinnick is obviously haunted by the issue: 'you'll never fit a plateau in a book'.[32]

In choosing this particular landscape, Tredinnick has an extra challenge in so far as he is representing something that is at once one of the most famous natural landscapes in Australia, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Blue Mountains, and also his home. In attempting to meet this challenge, he does two rather different things. First, he interprets the landscape for the reader as a tour guide would, attempting to give depth to a well-known location by telling or retelling the various stories that are associated with it: both personal stories, such as by those who have spent time, or indeed whole lives, in the mountains, and impersonal ones that shed light on the area's scientific and geological histories. Second, he conveys a reverence for a place and reflects on the implications of belonging to it, referring in part to his own intensifying relationship to the landscape over a period of seven years.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 233.

This distinction is reflected not only in the subject matter of the book, but also in Tredinnick's approach to representation itself, in which there is a tension between a theoretical, 'framed' perspective and a more practice-based approach to understanding the environment in which he lives. In his 'tour guide' mode, Tredinnick routinely sets up a cognitive interpretive model or scenic story for the reader. At times he draws typically picturesque scenes: a weather-beaten hut that might be 'the first house ever built in Kedumba',[33] or a stockman's settlement in a 'pretty bit of land' framed by fence and forest.[34] Other passages focus on cognitive knowledge frameworks like the area's scientific and geological histories. Throughout the work, Tredinnick's narrative strategy relies on setting up such scenes only to undercut these interpretations, either by using his associations in unexpected ways, or by offering alternative — sometimes jarringly different — experiences or points of view. Ultimately, as we will see, this appears to lead him to reject a cognitive approach entirely in favour of a practice-based notion of landscape. Tied into this is Tredinnick's conception of belonging, which he consistently represents as linked to appreciation and understanding. For Tredinnick, an emotive, working experience of Australia is often presented as more genuine than a distanced understanding based on formal education, but this apparent preference is complicated by his equally frequent fragmentation of the cognitive frame.

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[33] Ibid., p. 15.

[34] Ibid., p. 91.

The Fragmented Cognitive Frame

Tredinnick's initial use of a cognitive interpretive framework occurs in the first few pages of the text, in which he begins to people his landscape for the reader by outlining personal histories. He includes a 'cast list' at the beginning of the work, which introduces the characters that will provide the histories of place that he (and by extension the reader) uses to 'appreciate' the landscape. By being told stories of characters in a landscape, we are — at least in theory — more likely to be provided with historically relevant, appropriately inhabited situations, rather than with blank scenes. At the beginning of the first chapter, Tredinnick introduces a scene in which Les Maxwell, a resident of Kedumba Valley, is performing his morning routine:

> Les wakes before dawn and walks outside […] Though the house has an inside toilet, Les never could kick the habit of going outside to pee. It isn't just for that, though, that he leaves the house and walks across the paddock to the creek or down the two-wheel track toward the woolshed or east to his grandfather's grave through the frost or the rising fog or the tepid blue-grey silence.
>
> Les goes outside to remember who he is. He leaves the house to become place again.[35]

Immediately the reader is given a comforting frame of reference. Kedumba is 'where Les lives', and we are already given a limited understanding of what goes

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[35] Ibid., pp. 5–6.

on there in the mornings and what the valley physically contains: a paddock, a creek, a woolshed, a track, a grave, and an old man who lives there. Tredinnick also sets up Les as a character who implicitly belongs, both materially and spiritually, to the place he inhabits. He goes outside to urinate, hardly a spiritual activity; but as Tredinnick notes, he also regularly visits his grandfather's grave, which immediately points out his ancestral connection to the valley, or walks to the woolshed, which establishes his credentials as a pastoralist. Through these and other activities, Les is presented to the reader as a man so bound up with the valley, and it with him, that he has effectively become synonymous with the place.

Tredinnick soon changes topic to document his own move from the city to a small wooden house near Katoomba, at the top of the plateau and overlooking the Kedumba Valley. He then describes the view:

> Katoomba sits on a narrow ridge, and canyons gape all about. They surround you; they are where your eye wanders and your mind falls. The valleys are the larger part of the plateau I know, and they are what it will all one day become. And down in the deepest, the one below my place, Les Maxwell got up and went to work most of the days of his life.[36]

Here, Tredinnick explicitly associates Les's history, and especially his working life in the valley, with his understanding of his own prospect. Tredinnick is acting

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[36] Ibid., p. 8.

here as a tour guide, interpreting his view for the reader. As part of the story where 'the mind falls', Les and his life, introduced just pages before, are integral to the way the reader takes in this first view of the plateau. We already associate the view with another person's workplace — and his home. In this context, the final line in the section is arresting: 'But Les had been dead two years by the time I learned that the clearing I looked down upon each morning, from the end of the track through the trees, had been almost his entire life'.[37]

Suddenly, Tredinnick's preceding description is shown to be suspect. The reader has been introduced to the scene with a specific knowledge set, when in reality Tredinnick's view of the clearing was empty of Les's life until Tredinnick learned of it. Without this knowledge, memory and meaning are missing. By opening first with a scene describing Les's life and home, but then abruptly removing Les's story from Tredinnick's own experience, the text forcefully brings us into contact with the disjuncture between the two men's histories and their relationships with place.

This narrative strategy has a dual effect. First, our device for understanding the valley is called into question: our comfortable frame of reference for the valley, namely Les, has suddenly disappeared. What if we didn't know about Les? How would we understand the valley then? The veracity of our cognitive approach is threatened. Second, it implies that Tredinnick may be questioning his own right to belong. Les, who has ancestral connections and works the land, simply 'becomes' the place he inhabits. Tredinnick, on the other

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[37] Ibid., p. 8.

hand, has just moved there from the city; in looking out over the valley for the first time, he doesn't even know that Les has lived there before.

Some pages later, Tredinnick employs a similar technique, this time relating to historical associations. In this section, he describes his feelings the first time he comes across the Maxwell family home:

> Looking at the hut, you'd think you'd found the first house ever made in the Kedumba. It's built of slabs, timbers hewn from felled trees, Bentham's Gums or white mahogany, all of them adzed square and stood vertically; each slab is cut just as long but only roughly as thick and wide as the next and fit as tightly together as a man could manage, the cracks filled with clay to baffle the wind […] The Burragorang was settled with houses like this, houses roofed with stringybark held down with battens and rocks. But this one's roofed in corrugated iron. The tin, you'd think, was a later improvement, for surely this must be a pioneer's shack; this, you'd imagine, as I did standing beside it one hot January day in 2002, must be the house that Les Maxwell's grandfather William built when he settled the Kedumba.[38]

Here, Tredinnick sets out in some detail the original construction of the hut, outlining the work that would have been involved in hewing the timber and preparing the wood. He then provides us with a broader historical framework within which we are supposed to interpret the scene. We learn, or are reminded,

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[38] Ibid., pp. 15–16.

that the area's original colonial houses were built in this fashion, and are even given some idea of the subsequent improvements that might have been made in this case (e.g. the addition of the roof). Again, Tredinnick is providing a similar, albeit poetically embellished, interpretative role to that usually played by a Blue Mountains National Park guide. He goes further, however, by hinting at a human story that we can use to imagine the scene: a man fitting the slabs together as tightly as he can manage, and attempting to 'baffle the wind'. He even gives us a name, William Maxwell, and points out his family ties: he is Les's grandfather. Like the picturesque tourist looking at a ruin, we use our knowledge of history, in combination with the physical aspects of the hut, to understand the view and reflect upon the history that informs it.

Once more, though, Tredinnick's historical set-up is followed by a jarring negation:

> But you'd be wrong; the story of the hut is fifty years — a whole generation — younger than that. The hut was built the only way Billy, the son of William and the father of Les, knew how, the way houses had always been done in the Valley. This hut might have been built in 1824; in fact it was put up a century later.[39]

More emphatically this time, Tredinnick has set up a disjuncture between what readers think they know — based on the information provided about colonial house building — and the reality of the matter. Tredinnick's learned historical

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[39] Ibid., p. 16.

associations are proven false — as are, by extension, the reader's, whom Tredinnick has explicitly aligned with himself. We read the passage and perhaps feel fooled by it: our imagined pioneer struggling against the wind did not exist. Again, Tredinnick sets up an opposition between his own lack of understanding and the Maxwells' innate one: for the Maxwells had built the house 'the only way they knew how', in a timeless era ('the way houses had always been done in the Valley'). Tredinnick emphasises the familial bond the Maxwells have with place — Billy is the son of William, the father of Les — and re-instantiates the thesis of belonging as related to ancestry.

Perhaps the most explicit example of Tredinnick's inversion of a traditional colonial settlement narrative, however, occurs much later in *The Blue Plateau* during his portrayal of a horse ride with Kanimbla Valley residents. Tredinnick, along with 'Jim' and 'Dave', have ridden to the Konangaroo Gully to see a stockman's hut in 'a patch of lonely freehold in the middle of a National Park'. Tredinnick describes the scene as follows:

> It's a pretty bit of land, just a triangle of grasses and sedges and wombat holes, ironbark fences and encroaching forest. Here, where the Kanangra flows down out of the hard country behind and meets the Cox's, here at this remote meeting of the waters, miles and miles from anywhere or anyone, William Maxwell's friend Thomas Brennan had settled himself in 1862. And claimed and cleared these forty acres and built the hut.[40]

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[40] Ibid., p. 91.

Unusually for Tredinnick, the description is set up in a traditional scenic style that is heavily reminiscent of the picturesque. The land is 'pretty' (in this book a highly unusual term); it is a distinct triangle framed by forest and water and safely contained by ironbark fences. Here, far from anywhere, is evidence of a straightforward colonial tale. Thomas Brennan has fulfilled the usual story in the usual terms: finding and 'claiming' the land, working it by clearing it, fencing it off, and — the ultimate happy colonial ending — building himself a home.

However, in typical fashion Tredinnick then turns back on himself. His following paragraph reads:

> Here on the Kanangra Flats the mountains crowd you in. In front of you Yellow Pup and Dingo Mountain; Heartbreaker to the north; Cloudmaker and the Gangerangs to the southeast; behind you is Konangaroo, and behind that, all the others with their dark and rainy names—Paralyser, Storm-breaker, Guougang, Cyclops, Thurat.
>
> There's a quiet here, but it's not a peaceful quiet. You're set down on a small stage, overwhelmed by rock and timber, an unsympathetic crowd waiting for you to fail.[41]

The previously picturesque framing of the mountains, far from offering protection, turn out to be threatening. Tredinnick turns a framed scene, to be looked at and enjoyed, into a stage ringed by a crowd of spectators — and an

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[41] Ibid., p. 91.

unsympathetic one at that. An ironbark fence suddenly seems an insecure form of defence against the combined might of 'Paralyser', 'Storm-breaker', 'Cloudmaker' and 'Heartbreaker'. And in the last line Thomas Brennan, who in the previous paragraph claimed, cleared, and settled, is now met with a complete *volte-face*: 'I can't imagine Brennan stayed here for long stretches'.[42]

Representing Belonging

Tredinnick's narrative strategy discussed thus far — in which he typically sets up an information model (specifically a view) for understanding a scene before either showing the inconsistency of his framework or simply undermining it completely — allows his writing to act in a revelatory way, warning against blind acceptance of received stories, histories, and knowledges. He does not reject any single interpretation outright, but each frame is shown to be incomplete, slippery, contingent. If the archetypal picturesque view is 'seemingly natural, but in fact highly artful', Tredinnick takes this model and reverses it, revealing the artifice not only in historical and artistic framings, but also in scientific ones.[43] The passages cited above are above all characterised by the frequently considerable anxiety that surrounds attempts at truthful representation.

Jonathan Bate would hold this up as a perennial problem of representation itself: 'artists try to tell you something about the world, about life — they hold up a mirror to nature — but they can only do so via a repertoire of techniques and

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[42] Ibid., p. 91.

[43] Bate, p. 136.

conventions that are inherited from previous art'.[44] Cognitive framing, moreover, will always be partial or mediated, distanced, and anthropocentric: an understanding of nature 'only in so far as it radiates out from humankind'.[45]

An unmediated approach, in contrast, is an attempt at registering the fully immersive: an innate connection to the land. Although Tredinnick does not readily find this connection himself, he does attribute it to others. For example, of the Gundungurra people (a local indigenous group), Tredinnick writes: 'Once there was a people who belonged to a valley. They kept the Valley tame; they spoke the words it gave them […] spoke its name and nature when they opened their mouths'.[46] Tredinnick implies here that, for the Gundungurra, connection with the valley was ancient and innate, and representation unmediated, even automatic: to speak its name all they had to do was 'open their mouths'. This affects his own mode of representation, too, for in contrast to the contingent portrayals provided elsewhere in the book, his representation of the valley's previous indigenous inhabitants' relationship with the land is relatively straightforward. In another passage, he makes explicit the connection between understanding and indigeneity, commenting simply that 'the Gundungurra and their brothers and sisters knew [how to understand the plateau], and know it still'.[47]

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[44] Ibid., p. 126.

[45] Ibid., p. 138.

[46] Tredinnick, *Blue Plateau*, p. 19.

[47] Ibid., p. 236.

Tredinnick also bestows an innate belonging on the current white pastoralist residents of the valley, though in a slightly more complex way. In a passage about Les and his stepson, Norm, the latter is represented as out of place in the valley because of his city roots. When walking Les's path across the valley, 'trying to shuffle in Les's way' in an attempt to not to disturb the nearby animals, Norm is 'fooling no one':

[T]wenty-one animals turn and bound away. Not panicked; more disappointed than anything. Norm's been coming to the valley since Les cut the road in, but Norm isn't what the valley is and he knows he never will be. He's a part-time predator in some ill-fitting pieces of the morning's clothing […] "They can see you, boy. They can smell the big smoke on you," says Les, when Norm tells him what's happened. "You gotta come from here like they do, before they stop actually seein' you".[48]

Here Les is the authentic resident who comes from, and thus belongs to, the valley rather than simply visiting it. Norm, a 'part-timer', not only doesn't belong but knows he 'never will'. There are overtones of Norm, a city-dweller, trying to practise a type of deception — to get away with it. But this is not possible: he will always be found out. He is 'fooling no one', not even himself.

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[48] Ibid., pp. 6–7.

Acquiring Belonging

In the above passages, true understanding and belonging are somewhat romantically defined as an organic phenomenon, gained through full-time experience or, in some cases, inheritance. Tredinnick — who is a newcomer — has neither of these things. How, and if, belonging can be acquired is a moot point; and just over halfway through his memoir, Tredinnick grapples explicitly with this issue:

> There is a practice of belonging, and it starts with forgetfulness of self […] Don't come to the plateau to find yourself, I wrote; come to find the plateau. Come to know oneself, after a time, as one is known by the plateau, as one figures in geological time, in the pattern of the seasons and the rivers […] Of course, it might take about forever, and you'd have to do a lot of listening; it could be hardish work.
>
> I feel less certain now of what I wrote then. Belonging is a practice, not a birthright; this I still believe. Attachment grows if you abandon yourself, if you let a place in, and if you're lucky. It may happen fast if you are porous to places; it may never happen if you're impregnable to the world, as many of us are.[49] But it is performed best,

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[49] Tredinnick's advice to be 'porous' echoes Noel Carroll's so-called 'arousal model' of environmental aesthetics, which holds that an understanding of nature can be visceral, requiring an openness to being 'moved by nature'. It is worth noting that while Carlson classifies this as a 'non-cognitive' model, Carroll stresses that 'reasonable' emotional responses are objective and have a cognitive (though unscientific) dimension. Others, such as T.J. Diffey, see these sorts of emotional responses to nature as 'displaced religious emotions' (p. 55). See Noel Carroll, 'On

this practice, when it's an accident of one's being and staying somewhere, making some kind of a life and some kind of a living from the country […] Memories of […] so many hard lives lived there make my own practice, my pursuit of emplacement, seem to me now a soft and self-indulgent hobby […] The best kind of belonging is unself-conscious; I was always trying too hard to find it.[50]

His conclusion is that the best way to understand and belong in this landscape is through 'practice', which he initially refers to as 'hardish work'. Belonging of this kind still requires learning — of geological time, of the patterns of the seasons — but selfish ways, self itself, must be abandoned, and deliberate effort can be counterproductive: Tredinnick suggests that understanding is best 'when it's an accident', and concludes that 'working at it was the problem'.[51] He sees his active choice to enter the landscape and his 'softness' as always marking him out from those who truly belong; and although he acknowledges that, as a 'practice not a birthright', the option of belonging is available to him, he nevertheless creates a new gap between himself and the 'authentic' inhabitants of the valley.

At this point in the book, Tredinnick preserves a sense of humility and a degree of separation from the 'true' experience of the 'many hard lives lived'.

Being Moved by Nature: Between Religion and Natural History', in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts,* ed. by Salim Kemal (Dundee: University of Dundee Press, 1993), pp. 244–266, and T.J. Diffey, 'Natural Beauty without Metaphysics', in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts,* ed. by Salim Kemal (Dundee: University of Dundee Press, 1993), pp. 43–64.

[50] Tredinnick, *Blue Plateau*, pp. 149–150.

[51] Ibid., p. 150.

Later, however, his journey from detached, formally educated outsider to join the ranks of those who belong is experienced as a sort of religious conversion. Belonging is possible, he suggests, but it must be an accident: rationalist, educated attempts will always be found wanting. Belonging is attributed to knowledge of a kind, but access to this knowledge does not (cannot, perhaps) have a rational basis. Tredinnick's own eventual accident of belonging is described below:

> I had a dream in my house in the plateau. And in the dream I was there in the cottage, and I knew that I shared it with a snake, a giant red-belly black, which lived where it had always lived beneath the floorboards. I was not, in the dream, afraid of it, and yet one afternoon after lunch I took an axe and I went down there, and I killed it. As I slept, I lifted an axe a hundred times and I brought it down hard a hundred times and I sliced the snake into as many pieces.
>
> But when I had finished I watched each piece of the disarticulated snake become a snake itself and slide into the timber behind the house. Night came in my dream, and I took myself to the bedroom and lay down to sleep on a mat on the timber floor. And as I settled, I realised that the fragments of the snake had formed themselves into a broken circle beneath the blanket and made of themselves a bed, into which I sank. The snake was not whole, and yet it was somehow alive, the tip of its tail nearly in its mouth. And it held me, and in my dream I fell asleep on the blanket within the broken circle of the snake, and I felt at peace as I have rarely felt in waking hours, as though I had been forgiven everything. As though my life had come together at last.

> When I woke in the room in the house in that plateau of reconstituted mountains, I felt like I'd arrived somewhere other than myself.[52]

After years of trying to apply cognitive approaches to the land, Tredinnick's belonging happens *to* him, in a pseudo-religious manner. His knowledge, in biblical style, comes through a dream. The red-bellied black snake, one of Australia's most deadly, appears to him in the form of Ouroboros, the symbol of eternal life. And, like a god, it embraces and forgives him.

There is something self-fulfilling about this passage. Like any dream story, the passage demands to be interpreted. However, while Tredinnick describes its effect — the feeling of forgiveness, arrival and integrity — it is notable that he does not pin himself down to a particular version of what the dream means. This is warranted by the underlying conclusion of this section of the book: that knowledge of place is not something that can be obtained or expressed in propositional form. So the dream just asserts itself, as fact: 'I belong'.

Nonetheless, it is impossible to resist the urge to interpret the dream, and surely Tredinnick anticipates this very reaction on the part of his readers. First there is the description of the sinister-sounding snake, together with immediate denial of the natural reaction of fear. This is followed by his characteristic move of pulling the rug out from underneath the reader's feet when he continues: 'and

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[52] Ibid.*,* pp. 150–151.

yet one afternoon after lunch I took an axe and I went down there, and I killed it.'

The storybook phrase 'one afternoon after lunch' sets up the shocking violence of the second half of the sentence. Yet instead of D.H. Lawrence-like remorse, something altogether more fantastical takes place. It is as if the brutal act of violence is a form of initiation. Tredinnick is alone at night in the house with a hundred snakes, like a religious devotee spending the night in a temple. Finally, the passage culminates with the sacred-cum-horrific images of the snake's embrace and the circle; then the post-initiation feeling of forgiveness and communion with the plateau and the author's own life. It is a masterful passage, and it is sincerely drawn. It is perfectly possible to take it at face value. But like all 'religious' explanations, there is something incommunicable as well: a blank report of personal experience that not everyone can accept (at least without being willing to undergo the experience themselves). Tredinnick's response is certainly one possible answer to the perennial question of how individuals — and in particular educated, urban individuals — can ever 'belong' in a landscape. It is a highly sophisticated and thoughtful response, to be sure, but it is still worth testing the limits of the aesthetic solution Tredinnick seems to provide.

Belonging and Non-Cognitive Aesthetics

In reaching the conclusions he does, Tredinnick is reflecting a wider propensity in contemporary Australian representations of landscape towards a non-cognitive aesthetic, building on a conviction that the ability to understand, and therefore to represent, landscape is tied to a perceived sense of belonging based on a combination of ancestry, occupation, faith and, above all, experience of the land. Of course, this distinction between formally learned and locally

absorbed or sacredly experienced knowledge is by no means a new one. Nor is it particularly antipodean; rather, its roots can be traced to English pastoral literature. A classic example is Thomas Hardy's Edred Fitzpiers, an educated man, but without local knowledge and effectively distanced from his environment even more by science and learning. Fitzpiers is not embedded in the place he lives; instead, he is destined forever to remain, as Bate puts it, 'an outsider who always looks to mediate nature through technology'.[53] His knowledge is 'displaced', and as a result he cannot acquire true belonging: he can only gaze, not dwell.[54] It would not be inconceivable for Tredinnick (like Winton) to identify with Hardy himself: a man who, as Terry Gifford points out, was 'caught in the tension of knowing, but not belonging to, [the] rural culture' about which he wrote.[55] For Hardy, like Tredinnick, true belonging would come from 'old association' and collective memory — fundamentally separate from the kinds of 'knowing' underpinning cognitive models of aesthetics today.

In Australia, however, this distinction has been drawn on postcolonial lines, differentiating between indigenous and settler (or, sometimes, between enchanted and rationalist) modes of viewing the landscape. The historian Peter Read gives some context to this issue when he notes that:

> Australian farmers are beginning to advance their own sets of
> valued memories, attachments and histories over the same

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[53] Ibid., p. 17.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 103.

areas claimed by Aboriginal people. Having worked for many years with Aborigines deprived of their country, and more recently with non-Aborigines deprived of theirs, I am filled with anxiety at the complexity of such disputed attachments'.[56]

Read points out that Australians of European descent are routinely referred to as distanced and detached, as being fundamentally unable to understand their surroundings, and asks 'why do Aboriginals have relationships while we only have *notions*? Why do our notions *derive* while Aboriginals simply *understand*?'.[57]

Distrust of cognitive models of understanding the environment can thus be seen as part of a more general tendency in Australian discourse. The late Australian academic (and nun) Veronica Brady, for example, regrets a widespread distrust of the sacred, and the difficulty this poses for rationalists to move 'across the boundary'.[58] Similarly, David Tacey sees a rational/sacred divide in Australia, which he duly maps onto an autochthonous/settler binary, arguing that 'Aboriginal Dreaming and Western rationality stand to each other as thesis to antithesis. What one affirms, the other denies'.[59] He then suggests even more emphatically that 'we are faced with completely different and competing stories about the earth'. Landscape in the western consciousness is, for Tacey, 'barren,

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[56] Read, p. 1.

[57] Ibid., p. 4.

[58] Veronica Brady, quoted in Read, p. 4.

[59] David Tacey, *The Edge of the Sacred: Jung, Psyche, Earth* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Verlag, 2009), p. 145.

empty, unalive,' seen as a 'dead background', while in the indigenous consciousness 'the earth is animated by ancestral creator-beings' and 'landscape is at the centre of everything'.[60]

The Australian (Post)Pastoral

Tredinnick's support for a non-cognitive, experiential model of understanding landscape can also be understood as part of a contemporary ecocritical attempt to reclaim the pastoral as an environmentally conscious mode.[61] Indeed, he goes so far as to set out the parameters for a new, more ethically appropriate, Australian pastoral in an academic article about Robert Gray. For Tredinnick:

> *Pastoral* [is] a sensibility that inclines to find wisdom and truth in the world itself, beyond the merely human realms of reality, though inclusive of them [...] the real world — true humanity, true society, and true poetry — is naturally constructed. We are [...] set down within a wide, old, long field of truth — it is the world as it was before and will be after us; it is the world as it manifests in us. Nature in that large sense, in all its mystery, ruin, and transcendence.[62]

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[60] Ibid., pp. 145–6.

[61] For a discussion of the 'eco-conscious' pastoral, see Terry Gifford, 'Judith Wright's Poetry and the Turn to the Post Pastoral', in *Australian Humanities Review* 48 (2010), 75–86; also Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 146–174. For a discussion of postcolonial versions of the pastoral, see Huggan and Tiffin, pp. 98–145.

[62] Mark Tredinnick, 'Under', p. 131.

Tredinnick's ultimate focus here is on truth: 'One cannot do Australian pastoral in the same way anymore, not if one wants to bear witness truthfully'.[63] For him, the Australian pastoral represents not an unreal, Arcadian retreat, nor even any retreat at all, but instead bears truthful witness to the environment, with the writer shaping 'the essence of things he turns to into the kind of being they can only have in the witness a poet can make'. In this sense, pastoral writers are themselves shepherds of, or at least advocates for, the environments they represent.

To meet this ideal, Tredinnick echoes the American ecocritic Lawrence Buell's suggestion that the 'ecocentric repossession of pastoral' should involve a 'shift from representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake'.[64] In his advocacy of a more holistic, 'naturally constructed' pastoral writing, Tredinnick is also gesturing towards Terry Gifford's notion of the post-pastoral as going 'beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human'.[65]

For Tredinnick, however, this new vision of pastoral is set out on distinctly Australian lines. Finding an eco-conscious pastoral, he suggests, is also about finding an authentically Australian aesthetic. This is a common concern of Australian writing. As the contemporary poet John Kinsella writes,

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[63] Ibid., p. 131.

[64] Laurence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 52.

[65] Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 148.

Australian writers, musicians and artists never seem sure what their European pastoral models should be. It's as if, on crossing the equator, they lost their coordinates, or, never having been north of the equator, were unsure of exactly what it was they were imitating, or might expect to imitate.[66]

For Tredinnick, the authentic Australian pastoral is characterised by its attention to the physical Australian landscape. It should show, first, 'a practice of pastoral care that wants to write and serve the land as it has been since the beginning, not just the way it has been since white men cleared and fenced it and tidied it of its indigenes'.[67] It should reflect, second, the tough agricultural work done by Australian farmers: pastoral only 'rings true', he says, if it 'picks up the frequencies of Australian pastoral landscapes'.[68] Finally, Tredinnick describes Robert Gray's pastoral poetry as particularly successful and authentic precisely because he comes from a rural area, and hence writes a pastoral that is 'less rarefied, more locally inflected'.[69] Gray 'comes from the place he retreats to. So

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[66] John Kinsella, 'Is there an Australian Pastoral?' in *Georgia Review* 58.2 (2004), 347–368 (p. 348). For Kinsella this leads to the conclusion that anxieties over how the pastoral could or should be written are more significant than the pastoral itself: 'Rather than an *actual* Australian pastoral in terms of art and aesthetics, I would argue that there is more a consciousness — even a paranoia — that such a pastoral should exist' (p. 348).

[67] Tredinnick, 'Under', p. 126.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

his retreat is always also a coming home'.[70] Tredinnick's truthful Australian pastoral, then, reflects at heart a nationally inflected language of belonging that is based on local experience. Again, this is set out in postcolonial terms. Old (Anglophone) pastoral language, where it remains in use in Australia, is deemed to be inauthentic: a 'different music' that persists for many writers and citizens, despite attempts to find the 'real music of the Australian land they inherit'.[71]

So far, these are unexceptional arguments. But Tredinnick's focus here is revealing. He suggests that a split between an 'indigenous' and a 'European' relationship with landscape is one that 'many [Australian writers] recognise in themselves':

It is the unconformity between the bookish selves, which are Anglophone and Eurocentric, steeped in older world pastoral habits and intonation, and the antipodean selves, which are in love, more and more, with a land that will not be caught in the language learned in school.[72]

For Tredinnick, in this instance, school education and book-based learning are equated with Eurocentrism, and set against the authentically Australian. His suspicion of formal education (in favour of a practice-based relationship with land) is sentimentally mapped onto a binary where the Anglophone/Eurocentric is

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[70] Ibid., p. 125.

[71] Ibid., p. 141. For more discussion of the specifically Australian post-pastoral, see Tom Wilson, 'Introduction to the Post Pastoral in Australian Poetry', *Landscapes* 3.1 (2009), 1–17.

[72] Tredinnick, 'Under',, p. 141.

bookish and distanced, and only the truly antipodean is 'in love'. This distinction, as I will go on to discuss later, is taken to even greater extremes in Winton's *Island Home*.

Accommodating Limitations

In my discussion of Tredinnick's work thus far, I have outlined a narrative strategy which seeks to show the limitations of a cognitive framing, and which advocates instead for a more integrated, non-cognitive mode of relating to environment. Tredinnick's more accommodated vision has its own problems, however. For example, despite their welcome focus on 'truth', his images of the accommodated pastoral still fall prey to oversimplification. And although his cognitive interpretive frameworks are rigorously put to the test, and are often found wanting in the process, Tredinnick tends to writes of the instinctive, inherent belonging of other individuals and groups almost unquestioningly: others, it seems, are not treated with the same rigour as he treats himself. When he represents the Gundungurra people, for instance, as 'belong[ing] to the Valley', and as speaking 'its name and nature when they opened their mouths', Tredinnick may well be presenting an alternative environmental model, but it is also one that crudely essentialises 'the Gundungurra and their brothers and sisters', who become an undifferentiated collective who 'knew this, and know it still'.[73]

Tredinnick's other descriptions of the Gundungurra — and of the Blue Mountains before colonisation — are similarly idealised. 'For when white men discovered the Burragorang', Tredinnick writes, 'it was already a place sweet with

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[73] Tredinnick, *Blue Plateau*, p. 236.

grasses, made long ago into pasture by the fire farming of the people they took it from'.[74] Farming here is not only non-destructive, but also couched in rhapsodic terms, its indigenous custodians keeping the valley 'sweet' even as they tame it. He continues:

> The cattle had escaped the white men's colony almost as soon as they walked off the boats, and they'd found their way to the Burrangorang, where they fattened and prospered and increased. When the pioneers came […] they saw cattle grazing inside the plateau, horns as wide as your extended arms, grasses up to their back […] There were already cattle in the first people's dreamings; there were bulls on the walls of the caves where the old people lived.[75]

Here, even the imported cattle have been adopted into a timeless 'dreaming'. Tredinnick's pseudo-biblical storytelling (the cattle who have 'prospered and increased', and the pasture so idyllically lush it 'reaches up to their back') produces a sacred world — even a kind of Eden. There is no denying that Tredinnick's prose is powerful; but it also rife with the kinds of essentialist figures and tropes that post-pastoral writers have condemned. Part of the problem, perhaps, is the ongoing tendency of Australian writers and critics to subscribe to a dogmatic belief that one can only understand and belong in a landscape if one is an agrarian worker, preferably one who is neither urban nor educated, and ideally one who is also indigenous (albeit 'indigenous' to varying degrees). There is an

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[74] Ibid., p. 19.

[75] Ibid., pp. 19–20.

obvious truth behind this, but it is also potentially limiting, even patronising, running the risk of reinstating the kinds of binaries that Tredinnick himself clearly wishes to contest. Perhaps it would be more accurate in Tredinnick's case to refer to a continuum or spectrum running from the 'English/European' to the 'Australian': as I hope to have shown above, his writing about belonging is sophisticated and sometimes there is more than meets the eye in what he says. Nor can one take confessional passages, such as those articulated in the dream, as simple statements of principle. For all that, his writing remains in danger of perpetuating the well-worn dichotomies of indigenous/settler or sacred/rational; and the results can be jarringly reductive or at least annoyingly imprecise. Tredinnick is probably at his best when, in testing the boundaries of cognitive frameworks, he shows the deceptions that are inherent in any kind of interpretation. At such moments, his manipulation of interpretative frames effectively reveals the limits of *all* representations, revealing multiple impressions of the landscape rather than settling on one supposedly 'correct' and authoritative account.

Tim Winton's *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir,* and *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir*

While Tim Winton is known primarily as a fiction writer rather than a nature writer, his work is consistently associated with place. As he once told a journalist, 'place comes first. If the place isn't interesting to me then I can't feel it'.[76] Winton

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[76] Winton, quoted in Jason Steger, 'The Sea Side of Tim Winton', *The Age,* 26 April 2008, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/books/the-sea-side-of-tim-winton/2008/04/24/1208743149982.html> [accessed 1 September 2013].

is also an active environmentalist who has been involved in a number of campaigns, notably with the Australian Marine Conservation Society, and is characterised by media both in Australia and internationally as particularly 'in tune with' the Australian landscape, particularly in Western Australia where he grew up and still lives.[77] His memoir *Land's Edge: A Coastal Memoir* is a good example of this. First published in 1993 as a fifty-page essay preceding 100 pages of photographs of the Western Australian coast by Trish Ainslie and Roger Garwood, in more recent editions it has been published alone as a 'coastal memoir', double-spaced with wide margins to fill a slim volume. The text focuses on Winton's childhood holidays at the mouth of the Greenough River just south of Geraldton on the Western Australian coast (about 400 kilometres north of Perth), and explores his past and present relationship with the littoral zone more generally. The more recent *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (2015) similarly began as an essay, 'Strange Passion', accompanying a coffee-table book by photographer Richard Woldendorp, and a talk at the Royal Academy in London as part of the events surrounding an Australian exhibition in 2013, before being reassembled as a full-length text. *Island Home* expands on many of the ideas introduced twenty years previously in *Land's Edge*. Winton spends less time in the more recent text on autobiographical details than he does on his philosophy of the Australian landscape and on what, for him, are the most appropriate ways of experiencing it. The text is made up of ten chapters, each divided into two parts: a

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[77] For example, Ronan McDonald writes that 'like Hardy's Wessex or Faulkner's Mississippi, the Western Australian landscape has been consecrated by Tim Winton's fiction'. Ronan McDonald, 'Grace and Surrender', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 2008, <http://www.the tls.co.uk/articles/private/grace-and-surrender/> [accessed 17 September 2016].

short memoir scene taken from Winton's experiences in Western Australia and other parts of Australia (e.g. 'Fremantle, 1999', 'Albany, 1973'), followed by a lengthier essay that deals with some of the larger issues raised by his memories.

While Tredinnick's *The Blue Plateau* is largely a personal attempt to come to terms with a fractured sense of Australian belonging, Winton's memoirs — perhaps unsurprisingly, given their origins — are more outward-facing. Though Winton admits to feeling 'ancestral shame' for colonial dispossession and despoliation,[78] he is adamant that he does not feel guilt, and that 'in so many respects […] the attitudes of my nineteenth-century forebears are archaic and alien'.[79] And while he recognises the claims and responsibilities of ancestry, he argues understandably enough that 'what should have no claim upon me is the colonial mindset'.[80] With these historical concerns largely set aside, *Island Home* can focus instead on presenting something akin to a pedagogical guide to a better relationship with the landscape(s) of present-day Australia.

Winton may differ from Tredinnick in this and other respects, but he echoes him in setting up a binary between settler and indigenous modes of viewing. For Winton, 'European ways of seeing' are described as having been influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, which is broadly destructive and paternalistic, while 'antipodean' relationships with environment are inflected by indigenous philosophy ('ancient and hardwon knowledge at once philosophically

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[78] Winton, *Island Home*, p. 222.

[79] Ibid., p. 223.

[80] Ibid.

sophisticated and practical').[81] The antipodean position is not always clearly laid out by Winton, but it appears to involve a 'sacred' and 'humble' relationship with the land that is more childlike than paternal. Those cultivating this kind of relationship also perceive an animated landscape, and have an intuitive understanding of the country as a 'web of interdependent relationships' that recognises 'the organic costs of how we live'.[82]

Once again, the notion of 'frame' is central to these perceptions. In Winton's case, this involves persistent attempts to break down or cross over perceptual limits in favour of total immersion. This is reflected not only in his choice of subject matter — he tends to focus on transitional areas, most obviously the littoral — but also in his mode of representation, in which he repeatedly breaks down the barrier between the observer and the observed. Winton argues that while this way of experiencing the environment can be practised (e.g. by approaching it in a more immersive way, as he himself does) and learned from others (particularly indigenous Australians, but also suitably qualified outsiders and conservationists), it is something that merely happens, especially over time: 'sometimes seeing is about duration and experience'.[83]

This echoes Tredinnick as well; but Winton goes further than Tredinnick does in positing the Australian landscape as an active agent in learning how to 'see' properly. For Winton, the Australian landscape is grand-scale — sublime —

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[81] Ibid., p. 228.

[82] Ibid., p. 224

[83] Ibid., p. 86.

and includes dangerous characteristics, which he argues its European counterpart lacks. This guides its inhabitants towards a more porous and immersive relationship with environment. For Australians prepared to look and listen, including Winton himself, a more fully engaged experience of the physical landscape eventually leads them (in part for genetic reasons, through being 'native-born') towards a less combative relationship with environment; and, crucially, towards an apprehension of belonging: the sense of feeling 'truly at home'.[84] In what remains of this chapter, I will explore Winton's deconstruction of the framed view in favour of an immersive experience of the environment, which, for him, is often conflated with an experience of the sublime. I will also examine how the related concept of a 'truly Australian' belonging is constructed, and what this concept includes and excludes.

Breaking the Frame

In the earlier memoir *Land's Edge* (1993), it is already possible to see Winton's rejection of a static framed view. Focusing on the littoral — the Geraldton sand dunes, the Greenough River Mouth beach, and the Indian Ocean near his childhood holiday home — Winton characterises these using the language of transit, both literal and metaphorical. He actively seeks a non-static view of the ocean, suggesting that, unlike some other views, it is one that is in constant motion, yielding changes of different kinds. He writes of the sea:

There is more bounty, more possibility for us in a vista that moves, rolls, surges, twists, rears up changes from minute to minute. That innate human

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[84] Ibid., p. 227.

feeling from the veranda is that if you look to sea long enough, something will turn up.[85]

For those who look closely enough, all kinds of discoveries are to be made: 'From beneath the furrowed brows of our houses, in the shallows and beyond the surfline, we look out to sea, and things, wonderful things, do turn up'.[86] For the same reason, he is an avid beachcomber, for new things emerge daily from the sea: 'It's the possibility of finding something strange that keeps me walking'.[87]

In the later memoir, *Island Home* (2015), Winton goes further in describing an unframed view, which he presents as being as one that is a direct result of a particular mode of viewing. He writes that as a child, despite being 'told not to stare', he 'stared all the time — and at the oddest things'.[88] However, his objective is to see the spaces between things rather than fix them as objects of a defining gaze (it is telling that, here as elsewhere, he presents himself as going against his formal instruction):

I found that if you gazed hard enough at a handful of sand the individual grains became enormous; you could see cavernous spaces between them. There was so much air between the particles you were surprised dirt weighed anything at all, and when you tipped it free the hiss it made as it

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[85] Winton, *Land's Edge*, p. 41.

[86] Ibid., pp. 41–42.

[87] Ibid., p. 104.

[88] Winton, *Island Home*, pp. 85–86.

fell to earth was like the sound of all the air escaping. When you looked at things long enough your gaze seemed to alter what you were looking at. It felt like a quirk of optics, a sleepy trick.[89]

In the passage above, Winton actively reverses the unifying principles of the conventional picturesque gaze. Instead of looking to find meaning by framing the 'blooming, buzzing confusion'[90] of the natural world, Winton's mode of viewing expands space until it is 'cavernous' and the elements begin to meld into one another. Similarly, gaps, space, and permeability are defined as integral elements of his own, and by extension his country's, identity: 'Space was my primary inheritance. I was formed by gaps, nurtured in the long pauses between people. I'm part of a thin and porous human culture through which the land slants in, seen or felt, at every angle'.[91]

From the inchoate mingling of frames to be found in some of his earlier work, Winton proceeds here to a fully deconstructed frame, which is about as far from a distancing, unifying gaze as it is possible to get. In this instance, humanity itself has become something 'thin and porous', as if it were a film of bacterial culture growing at the bottom of a petri dish, while the land is omnipresent and active, not just the backdrop against which patterns of human action play out. A further unexpected reversal takes place when the land that 'slants in' (the only

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[89] Ibid., p. 70.

[90] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 462.

[91] Ibid., p. 18.

active verb in the passage) turns out to be felt, not by its solidity but by its porosity. Space and gaps become nurturing and generative; and what is envisaged in the process is a fully unmediated relationship with place to the extent that (non-human) place and (human) body are combined. The link between such a relationship and belonging is readily apparent, as expressed in the words 'inheritance', 'nurtured', and 'formed'.

The three short sentences quoted above leave open the crucial question of who has 'space' as their 'inheritance': as David Punter has observed in writing about the picturesque, 'what is at stake here in this discourse of boundaries and frames is, as always, a negotiation of the bounding line between self and other'.[92] The context of the passage suggests, however, that Winton is primarily describing a relationship between permeability and a specific sense of *Australian* belonging. It remains to examine how Winton binds place to nation, allowing the Australian landscape to produce this particular kind of open response.

Winton's Australia: 'the place' and 'the national idea'

Throughout *Island Home*, Winton gives prominent attention to the question of Australian belonging. In line with his description of the land 'slanting in' to human culture, Winton emphasises the importance of the *material* in his approach to valuing the Australian landscape. Early on in the text, he voices his concern

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[92] David Punter, 'The Picturesque and the Sublime: Two worldscapes', in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, landscape and aesthetics since 1770*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 220–239 (p. 225).

that 'Australia the place is constantly overshadowed by Australia the national idea', and suggests that 'the material facts of life, the organic and concrete forces that fashion us, are overlooked as if they're irrelevant or mildly embarrassing'.[93] For Winton, by contrast, it is Australia's relentless physicality that marks it out as special. The Australian physical environment is both important in and for itself and prodigiously generative, but it is not necessarily congenial to human life. What Winton calls the 'strangeness' of the non-human environment, along with the sheer physical presence it registers, is its saving grace:

> We are in a place where the material facts of life must still be contended with. There is so much more of it than us. We are forever battling to come to terms. The encounter between ourselves and the land is a live concern. Elsewhere this is largely done and dusted, with nature stumbling in retreat, but here our life in nature remains an open question'.[94]

'Australia the place' may be overshadowed, but it still finds a way of asserting itself. That its inhabitants are 'forever battling' is seen as a positive, suggesting for Winton that Australia is an as yet not fully colonised land. While in 'relentlessly denatured' Europe, 'even the northern sky looked colonised, its curdled atmosphere a constant and depressing reminder of human dominion', the vast Australian continent is special because it is broadly 'still itself' and 'continues to impose'.[95] For Winton, the possibility of an immersive experience of

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[93] Winton, *Island Home*, p. 10.

[94] Ibid., pp. 20–21.

[95] Ibid., p. 20.

landscape relies in part on a certain level of purity ('still itself') embedded within the natural environment, which he repeatedly stresses as the defining feature of Australia: 'in Australia what is more impressive than the land? Culturally, psychologically, it's still the gold standard'.[96]

He then suggests further that in Australia, the land effectively 'imprints itself upon the body':

> and in order to make sense of it the mind is constantly struggling to catch up. This is why, despite the postmodern and nearly post-physical age we live and work in, Australian writers and painters continue to obsess about landscape.[97]

For Winton, this imprint is a particularly Australian characteristic. He suggests, for example, that for many urban and prosperous Australians, the ritual weekend and holiday escape to the great outdoors is part of

> a palpable outward urge, a searching impulse, something embedded in our physical culture, our sensory make up. It speaks of an implicit collective understanding that the land is still present at the corner of our eye, still *out there*, but also carried within, as a genetic connection […] We've imbibed it unwittingly; its in our bones like a sacramental ache.[98]

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[96] Ibid., p. 25.

[97] Ibid., p. 20.

[98] Ibid., p. 24.

Winton posits this urge as an unavoidable physical effect of the Australian material landscape. It is Australia's massive size and scale, he later suggests, that has the capacity to instil in people a much-needed reverence for land, which he likens to being 'overwhelmed by beauty'.[99] In Australia, where 'geography trumps all', Winton argues 'everything we do […] is still overborne and underwritten by the seething tumult of nature'.[100]

At moments like these, Winton reflects Arnold Berleant's assertion that 'the aesthetic mark of all such times [of experiencing the natural world] is […] total engagement, a sensory immersion in the natural world'.[101] However, for Winton this mode of engagement is distinctly antipodean. It is, on the one hand, a purposeful rejection of a colonising gaze, but on the other a direct result of the physical Australian landscape. While the European sky is colonised, 'where I live these days the heavens draw you out […] the sky's commotion renders you so feverish [and] the night's sky sucks at you'.[102] Winton argues that for most of the last century 'amongst peoples of the developed nations this felt pressure — the presence of wildness — was a default experience unique to Australians'.[103] Thus, for Winton, being 'antipodean' is about being able to see in a different way, which is in turn acquired by spending time on the continent and allowing that continent — the minute details as well as the vast mass of it — to seep into one's

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[99] Ibid., p. 233.

[100] Ibid., p. 16, p. 17.

[101] Berleant, quoted in Carlson, *Nature and Landscape*, p. 30.

[102] Winton, *Island Home*, p. 18.

[103] Ibid., p. 25.

pores. Winton suggests that the landscape has 'exerted a kind of force' on him that is 'every bit as geological as family', a characteristic mixing of registers by which the landscape is only metaphorically 'geological' while family seems to be literally so.[104]

Yet this susceptibility to the force of Australian nature is not inevitable; it can still be actively resisted or inadvertently missed. For those still bound to a colonial mindset, this amounts to a wilful rejection:

> This is no longer a question of ignorance — they know full well what the situation is. Their refusal to change is an ideological aversion […] they display a devotion to magical thinking they seem to find contemptible in others.[105]

But for other, more 'open' Australians (like Winton himself) landscape can have a redemptive power: he thus argues that while he had once thought he might be 'the mongrel European transplant of my formal education', he hadn't given his 'own geography sufficient credit', and that this geography has since come to wield its own transformative power.[106]

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[104] Ibid., p. 10.

[105] Ibid., p. 224.

[106] Ibid., p. 10.

Unknowable Home

As I have argued above, the experience of immersion in nature is crucial in both *Land's Edge* and *Island Home*. As in much of Winton's fiction, the focus in both memoirs is on the sublime, the dangerous, and the overwhelming; indeed, it is integral to Winton's argument that it is the very danger and 'unknowability' of the Australian landscape that forces, for those prepared to respond to it, a more appropriate relationship with the natural world. As I will now discuss, submission to this mystery is eventually conflated with a 'native-born' (Australian) view of the environment, and treated as an endemic characteristic of those who belong.

For Winton, particularly in *Island Home*, what begins to be built up — as in Tredinnick's work — is a suggestion that Enlightenment rationalism and formal learning are more likely to lead to a distanced connection with land, while an immersive experience is more likely to lead to (also proceed from) an 'imbibed', 'genetic' connection.[107] As a result, a broad rejection of the notion of cognitive framing is at the heart of Winton's philosophy of environmental value, in which he posits that the unknowability of the Australian landscape is key to the

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[107] Ibid., p. 24. Winton openly acknowledges a Christian inheritance, and has long argued against aspects of rationalism, calling it a way 'to arm ourselves against the transcendent'. Winton, quoted in Lyn Jacobs, 'Tim Winton and West Australian Writing', in *A Companion to Australian Literature,* ed. by Nicolas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 307–320 (p. 312). Similarly, Winton is regularly characterised as a novelist interested in the 'other than rational'. See, for example, Delys Bird, 'New Narrations: Contemporary Fiction', in the *Cambridge Companion to Australian Fiction*, ed. by Elizabeth Webby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 183–208, p. 205.

attitude of reverence needed to protect it (see section above). One example of this is found in the various passages in *Land's Edge* that come closest to straightforward environmental advocacy. These passages tend to lean on the spiritual rather than the scientific, even positioning them as oppositional concepts. For example, Winton spends a number of pages describing three examples of 'miracles' of nature occurring on the West Coast. He suggests that it is personally experienced phenomena like these (dolphin visits at Monkey Mia, swimming with whale sharks at Exmouth, and an unexplained feeding frenzy on a captive school of fish at Cape Cuvier) that often lie behind public support for environmental causes. Such phenomena, he suspects, are tantamount to 'an ocean, an earth, a creator, something shaking us by the collar', causing us 'to back off and think before we shoot'. Part of the power of these experiences is that they are barely understood scientifically. The sea itself — Winton's *locus classicus* for miracles — is similarly characterised as being beyond the limits of scientific understanding: 'the sea is a field of miracles, a profusion of depths and mysteries […] It baffles and infuriates humans because we cannot subdue or comprehensively understand it. We haven't even completely mapped it, let alone explored it'.[108]

Unsurprisingly, Winton's descriptions of his own fully immersive connections with the environment likewise involve a wilful 'letting go' of cognition — a process he refers to as 'forgetting'. In one apposite example, he describes freediving as follows:

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[108] Winton, *Land's Edge*, p. 39.

Of all water occupations, freediving is the most forgetful. You turn your back to the land, to the sun, and slide down to where all sound is flattened to chirps and rumbles. The deeper you dive the heavier is the blanket that insulates you. You wilfully forget to breathe; you sidestep the impulse and your thinking things out to the moment at hand. The poet John Bligh had it clearly: 'All reason drowns: drowning in you.' It's a religious feeling. On the seabed, or gliding midwater with everything sharp in focus and my body aching with pleasant, urgent hunger, I understand the Christian mystics for moments at a time. I too feel swallowed, miniscule, read.[109]

For Winton, the sensation of crossing the boundary between observer and observed is associated with a loss of the cognitive self. Reason is forgotten, and the physical self comes to be controlled by the environmental forces that surround it. Here Winton, like Tredinnick, advocates breaking through the necessity of reason to a purely physical, non-cognitive realm. It is only when reason 'drowns' that the landscape becomes both fully available to his senses and capable of 'reading' him in its turn.

In *Island Home*, Winton expands this sentiment to describe his experience of Australia as a whole. Again like Tredinnick, Winton is acutely aware that places can never be fully understood:

A continent like this is too big and rich and complex to be truly understood […] it will always slip through your fingers to some extent

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[109] Ibid., p. 68.

> […] For all the empirical knowledge we've garnered, and the many
> generations of lived experience that resonate in our collective memory,
> this continent remains an enigma.[110]

However, for Winton this mystery is a central part of relating to the environment properly: 'seeking to learn its ways [certainly] enriches us', he suggests, but it is sometimes 'sufficient to admit you're mystified, not just because it's an honest response, but because it's a suitably humble one'.[111] Thus, while Winton welcomes further scientific research on the Australian environment, he is at the same time grateful for the overwhelming mystery he sees as being located at its core.[112] To put this differently, what he is seeking here is an experience of the *sublime*: those experiences of landscape which 'take possession of our attention, and all our faculties', and 'mark out the limits of reason and expression'.[113] As Arnold Berleant writes with specific reference to the Kantian sublime, scale is key here: 'it is through the very sense of magnitude and might' that we 'grasp the true proportions of the nature-human relation, where awe mixed with humility is the

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[110] Winton, *Island Home*, pp. 226–227.

[111] Ibid., p. 226.

[112] Scientific knowledge and sublime sentiment have long been opposed. As Mark Twain wrote of the Mississippi, after mastering the language of the water and coming 'to know every trifling feature [...] all the grace, the beauty, the poetry had gone'. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), p. 54.

[113] James Usher, quoted in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 147.

guiding sentiment'.[114] Since Winton understands the true — or at any rate the most profound — experience of nature as occurring at those moments when the human subject is overwhelmed by nature, he sees belonging as being easier to find either in extreme environments from which human beings cannot physically distance themselves, or in relatively isolated environments about which little is scientifically understood. In both cases, he sees rationalist perspectives as being of limited use, while elsewhere he opens up this opposition (Enlightenment rationalism versus non-cognitive understanding) to describe the ongoing transformation from European to Australian perspectives. While this transformation is not necessarily associated with indigeneity — indeed, in *Land's Edge* Winton's only mention of indigenous people is a simile referring to an Aboriginal dot painting — in more recent work such as *Island Home* he comes closer to the position adopted by Tredinnick and, particularly, David Tacey, where Enlightenment rationalism is set against an enchanted indigenous understanding of place.

Be this as it may, Winton still sees many 'native-born' Australians as having gradually transformed their mode of perception of the natural world; as he suggests, the early settlers 'only liked what they knew, but over time Australia *was* what they knew and for their children it was all they knew'. Thus it is that by the time of writing (2015),

Our attitude to the landscape and the species it supports has changed. The fragility of ecosystems and the consequences of the old frontier ethic have

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[114] Berleant, p. 82.

impressed themselves on scientists and farmers alike, and the land is slowly beginning to be used more sensitively.[115]

The key to this change, Winton suggests, has been the transformation from a largely 'combative' to an increasingly 'cordial' approach to land: 'the compounding experience of generations helped wear people into different shapes and rendered them open to country'.[116] This is primarily related, as we have seen, to a rich experience of the landscape itself, which is found by travelling 'deep into [it], paying [rapt] attention to the natural world'.[117] It has also been helped by generations of 'visionary' outsiders who have seen 'beyond the bounds of their European inheritance', and who have often benefited significantly from the counsel of 'Aborigines whose pride in the wisdom of their own cultures and whose reverence for country endure[s]'.[118] By this route, 'native-born Australians without indigenous heritage came to the realisation that the natural world […] has intrinsic value'.[119] This, for Winton, is also the route by which Australians can feel 'truly at home'.[120]

At the same time, while Winton is broadly positive about this transformation, he notes that some may 'never feel truly at home in Australian

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[115] Winton, *Island Home*, p. 93.

[116] Ibid., p. 94.

[117] Ibid., p. 225.

[118] Ibid., pp. 94–95.

[119] Ibid., p. 95.

[120] Winton, p. 226.

landscapes', choosing instead to invest in 'abstractions and virtualities'.[121] Here, 'true belonging' is conceived as being primarily a function of the *imagination*: it is a question of whether one *allows* oneself to be immersed in the land, the sea, or the sky. Identification becomes as important as blood: who thinks he is an Australian, is an Australian. While still arguably locked in a male-oriented perspective of what 'immersion' means,[122] Winton's writing in many of these

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[121] Ibid., p. 226.

[122] For Winton, boundary crossing is all too often related to a stereotypical version of Australian male bravado that involves risk taking, danger, and physical extremity. A notable example can be found in his descriptions of surfing, which is grandiloquently described in terms of 'a young man's […] quest for a worthy force, something large to submit to' (*Island Home*, p. 74). Such 'submission', Winton questionably suggests, leads to a deeper understanding of nature. 'For me, the secret release of surfing was the experience of being overtaken [and] monstered by a force beyond my control. This was how I came to understand nature and landscape' (*Island Home*, p. 75). Here as elsewhere in his work, Winton's journey to manhood is completed through an experience of the sublime. This experience is later extended to the core concepts of home and belonging. Already in the first few pages of *Island Home*, Winton rolls out images in terms that are traditionally associated with a normative Australian masculinity: 'bare chests' and 'dogs in Utes' (p. 4). Similarly, he connects a core Australian notion of home with physical hardship, describing travel to less inhabited regions as following a 'homing impulse', but the home arrived at as being 'austere, savage, unpredictable [and] hard to reach' (*Island Home*, p. 22). In this and other ways, Winton's immersive attitude to place is shot through with gender assumptions. While a more detailed critique of this is outside the scope of the thesis, useful critical discussions of Winton's masculinist biases, particularly in relation to surfing narratives, can be found in, for example, Colleen McGloin, 'Reviving Eva in Tim Winton's *Breath*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 47.1 (2012), 109–120. See also Brigid Rooney's discussion of surfing, sublimity, and hegemonic masculinity in 'From the Sublime to the Uncanny in Tim Winton's *Breath*', in *Tim Winton: Critical Essays*, ed. by Lyn McCredden and Nathanael O'Reilly (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2014), pp. 241–262.

passages challenges anthropocentric discourse. For Winton, the 'unmediated' experience of the sublime encourages instead an ecological model of the natural environment that positions human beings as part of a vast web of connections, and that correspondingly calls readers to consider the implications of human uses and abuses of the land. At the same time, Winton's version of the natural relies on a problematic vision which sees the sublime as offering a kind of solace, a vehicle of redemption where belonging can be found simply by travelling 'deep into the landscape', at which point 'native-born' (non-indigenous) Australians can learn to see as they 'truly' are. Furthermore, while Winton encourages an immersive experience of environment, his accompanying suggestion that it is the purer, 'gold standard' landscapes where this occurs paradoxically suggests a continuation of the picturesque habit of cordoning off nature into particular, privileged places: environmental 'ghettoes' where the full beauty of nature can be appreciated even as it is culturally contained.[123] Of course, Winton's stated purpose is one of decolonisation, a deliberate throwing off of the colonial mindset; and it is through the immersive experience of landscape that he aims to counteract the limitations of a colonising frame. But by claiming 'unmediated' access to nature, Winton runs the risk of declaring his experience of landscape as being located outside aesthetics and politics, at a point where thinking sufficiently Australian, or feeling sufficiently humble, is enough.

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[123] Buell, p. 4.

Conclusion

Belonging in Australia is clearly no longer, if it ever was, just a question of legal ownership.[124] For Winton and Tredinnick, as well as many other contemporary Australian writers, the question of how to belong has cohered around finding a more appropriate relationship between human beings and their environment. As I have argued in this chapter, this question, in these two particular texts as well as in wider public discourse, is largely played out in aesthetic terms. A characteristic response of recent Australian nature writing, seen in Winton and Tredinnick's work in particular, has been to show the limitations of the colonial frame, and to imagine and instantiate new, alternative frames for the appreciation and understanding of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. The picturesque frame, once seen as normative, is now increasingly characterised by anxiety. It provides no answer to the urgent need to belong, which, for Winton and Tredinnick as for many of their contemporaries, now seems to rest on practice (Tredinnick) or overwhelming immersion (Winton) — 'unframed' relationships to place.

It is no surprise that many of these writers, in their quest to belong, have turned to indigenous knowledges and philosophies; after all, the wish to belong in Australia, and to relate to the land appropriately, are still inextricably related to what Terry Goldie called nearly twenty years ago 'the impossible desire to become indigenous' — an ontological desire to become *native* that reaches deeper

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[124] See Huggan and Tiffin, who go so far as to suggest that the 'ideology of possession' may even be antithetical to 'understandings of the relationship between people and place', p. 135.

than the political claims and assertions of the *native-born*.[125] The turn to alternative, particularly indigenous views of landscape is of course a welcome one, both for theories of aesthetics and questions of long-term environmental sustainability (for which Winton in particular continues conspicuously to campaign).[126] However, I am wary of the potential conflation of 'indigenous' with 'ecological'.[127] I am also suspicious of any aesthetic response that risks sidestepping political questions. The immersive relationships with nature that are offered in Winton and Tredinnick's texts purport to offer a way to experience the land that is broadly non-cognitive.[128] They seem to offer a *moral* way, too; as Tredinnick suggests, 'if you let them', 'places [can] teach us how to live right'.[129] For both writers, the implication is that the 'right' relationship with nature will

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[125] See Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 13.

[126] It is notable that discourses of environmental sustainability often feature the broad rationalist/anti-rationalist lines laid out by Winton: lines strategically manipulated by both political 'sides'. Loggers and miners are regularly represented in the mainstream media as 'rational' and 'utilitarian', in contrast to 'romantic', 'sentimental', or 'idealistic' environmental campaigners — an opposition that is by no means as straightforward as it appears. See David Trigger and Jane Mulcock, 'Forests as Spiritually Significant Places: Nature, Culture and "Belonging" in Australia', in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 16.3, 306–320, p. 307. Trigger discusses the 'mutual demonisation' in an earlier article, 'Nature, Work, and "the Environment": Contesting Sentiments and Identities in the Southwest of Western Australia', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology,* 10.2 (1999), 163–176.

[127] For a book-length study of this conflation, see Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: Norton, 2000). Krech seeks to dismantle the romantic view of indigenous peoples as necessarily living in harmony with nature.

[128] Winton, *Island Home*, p. 226.

[129] Tredinnick, 'Credo'.

likely lead to more appropriate, sustainable action. As Tredinnick writes on his website, 'our work is to cry the world's beauty; to protest its peril; and to hold us responsible'.[130] A valid concern, however, is that this line of thinking might tacitly suggest that natural places are somehow separate from political issues. It is worth asking if any relationship with landscape and the sense of belonging that is associated with it is enough without the material political and environmental actions needed to back it up.[131]

Similarly, avoiding a rationalist approach to land is presented in these texts as a non-violent, even a decolonising, act. But while challenging the subject/object dichotomy might help counteract the distancing, colonising gaze, it does not set out guidelines for concrete action. As I have suggested in this chapter, in Tredinnick's treatment of cognitive frameworks he shows the deceptions at work in any kind of single frame, placing emphasis instead on multiple (and necessarily partial) impressions of the landscape. To my mind, it is in these self-doubting passages, rather than in any form of accommodated pastoral vision, that the most 'truthful' representations of place begin to emerge, precisely because these representations show themselves to be fragmentary, and sometimes admit to being false.

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[130] Ibid.

[131] As Jenny Kerber has observed in a similar context, 'instead of placing the burden of reconciliation on human actors and concrete forms of social and environmental justice, the burden can then be placed upon nature, as though nature were somehow less politically fraught than the social sphere'. Kerber, p. 102.

Digging

Introduction: 'When is the Prairie?'[1]

The Tourism Saskatchewan website, in advertising the small town of Eastend, invites the visitor to 'come to the valley of hidden secrets and find yourself in the middle of nowhere'.[2] Meanwhile, Parks Canada invites visitors to nearby Grasslands National Park in order to 'travel back in time as you gaze at dinosaur bones, wander past tipi rings and catch a glimpse of a prairie homestead on the distant horizon'.[3] This pair of descriptions reflects two common conceptions of the relationship between the landscape of the Canadian prairies and the physical signs of history. In the first description, the prairie is quite literally nowhere, the standard definition in the Oxford English Dictionary listing 'nowhere' as 'no discernible or identifiable place'.[4] This definition is useful because it hints at the connection between cognitive aesthetics and language (see also previous chapter). 'Somewhere' is perceived as 'no place' because the viewer

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[1] Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh use this question as a starting point for their collection *History, Literature and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), p. 3.

[2] Tourism Saskatchewan, *Eastend,* <http://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/searchresults/community/102573/eastend?> [accessed 29 April 2016].

[3] Parks Canada, *Grasslands National Park*, <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/sk/grasslands/index.aspx> [accessed 29 April 2016].

[4] OED Online. 'nowhere, adv., n., and pron., and adj.' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/128841> [accessed June 18, 2016].

cannot identify it, i.e. cannot discern whether or not something is physically there. If a place is not recognisable by the viewer, then it may not be noticed at all; and with no cognitive entry into a place, no recognisable association, it may end up appearing empty or blank.[5]

This cognitive vacuum — the insufficiency of language and imagery to be able to create a cognitive link with landscape — lies behind an oft-repeated narrative of colonial settlement in which the 'new country' is portrayed as empty, unvaried, and un-picturesque (see also Introduction). In depictions of the prairie region (in both Canada and the United States), blank space, emptiness, and absence have dominated literary representations ever since the earliest European commentaries. The land, to the eyes of the European newcomers, did not easily 'translate', posing a problem to those used to a dominant aesthetics of landscape that relied largely on historical association. According to this model, landscapes were 'prized for their ability to conjure up the past for experience', and the prairies in early settler descriptions were duly dismissed as 'nothing but short

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[5] British author Robert Macfarlane, for example, has argued that the 'key ethical principle' of British environmental literature has been 'that making us see differently is an essential precursor to making us act differently'. He suggests that arguing that that 'language-deficit leads to attention-deficit': in other words, that if we lose the vocabulary with which to talk about things we may also lose the ability to see them. 'Rereading: Robert Macfarlane on *The Monkey Wrench Gang*', *Guardian*, 26 September 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/robert-macfarlane-monkey-wrench-gang> [accessed 14 June 2014]. Robert Macfarlane, 'A Counter-desecration Phrasebook', in *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings*, ed by Di Robson and Gareth Evans (London: Art Events, 2010), pp. 107–130 (p. 265).

Round sticky grass & Bufillo'.[6] How the past is perceived in the landscape has

historically had, and continues to have, wide-ranging ramifications. As already

argued in this thesis (see Introduction and Chapter One), the aesthetic judgement

of landscape is intimately related to concurrent social and political judgements:

the common Enlightenment view of the world as not merely *geographically*

differentiated, but also *chronologically* differentiated, placed countries like

Canada and Australia — new in some respects, ancient in others — close to the

perceived beginnings of time.[7]

Lacking in the physical signs of history, the prairies were also perceived

until relatively recently as missing the symbolic support of writers and poets. As

[6] Henry Kelsey (1691) quoted in *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report"*, ed. by Henry Epp (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre/University of Regina, 1993), p. 13.

[7] As Edmund Burke famously observed in 1791, 'now the Great Map of Mankind is unroll'd at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our view'. Quoted in Charles W. J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 13. The implications of these views are wide-ranging and well documented: for example, the notion of the indigenous populations of Canada as being at an earlier, pre-agricultural point in the linear narrative of civilisation fed directly into a European understanding that land which appeared to their eyes as undeveloped through agriculture or architecture was effectively *terra nullius*. In Canada, unlike in Australia, *terra nullius* has rarely been discussed explicitly in case law. However, as Robert J. Miller points out, 'the implicitly understood imperial construction of Indigenous primitivism remains affixed to Indigenous institutions, laws, and economic activities'. Robert J. Miller, ed., *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 260.

late as 1913, Rupert Brooke would complain of the area north of Winnipeg that 'there is no one else within reach, there never has been anyone; no one else is *thinking* of the lakes and hills you see before you. They have no tradition, no names even; they are only pools of water and lumps of earth […] dumbly waiting their Wordsworth or their Acropolis to give them individuality, and a soul'.[8] Similar sentiments have sometimes been expressed by more recent prairie writers, from Wallace Stegner's 'no place is a place until it has a poet' to Robert Kroetsch's 'fiction makes us real'.[9]

Notwithstanding, in the Parks Canada description quoted at the outset of this chapter the tourist is invited to 'travel back in time'.[10] The prairie is increasingly recognised today as a deep repository of human, animal, and geological history, which, once unearthed, belies surface impressions of timeless grasslands. This is a common theme in the tourist literature: elsewhere in its advertising copy for the prairies, Parks Canada suggests that the tourist might wish to 'Find peace and beauty in a pristine boreal forest or travel back through 150 million years of geological history'.[11] The hidden secrets are there to be discovered, brought forth from a previously blank canvas. This journey of discovery is promoted as being part of the tourist experience: visitors to the

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[8] Rupert Brooke, quoted in J. I. Little, 'A Country Without a Soul: Rupert Brooke's Gothic Vision of Canada', *Canadian literature* 219 (Winter 2013), 95–111.

[9] Wallace Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), p. 265. Robert Kroetsch, James Bacque and Pierre Gravel, *Creation* (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p. 63.

[10] Parks Canada, *Grasslands National Park*.

[11] Parks Canada, *Experience Parks Canada in the Canadian Prairies* [brochure], n.p., n.d.

prairies, if they use just a little knowledge and imagination, should be able to enhance their enjoyment of the landscape by exploiting its association with the past, which has now become part of the prairies' cultural brand.[12] This echoes the tropes of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century travel writing discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, with the one significant difference being that these tropes are now routinely applied to the very lands that were once considered to be devoid of historical association: the prairies themselves.

If there appears at first sight to be a stark contrast between the conception of the prairies as 'nowhere' and the alternative view of the prairies as deep repositories of history, on closer inspection these two understandings are by no means diametrically opposed. The past as seen in the landscapes of the New World is always potentially just another version of a primitive Eden: what the Australian environmental historian Tom Griffiths describes as 'a continental museum where the past was made present'.[13] Even today, the leftovers discovered by the visitor — the physical signs of history on or in the ground — often represent an unspecified past, coated in a nostalgic haze of a time long gone with equally long-vanquished previous inhabitants. The tipi rings described by Parks Canada take on the same romantic glow as the extinct dinosaurs, and appear

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[12] As prairies scholar Alison Calder points out, an increasingly urban population's fascination with 'getting away from it all' has led to the renewed popularity of the prairies as a kind of golden age idyll. 'The Wilderness Plot, the Deep Map, and Sharon Butala's Changing Prairie', *Essays on Canadian Writing*: 77 (2002), 164–185, (p. 164).

[13] Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 9.

as far removed.[14] The historical interpretation of prairie landscape thus remains partial at best: visitors might see physical signs of the past, e.g. stone circles, but these are more likely to add imaginative interest than to be recognised as signs of recent dispossession. As previously suggested (see Introduction and Chapter One), this is part of the normalising transformative power of picturesque habits of viewing, whereby the construction of the aesthetically pleasing 'natural' landscape involves the suppression of other interpretive signs.

Two Versions of Eastend

The two literary works to be examined in this chapter are recent pieces of nature writing in which the representation of the prairie landscape and, more particularly, the *signs* of history in that landscape come to the fore. Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice In the Fields* was first published in 2000, and Candace Savage's *A Geography of Blood: Unearthing the Prairie Landscape* followed twelve years later, in 2012.[15] Both works are set in and around the small town of Eastend (Wallace Stegner's childhood home and the site of a T-Rex discovery in 1994). For Savage, the focus is on the nearby Cypress

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[14] Even the far-off glimpse of the prairie homestead, albeit part of a more clearly defined period of agricultural settlement, is relegated to a romantic past, a part of the popular image of the prairies Calder and Robert Wardhaugh describe as 'permanently frozen in a rural agricultural scene alternately coloured by the grainy, sepia tones of the dirty Thirties or by the romanticised, golden glow of a nostalgic small-town sunset'. Calder and Wardhaugh, p. 3.

[15] Sharon Butala, *Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields* (London: Virago, 2001). Candace Savage, *A Geography of Blood: Unearthing Memory from a Prairie Landscape* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012).

Hills, while Butala mainly describes her family ranch, now dubbed as 'The Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area'.

The two autobiographical narratives follow women who, though born and raised in the prairies, first came as adults to rural life. Both narratives are primarily motivated by what their respective authors describe as a 'calling' to understand the landscape, more specifically to 'uncover' or 'unearth' history from the landscape. The discovery of this history, along with the interpretation of its physical signs — primarily stone circles and other artefacts — becomes the driving force behind both narratives. Typically, these artefacts emanate from the ground, i.e. they are either found on the ground, are dug up from it, or are known to have been removed from it.

In each narrative, the author-protagonist describes a process of being haunted and of being compelled to find her own truth from the landscape in an attempt to overcome this haunting.[16] Violent histories are implicated in both

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[16] The recent prevalence of hauntings in prairie literature has been described by literary critic Marlene Goldman as part of the 'long-standing desire to lay claim to a Canadian genius loci or spirit of the nation and to come to terms with Canada's past'. Writer and critic Warren Cariou further argues that it reflects 'a kind of neo-colonial uncanny, a lurking sense that the places settlers call home are not really theirs, and a sense that the current legitimacy as owners or renters in a capitalist land market might well be predicated upon fraud, violence, or other injustices in the past'. Marlene Goldman, *DisPossession: Haunting in Canadian Fiction* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), p. 5. Warren Cariou, 'Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal 'Ghosts' and the Spectres of Settlement', *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 75 (Spring 2006), 727–734 (pp. 727–728).

cases. In Butala's, the history of place that she finds revealed to her through the landscape is that of an especially distressing past: she finds a large number of burial cairns in the field near her home, a mass grave where she believes many people were buried who died at the same time. She speculates that this was the result of battle: most probably people killed in skirmishes with the military in the late nineteenth century. Savage, too, focuses on local history, mostly from 1870–1885, including the destruction of the buffalo ecosystem, the 1873 Cypress Hills massacre, treaties and hunger camps. In the process of digging up these histories, the authors attempt retrospectively to fill in what has previously been misconceived as a 'blank landscape' by providing a substantiated account of it. There is a personal dimension to this as well in so far as both authors are also trying to come to some form of reconciliation with their relationship to the land and its previous inhabitants. In what follows, I will discuss these strategies of reconciliation and their implications, as well as discussing the authors' respective strategies for presenting and popularising the prairie histories they unearth.

The Archaeological Canon

Neither Savage nor Butala is the first to attempt to 'backfill' the history of prairie landscape. As early as 1980, Robert Kroetsch discussed the disconnect between the landscape he had previously thought of as 'the ultimate tabula rasa' and the physical traces left behind (a buffalo wallow or tipi ring) that seemed to have no explanation in official histories of the region.[17] For Kroetsch, a gap

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[17] Robert Kroetsch, 'On Being an Alberta Writer: Or, I Wanted to Tell Our Story', in H. Palmer and D. Smith, eds, *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905–1980* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1980), p. 218.

yawned between the physical signs of history that were presented to him and the explanations of these signs that were provided to him. Kroetsch described the discovery of this gap as 'my first lesson in the idea of absence'.[18] He went on to suggest, though, that such physical traces might be used as clues towards a better understanding of landscape that embraced 'the model of archaeology, against that of history', and pointed aspiring prairie writers to 'newspaper files, place names, shoe boxes full of old photographs, tall tales, diaries, journals, tipi rings, weather reports, business ledgers, voting records' as archaeological deposits that might be used to write a more accurate version of the prairies.[19] Such material, he also suggested, might also provide a way of understanding the fragmentary rather than unified nature of the historical past, allowing for 'hints and guesses that slowly persuade us towards the recognition of larger patterns'.[20] Furthermore, these clues might also allow for 'imaginative speculation': a place for creative writing in 'both [the] record[ing] and [the] invent[ing of] these new places called Alberta and Saskatchewan'.[21] As Kroetsch put it at the time, 'I had to tell a story. I responded to those discoveries of absence, to that invisibility, to that silence, by knowing I had to make up a story. *Our* story'.[22]

The influence of Kroetsch's work on other contemporary Canadian writers and poets has been considerable, leading to what the literary critic Jenny Kerber has referred to as a canon of late twentieth-century prairie poetics that follows a

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[18] Ibid., p. 218, p. 223.

[19] Ibid., p. 219.

[20] Ibid., p. 224.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 219.

broadly archaeological impulse, 'digging up buried histories, found documents, and oral anecdotes as a means of becoming at home in place'.[23] Kerber suggests that this 'archaeological version of poetics eventually became central to the region's literary self-imagining'.[24] While many of the works following Kroetsch's archaeological directive have been celebrated as 'metafictional, metahistorical documents that interrogate their sources even as they reinscribe them', there is a danger that writers' recording and inventing of the prairie landscape might privilege some stories over others.[25] As the American ecocritic George Handley writes in a similar context, where one kind of poet acts as a witness of place, another acts as creator: 'the poet's language, like Adam's first task of naming things, inscribes itself onto that blank sheet that is the landscape, thus creating a sense of place'.[26] Those writing in this vein have generally employed methods that Kerber calls 'deliberately unsystematic', i.e. liable to interruption and resistant to closure.[27] However, other critics argue that works within the 'archaeological canon' run the risk of adhering to an image of the prairies that does not sufficiently account for all experiences of the region: in particular issues of social justice, environmental challenges, and urban and indigenous identities.[28]

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[23] Jenny Kerber, *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), p. 118.

[24] Ibid., p. 119.

[25] Calder and Wardhaugh, p. 9.

[26] George B. Handley, 'A Postcolonial Sense of Place and the Work of Derek Walcott' *Isle*, 7.2 (2000), 1–23 (p. 4).

[27] Kerber, p. 118.

[28] See Kerber, p. 119.

Seeing History in Landscape

This fundamental issue — whether and how the prairies can be interpreted and represented in a way which avoids absolutes and yet maintains the capacity to differentiate and make judgements — is another formulation of the central problem of the frame in environmental aesthetics (see Introduction and Chapter One). In response to this problem, Savage's and Butala's works join other recent exercises in Canadian nature writing like Trevor Herriot's *River in a Dry Land: A Prairie Passage* (2000) and Warren Cariou's *Lake of the Prairies: a Story of Belonging* (2002) in what has been aptly described as a larger project of 'deep mapping'.[29] Such works — in Susan Maher's words — attempt to layer multiple stories, capturing 'a plethora of interconnected stories from a particular location, a distinctive place, and framing the landscape within this indeterminate complexity'.[30]

In Savage's and Butala's texts, the recovery of what is in the ground via the work of 'imaginative speculation' remains a powerful image. The problem of framing landscape is distilled into the question of how to account for the physical signs of history, particularly ruins or artefacts; and into the accompanying issue of how to account for absences in the landscape, for individual artefacts and collective histories that may have been buried or removed. It is significant that both writers, albeit in different ways and for different reasons, express anxiety about their ability to interpret the landscape, and about the project of imaginative

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[29] Susan Naramore Maher, *Deep Map Country: Literary Cartography of the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), pp. 10–11.

[30] Ibid., p. 10.

speculation. Both, like their Australian counterpart Mark Tredinnick (see Chapter One), generally follow the course of constructing a given view and then providing cogent reasons to question it. Thus, while both Butala and Savage loosely follow Kroetsch's precept of using artefacts to find history and to 'write in a new country', each simultaneously reveals the frame to readers in ways which show the partiality or fallibility of constructions of the 'new country', thereby questioning their own sources of knowledge and authority.[31] At the same time — as I will go on to show — theirs are both strongly normative texts, avoiding a collapse into subjectivism.

The revelation of the frame is carried out through a variety of techniques. For Butala, the primary technique consists in her disclosure of the consistent discomfort that surrounds her ability to interpret place. She repeatedly states the truth of her interpretation and the importance of her imagination, but at the same time shows the sometimes pointedly irrational processes behind her interpretations of landscape and the artefacts she finds within it, and admits that these interpretations have been discredited by archaeological experts and indigenous elders: people whose greater authority and expertise she concedes. Savage, for her part, deliberately constructs a naïve narrator who first 'sees' conventional vistas then 'discovers' contingencies or even terrors beneath them. As the narrative develops, its experiencing subject is increasingly overwhelmed by the implications of the layers of interconnection she begins to observe as a

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[31] Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5.

result of the enquiries set in train by her initial attentiveness to the landscape's signs of the past.

For both authors, this is very much a question of aesthetics: of how to 'see' or 'recognise' the landscape and its history in legitimate ways. For Savage, this is discussed through an extended metaphor of geological 'unconformity' — a gap in the geological record. Savage explains how the 'unschooled eye' might not recognise an erasure of history (geological, animal or human) in the landscape. For her, schooling in historical association is the answer to a better, fuller view of the prairie landscape. Similarly, when Butala finally expresses her understanding at the end of *Wild Stone Heart* about the difference between a sound and a defective relationship between people and the land, this is expressed in terms of seeing (more specifically seeing stone circles) properly. As she writes:

> How strange it was that the settlers, my own people on both sides, too, could not *see* what was there all over the prairie. They'd used the stones to build dams and for foundations for their buildings, they'd picked them so they could farm — 'the circles always went first,' Peter said, 'because they were so easy to see.' — and yet, even knowing what they were doing, they didn't *see*. Beyond seeing, there was *recognizing*. I couldn't find a better word for what I meant; that a lot of people had lived here for a very long time, that they were not "picking rock" so they could farm, that they were dismantling the remains of a civilization. Every stone freighted with tears, with the weight of grief, they should have been too heavy to lift.

> If the settlers had seen, recognised, admitted that actuality, instead of blinding themselves to it, none of the rest of the horror would ever have happened, because even though they were merely pawns in a much bigger game, and struggling with their own human needs, they would not have been able to be a part of what was, in the end, evil.[32]

This passage acknowledges that settlers like the Butalas' forbears have their 'own human needs' and were — still are — subject to economic, social, environmental and political forces beyond their own control. This in turn acknowledges the common humanity and — at some level — common struggle of settlers and indigenous people, opening up the possibility that settlers as well as indigenous people may have a right to 'belong' (see Chapter One). But it refuses to deny settler responsibility for what Butala classes the 'horror' and 'evil' of colonial dispossession. The balance between these two positions is held by positing a strong relationship between perception and action: no one, Butala suggests, would knowingly and willingly have caused the suffering and injustice that took place, or, having done so, would have 'dismantl[ed] the remains of a civilization'. Seeing and understanding artefacts, social relationships, and history for what they are thus become a necessary precondition for social justice. It is significant that the failure to see properly is conceived as being in some sense wilful: settlers are described as having 'blinded themselves' to the actuality of what they themselves have helped to cause.

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[32] Butala, p. 199.

Seeing properly is therefore fundamental to Butala — as to Savage — and to the various transformations that their respective texts describe. In the readings of the two texts that follow, I will trace narratives of learning and personal transformation, paying particular attention to the role of landscape within the texts' overall design. I will look at both the similarities and the differences between the two works, especially as regards their treatment of formal systems of knowledge including science, history, geology and archaeology. While I situate both texts in the context of the Canadian prairie tradition of 'imaginative speculation' following Kroetsch, I argue that both texts (if in different ways) can be understood as responses to the problem of framing that is the central concern of this thesis. As such, while the texts are clearly products of a distinctive Canadian prairie writing tradition, they are also products of the recent self-conscious turn in nature writing transnationally (see Introduction and Chapter One).

Seeing Properly (I): Sharon Butala's *Wild Stone Heart*

Butala's *Wild Stone Heart: an Apprentice in the Fields* is a follow up to her better-known national bestseller, *The Perfection of the Morning*. A highly personal narrative describing her then new home near Eastend in southern Saskatchewan, the book is made up of an occasionally giddy mix of self-reflection, autobiography and spiritual quest, focusing in particular on the author's many walks on the hundred-acre unploughed field near her house. This field becomes a space that catalyses experiences of the past that have always been important to her. The initial attraction of the field, she suggests, is that during her preliminary visits to it she felt a sense of going back in time: 'a hundred years to

the time before the first settlers […] five hundred years, before horses had reached the northern plains […] even two thousand years ago, when the earth was what […] we ecologically minded folk now like to imagine, probably foolishly, as Eden'.[33] From this typical 'blank canvas' description of a relatively unspecified Edenic past, Butala begins to discover physical signs of (mostly) human history: burial cairns, tipi rings, tools and other artefacts including, for example, what she believes to be a petroglyph.

Artefacts such as these become central to her interpretation of the landscape as a physical space in which the past can be uncovered. Uncovering this past turns into a decades-long obsession for her. Through a mixture of research and discussions, but also contemplation, re-enactments, visions and imaginative leaps, she uncovers — and at least partly creates — her own history of the area. The crucial discovery is that of a large number of burial cairns, which she believes are the result of the deaths of a large group of 'Amerindians' (this is Butala's term: she does not specify, nor indeed know, which people these may have been). She notes that while the deaths may have occurred during the historically confirmed epidemics of 1780–82 or 1837, she 'preferred to think they'd died in battle and that, later, either those who had survived had come back and buried the bodies or others coming upon the dead did so'.[34] Eventually, a friend of Butala's is spoken to by an old man of again unspecified indigenous descent who seems to corroborate her idea, telling her friend that his ancestors had lived in the same area, 'had been killed in skirmishes with the army, and no ceremonies had ever

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[33] Ibid., p. 18.

[34] Ibid., p. 154.

been performed for them to put them to rest'.[35] For Butala this is a satisfying answer, and she concludes that the haunting she has experienced may well be 'the restless spirits of the many unhonoured dead of this field'.[36]

Her understanding of this past history is key to developing a theory of what the 'right' way might be to interpret and relate to the landscape. Over the course of the narrative Butala describes a variety of relationships with the field, from an initial experience of it as a source of solace and learning from 'nature', to a place that inexplicably leaves her ill and exhausted, to a site of grief in which she mourns the previous inhabitants now buried in the field. Alongside this, she describes the difference between a superficial aesthetic reaction to landscape and what she feels to be a richer, emotional response. The field is initially valuable to her because she can see that it is beautiful despite it being considered 'barren and useless' by her fellow ranchers and agriculturalists. As she says, the field provides 'a stunning beauty that made me want to paint […] to sing […] to take a photograph […] to tell everyone in the world to look, only look'.[37] Later in the text, however, she discovers that the importance of the field extends well beyond being merely aesthetically pleasing, and, increasingly frantically, she sets out to understand what the various artefacts she finds in it might mean. Threaded through this is the realisation that she 'was probably wrong in attributing to nature itself — herself — all the strange experiences I'd had out on the prairie', and that rather than interpreting the feelings of presence she experienced as 'God

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[35] Ibid., p. 156.

[36] Ibid., p. 158.

[37] Ibid., p. 35.

(whatever that might be) or even Nature (whatever that might be)' she ought instead to be moving beyond the standard Edenic narrative (which had dominated the earlier *Perfection of the Morning*) and consider the larger human history of the field.[38]

The peak of the narrative, and of Butala's transformation within it, is described in a passage of spiritual awakening in the field after she revisits four burial cairns:

> what I felt was what I should have felt all along, if I had believed the bones of those beneath the cairns were once living and walking and breathing human beings: that they were *people*. *People* had died here, and those who loved them had buried them in sorrow. I wept for a moment, and my grieving was for once genuine. I walked only on the sufferance of the ancestral spirits guarding it, and only because those to whom this field and those graves rightly belonged had been rendered powerless to stop me.[39]

Butala's premise for this passage seems to be that her previous relationship with the history of the field has been distracted by an abstract idea of history rather than any more tangible realisation that this history affected individuals: '*People* had died here'. Now she experiences not only a knowledge of the flora and fauna of the field, plus a knowledge of archaeology and history, but also what she describes as a genuine imaginative and emotional connection with the individuals

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[38] Ibid., p. 158.

[39] Ibid., p. 187.

concerned.

Here again, how to 'see' properly is of crucial importance. Butala notes that many of her visitors walk through the field and simply do not see burial cairns and stone circles 'as if they weren't there at all', admitting that she herself 'had walked there for years and seen nothing'.[40] The text traces her development from a superficially aesthetic appreciation of the landscape where the cairns add mere interest or depth to the scene to a deeper appreciation of landscape that is underpinned by emotional connection. This transformative understanding of the field and its 'true nature' (by which she means its true history and previous inhabitation) is key to her taking ownership of her experience of haunting, which predictably dies down after her she learns the history of the region and experiences what she feels to be a true connection with its previous inhabitants: 'we no longer needed disturbing, shaking up, some sense knocked into our thick heads'.[41]

Butala also translates this experience into action: she and her husband donate one thousand acres of land to the Nature Conservancy, who then (with the help of a hefty donation from SaskPower) purchase the remaining two thousand acres and take over the Butalas' ten thousand leased acres of Crown land, thereby creating the The Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area.[42]

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[40] Ibid., p. 199.

[41] Ibid., p. 189.

[42] See Krista Foss, 'Preserving a Piece of the Prairies', *The Globe and Mail*, 13 May 2002, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/preserving-a-piece-of-the-prairies/article4134965/> [accessed 1 June 2016].

Bison have since been re-introduced to the reserve, shared with other at-risk species (swift fox, ferruginous hawk, pronghorn antelope).[43] As is clear from this outcome as from the various descriptions mentioned above, the text is a relatively straightforward transformation narrative featuring many of the common tropes of nature writing. Ostensibly, Butala charts the journey from unenlightened, haunted westerner to knowledgeable, spiritual inhabitant, via a much-needed acquisition of historical knowledge and, crucially, emotional engagement with this knowledge. This leads not only to a spiritual transformation, but also to a sense of belonging and a new sense of acceptance of self.

Limitations of Vision

There are conspicuous limitations to Butala's work that make it an easy target for a scholar of postcolonial and ecocritical studies, and indeed she has frustrated a good number of critics.[44] Her focus on her personal process of learning and her experiential method has drawn criticism for being 'more about the apprentice than the fields', and her transformation narrative has been criticised (with some justification) as predictable.[45] Her attempts at re-enactment also involve, at least initially, vague and unspecified versions of 'Amerindian' people. After her first discoveries of stone circles, for example, she decides to fill in the history of the landscape by imagining herself as 'an Amerindian woman perhaps

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[43] Ibid.

[44] See, for example, Cheryl Lousley, 'Spirit and Land', *Canadian Literature*, 172 (Spring 2002), 152–153.

[45] Ibid., p. 152.

two thousand years ago'.[46] However, it is noticeable throughout the text that she does not speak much to anyone of indigenous descent, and those she does speak to tend to remain un-named figures.

Similarly, while Butala actively works to try to rectify past dispossession, her motives are made somewhat ambiguous by her simultaneous interest in developing her own belonging through understanding the landscape, which is often described in terms of ownership. Her discovery of the first stone circle, she writes, is exciting not because it is an important discovery but because 'I had found something on my own, and although I didn't directly realise it then, this discovery gave me something solid and understandable to hold on to. Thus was the beginning of making the place my own'.[47] Eventually, the two motives combine, with her eventual sense of belonging paradoxically prompting her to give up the land entirely. Even then, however, while the creation of the Old Man on His Back reserve is a laudable act, it seems more geared towards commemorating the long history of indigenous life than directed towards addressing current social justice problems.

Finally, as I discuss in more detail below, Butala's narrative tends to reject knowledge derived from formal disciplines (e.g. archaeology), reaching instead towards mystical visions and experiences. Thus, while it is true that she repeatedly requests expert opinion about the artefacts found in the field and that she does extensive reading around them, she rejects many conclusions that do not

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[46] Butala, p. 24.

[47] Ibid., p. 23.

tally with her own. In one of the most significant examples, in the final section of the book Butala consults a white Canadian archaeologist and two First Nations men about the objects in the field, and is forced to admit that many of her previous claims — summarily dismissed by both parties — are unfounded. Almost immediately, however, she asserts that the verifiable truth is unnecessary; that while she might be classified as 'crazy or a liar or both', 'I found now that I could only say that *I knew what I knew* […] I would no longer refuse or deny my own experience'.[48] Such responses to those who might not believe her often seem obstinate to say the least: similarly, at the beginning of the book she blithely asserts that she 'no longer [cares] if I'm believed or not'.[49] Without detracting from these criticisms, I would suggest that Butala's interpretation of the landscape is not as simple as it at first appears; and in addition, as I will now demonstrate below, she herself regularly undermines her own assertions of knowledge and truth, registering acute anxiety not only about her ability to interpret the landscape correctly, but also about the reasons for (and indeed the ethical validity of) her curiosity. It is for this reason that the largest portion of the book is dedicated to the thought processes behind Butala's own exercise in landscape interpretation. These processes involve extensive questioning of what models and disciplines of knowledge might justifiably be used to interpret and understand a specific landscape and the various objects found within its midst.

Representation and its Anxieties

The more time Butala spends trying to understand her surroundings and the

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[48] Ibid., p. 197, pp. 197–198.

[49] Ibid., p. 1.

process of framing the landscape, the more the cumulative creation of a full picture of place proves to be an overwhelming task. In one early scene, Butala describes that after some years of experience in the field, when 'I began to think that I knew its terrain pretty well' and 'no longer expected surprises', she and a friend are suddenly and unexpectedly surprised by 'the largest snake I have ever seen in the flesh'.[50] After a moment of terror, the snake slides back into a hole. At this point, the friend notices that in fact 'there were holes just like it all around us'.[51] Butala comments that 'just when I was beginning to think I'd pretty much seen all there was to see in the field, the landscape had opened another crack to reveal one more of its secrets'.[52] But what begins as a triumph ('now I *had* seen everything') is quickly replaced by 'a steadily growing uneasiness' about 'what more there might be here that I hadn't seen, I didn't know about, had not even guessed at'.[53] Butala thus shares with Tredinnick (see Chapter One) an intense wish to understand and represent the landscape, and to find some sense of belonging within it, but also an underlying concern that this is simply not possible — a concern that feeds off the anxieties surrounding representation itself.

This concern is accompanied by an ongoing unease as to whether the field and its contents can be interpreted validly. This is demonstrated most obviously in Butala's distrust of the principles and techniques of Enlightenment rationalism, those attached to mainstream science in particular: 'It is scientists — botanists —

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[50] Ibid., p. 36.

[51] Ibid., p. 37.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

who decided what […] plants would be called, using their own system of discrimination, a very different one than that used by aboriginal people around the world […] Science provides a different classificatory system for which it claims the only truth, or at least the primary truth, an arrogance I've always found shocking'.[54] Butala is more dismissive still of those fashionable forms of adventure environmentalism which turn their back on ordinary sites (like the field) and insist instead on interpreting the wild in 'hard-to-read, little-known places' that require exploration by would-be pioneer figures with 'expensive equipment', a 'sense of superiority', and a background in science — all attitudes, she argues, that smack of 'mere elitism [and/or] masculine arrogance at its worst'.[55]

Butala applies a similar distrust to her interpretation of the objects in the field. Although she describes a number of discussions with archaeologists, and reads several archaeological texts, she is demonstrably impatient with much of this, as registered in her paranoid concern that a team of archaeologists might physically start 'digging up the ground and measuring and disturbing what I now felt was a sacred site'.[56] She thus decides fairly early on that she 'would not dig into the ground as an archaeologist does; would not even talk to an archaeologist for clues'.[57] Butala's predominantly irrational approach might easily lead to the kind of paralysis of representation described by Peter Read in my introductory

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[54] Ibid., p. 48.

[55] Ibid., p. 92, p. 93.

[56] Ibid., p. 154.

[57] Ibid., p. 24.

chapter, were it not for the fact that she staunchly defends the validity of her own imaginative interpretation: 'I would just walk and think and study what was there, and in time the meaningful pattern I felt sure was there would become evident to me.[58]

A somewhat contradictory situation ensues. In one guise, Butala presents herself as a conduit for special revelations from the field, which she now conceives as being made up of '*layers of presence* [that are] gradually disclosing themselves to me'.[59] This suggests an intuitive knowledge which simply 'happens' to Butala after time spent in the field: she writes about finding a new plant, for example, that 'I knew at once without the slightest doubt, despite still not having looked it up, [that it] was Indian breadroot'.[60] In another guise, however, she engages in frantic searches for artefacts, seeking a complete understanding of the landscape she fears she will never have, and perhaps ought not to have been looking for in the first place. To take just one example, after several days of searching 'with an intensity that had gone beyond common sense' for a quartz sphere and cylinder she had previously found then subsequently lost, she describes hearing a question, '*What do you want them for?*' and reacts with surprise, dismay, and a hint of shame.[61] Similarly, towards the end of the narrative, still in search of a full understanding of the history of the landscape, Butala is greeted by the withering answer: '*You will never know*'.[62]

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[58] Ibid., p. 24.

[59] Ibid., p. 37.

[60] Ibid., p. 58.

[61] Ibid., p. 28.

[62] Ibid., p. 157.

This ongoing tension fuels a text that is often simultaneously assertive and self-questioning. Even the opening passages about Butala's 'haunted home' are deeply ambiguous, establishing her own right to belong even while she acknowledges the ghosts of previous owners. Her initial description reads:

Our house was haunted. It was haunted from the time it was an unfinished shell sitting on its foundation next door to the small log house in which we lived in a wide river valley some miles from Eastend, Saskatchewan (so-called because it's at the east end of the Cypress Hills), until recently, a period of a good twenty years […] Since 1913, when my husband's father had arrived from Slovakia to join his two brothers already in Canada, the Butalas had slowly built up their ranch on the wide grasslands of the northern Great Plains, just over the border from Montana, and in the extreme southwest corner of Saskatchewan. By the time Peter and I married in 1976, it was more than thirteen thousand acres. Here Peter and his siblings had been raised, and here I came as a bride.[63]

In the passage above, Butala contrasts a seemingly intractable problem with her house (it is haunted) with an image that appears to stake immediate claim to her entitlement to the landscape. With her description of the traditional 'small log house', she sets herself up as a traditional, historically legitimate owner, while her references to inheritance and the family's more than hundred-year history bolster her husband's history and claim to the land. The elevated tone of 'here I came as

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[63] Ibid., p. 1.

a bride' has a faint echo of a foundation epic or chronicle, and the archaic 'bride' plays on traditional conceptions of land ownership and legitimate inheritance through marriage. Typically, however, she quickly undermines this narrative and the frame within which it operates. She is not, she argues, the traditional bride at all, but rather a 36-year-old divorcee moving out from the city, and who does not fit in with the other ranch wives.

As she candidly concedes, she inhabits the shadow-land between urban academic and ranch wife, on the edge of both worlds and not really fitting into either. She feels she is too old, too urban and university-educated to fit in with the young wives of the area, but feels similarly insecure about her academic standing, describing herself as 'a graduate student and lowly lecturer'.[64] Increasing her discomfort is her sense of the limited gender role offered to her in the rural society in which she newly finds herself. In this context, seeing and interpreting the landscape is nothing less than her attempt to assert her personal right to a voice. She notes early on that many of her observations about the field were not surprising, but that

> now I was seeing all this for the most part, alone, at my own speed, in my own way, as an adult. No one was telling me what to look at, or explaining it to me, or telling me to wait and look longer, or not to bother with looking at this or that. This, it was now beginning to seem to me, had been the story or my entire life up to that point, the assumption by everyone significant to me apparently having been that I wasn't clever enough or sensible enough to

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[64] Ibid., p. 22.

know what I ought to be looking at or, worse, that I didn't have the right to choose for myself.[65]

Many of Butala's more arcane passages describing what she alternately calls 'visions' and 'mystical experiences' are similarly put forward as gendered claims. She points, for instance, to an academic paper suggesting that older women have the highest number of such experiences, perhaps because they have more 'porous boundaries'.[66]

One explanation for the tension to be found in Butala's work is to read it as a study in the irreducibly personal way in which we see, experience, interpret and relate to a landscape. This raises questions about the extent to which our thinking about environment should be based on what designated experts say about it, but also about the degree to which there are morally 'right' and 'wrong' ways of seeing the environment. Butala passionately explores the personal nature of one individual's — her own — largely non-scientific engagement with a landscape, which turns out to be necessarily more than learning a set of facts. (It is interesting that Savage, a credentialled scientist and scientific writer, chooses to write a personal memoir with significant similarities to Butala's text). However, Butala's book also charts significant anxieties, showing some of the fault lines that open up when personal experiences of landscape are out of kilter with the understandings derived from scientific and historical knowledge. While Butala has been heavily criticised for giving significance to her own personal imaginative

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[65] Ibid., p. 22.

[66] Ibid., p. 61.

leaps at the expense of maintaining historical accuracy, it also needs to be understood that she is representing a form of cognitive dissonance that is both practically universal and highly particular to her chosen genre.

Seeing Properly (II): Candace Savage's *A Geography of Blood*

Like Butala's *Wild Stone Heart*, Candace Savage's *A Geography of Blood* (2012) focuses on the place and history of the prairie landscape around Eastend, particularly the Cypress Hills. For Savage, this is local history from 1870–1885, the so-called 'End of the Frontier' in particular, but *A Geography of Blood* also pays attention to history more generally, including natural history from Late Cretaceous period animals whose remains have been found in the area, to the geological history of place. (As a science writer, Savage has previously written fourteen natural science books.) For Savage, like Butala, the exploration of history hangs on how the physical landscape is perceived. It begins with 'seeing' (as in noticing or discovering) signs of history in a landscape that seemed at first not to contain them, and progresses through interpreting these physical signs of history for the reader — and for herself. Savage uses the simple if effective narrative technique of explicitly playing on the traditional image of the prairie as empty or absent, refilling that image with an interpretation that is both more ethically appropriate and closer to the truth.[67] On the first page of *A Geography of Blood*, for example, she notes that 'the journey I want to tell you about was not a grand excursion to some exotic, faraway destination, but a trip that brought us

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[67] Savage has described Wallace Stegner's purpose in *Wolf Willow* (also about Eastend) as a similar one. Although Savage has criticisms to make of Stegner's work, she believes part of his purpose in writing *Wolf Willow* was to 'backfill the legend with truth'. Savage, p. 58.

closer home. A nothing little ramble to nowheresville'.[68] A few pages later, she notes that '[w]here I was headed could not be found on a map'.[69] When Savage and her husband first visit Eastend, they find themselves 'cast adrift, with nothing to guide us but our thoughts and our unaided senses': the telephone does not ring, there is no radio, and the TV does not work. The noise of the spruce trees 'only served to signal an eerie absence of noise'.[70] The reference to 'unaided senses' recalls Butala's type of personal trajectory of engagement with the land.

Emptiness, eeriness, absence are of course all prairie clichés, and Savage quickly makes it clear that this 'nothing' is to do with a lack of historical awareness rather than with any objectively justified conclusion about the prairies. Early on, Savage describes a trip near Havre with her husband:

> We jog north again, running for the border ourselves, and fail to notice, on the western outskirts of the town, the remains of Fort Assiniboine, established in 1879 and once the grandest military establishment in Montana, with a garrison, at its peak, of more than five hundred blue-coated men. Their mission was to clear the country of "British" Indians, Cree and Metis hunters from across the line, by whatever means necessary. Voices hang in the air here, speaking of hunger, displacement,

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[68] Ibid., p. 1.

[69] Ibid., p. 4.

[70] Ibid., p. 19, p. 1.

and cold, but we do not hear a word. Do you suppose it's really true that what you don't know can't hurt you?[71]

Savage and her husband see 'nothing' of the past in the landscape because they simply 'don't notice' it. There are two objects of perception in this passage, 'remains' and 'voices', both of them more or less invisible. The passage duly exploits a contrast between a vivid and bustling picture of the past ('grandest military establishment', 'five hundred blue-coated men'), and the absence of the present (a few unnoticed remains 'on the western outskirts of the town').

These unseen histories are referred to again when Savage describes the journey from Calgary to Eastend to visit their newly bought home:

From the beginning to the end of the journey — a good four hours of travel — the landscape told and retold the same familiar story. The broad fields of stubble that spun by our windows represented the climax of the settlement saga, the triumphant end point […] the payday of my own grandparents' enterprise. Somewhere past Gull lake, we passed a commemoration of the whole agricultural undertaking, painted in exact letters on the gable of a meticulously maintained barn: 'Rolling View Farm,' it read, '1917.' It was as if the settlement experience marked the beginning of time.[72]

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[71] Ibid., p. 8.

[72] Ibid., p. 36.

This journey, for Savage, shows a landscape that inspires a familiar set of historical associations. The stubble of the landscape — the physical sign of farming — is associated with the 'triumph' of settlement: farmed land, accumulated earnings, and neat, well-maintained farm buildings. It is, if 'what you don't know can't hurt you', an aesthetically pleasing image. However, Savage caustically notes that

> Of the country's longer past and its deep reservoirs of stories — memories of the metis settlement that (unbeknownst to me on these early journeys) flourished briefly at the Saskatchewan River crossing; of the terrible battle that had taken place in the Red Ochre Hills, southwest of Swift Current, in 1866; or of the buffalo jump near Gull Lake that dates back thousands of years and once sustained hundreds of families — of these memories and so many others we did not hear a single word.[73]

Along with the familiar story of settlement is a hidden history, both human and non-human (e.g. the buffalo jump). The operative absence here is obviously not that of history itself, but that of the knowledge needed to recognise that history from the landscape that remains. Savage emphasises the lack of adequate historical association, which limits her aesthetic interpretation. In theory this absence can be countered — or so she suggests — by learning to see more clearly. Relatively early on in the text, Savage describes a passage in which she and her husband become 'discoverers' of the remains of a small encampment, emphasising the difference between the initial view — where it appeared 'stones

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[73] Ibid.

were strewn at random' with 'no rhyme or reason' — to the final view, where 'now that you know what you are looking for, you quickly locate half a dozen more rings clustered about'.[74]

The Cypress Hills area, Savage discovers, contains a particularly large and diverse range of physical clues, both human and non-human. Savage notes that archaeologists mapping the proposed oil pipeline in the 1990s 'encountered dozens of circles each day, far more than anywhere else in their journey', and a palaeontologist at Eastend's T-Rex centre tells her that 'within an hour's drive of town, I can hit almost a continuous seventy-five million years of vertebrate history […] from the end of the Western Interior Seaway, through the Late Cretaceous and the extinction event, all the way to the Age of Mammals and the emergence of the grasslands'.[75] These signs of history are also found in geological strata. Savage is by no means the first writer to turn to geology as a route into the history of landscape, but she argues that the Cypress Hills, an 'erosional remnant' of a landscape that once made up the prairies, are a particularly rich source, explaining in an interview that this 'landscape is gone from the rest of the country, eroded away. This means that the Cypress Hills are a repository of memory. Both literally and figuratively, they remember ancient life forms and long-buried events that have been forgotten everywhere else'. [76]

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[74] Ibid., p. 70.

[75] Ibid., p. 83, p. 147.

[76] 'A Conversation with Candace Savage, winner of the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction', (2012) <http://www.candacesavage.ca/geography.html> [accessed 15 June 2016].

Unconformities

In some cases, the signs of history are not just unrecognised but physically missing. Savage discusses this through an extended discussion of a so-called 'unconformity' or hiatus in the geologic record at the eroded headlands of the Cypress Hills along Ravenscrag road. Broadly speaking, an unconformity occurs when deposition of sediment temporarily stops and erosion removes some sediment before deposition resumes: the result is a disjuncture between 'younger' and 'older' packages of sediments, with a chronological break in between. Ravenscrag Formation, one of the locations that Savage discusses, is surmounted in places by the Cypress Hills Formation: this is a place where the physical signs of the past are no longer present, representing 'an erasure of about thirty million years'.[77] Savage notes that while she is able to discern this unconformity with the aid of a guidebook, 'to an unschooled eye, nothing looked amiss; one layer overlaid another in complete innocence. Apparently, an unconformity could exist between the present and what we knew of the past, and very few of us would ever notice it'.[78]

If geological unconformities occur 'in complete innocence', other, human-induced unconformities in the landscape are deliberate acts. In a 2012 interview with MinnPost, Savage discusses her concern about the removal of physical traces of history through 'picking rocks' of tipi rings and 'other mementoes of ancient human presence', suggesting that while such removals had agricultural purpose, they also 'erased the traces of previous residents and made it easier to maintain

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[77] Ibid., p. 57.

[78] Ibid.

the myth that North America was a new world ready for the taking'.[79] For Savage, such literal unconformities become the starting point for a disquisition on metaphorical ones; as she notes, 'there are similar unconformities in the way we choose to remember — and selectively choose to forget — more recent, human events'.[80] Alison Calder suggests that for Savage, the 'unconformity makes for an invisible absence; because once the absence is normalized, a viewer would not know something was missing, unless he or she went looking for it'.[81] For Savage, however, the absence is entirely visible. The difference instead is in the 'unschooled eye', which looks at landscape without the benefit of knowledge and education. The purpose of *A Geography of Blood* can consequently be found in its subtitle, 'unearthing memory from a prairie landscape'. Savage is quite simply attempting to provide the 'schooling' needed for a fuller view of landscape. While Butala suspects the rationalist approach that underpins standard modes of scientific knowledge, Savage adopts a more normative model of interpretation. As I will go on to describe in more detail below, she uses the nature-writing genre in large part as a vehicle to disseminate expert knowledge about her surroundings.

In so doing, Savage also emphasises the flexibility of environmental aesthetics: for the interpretation of beauty within a landscape may differ hugely

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[79] Savage, quoted by Amy Goetzman, 'Prairie Memories: a Q&A with Canadian Author Candace Savage' (MinnPost, 2012) <https://www.minnpost.com/books/2012/10/prairie-memories-qa-canadian-author-candace-savage> [accessed 1 June 2016].

[80] 'A Conversation with Candace Savage, winner of the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction', <http://www.candacesavage.ca/geography.html> [Accessed 15 June 2016].

[81] Alison Calder, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: A New Narrative for Canadian Literary History', *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d' études canadiennes*, 49.2, (Spring 2010), 87–105 (p. 88).

based on the viewer's knowledge and understanding of the scene (see also Introduction). On several occasions, Savage sets up a traditionally picturesque scene, now common to the prairie brand, before revealing a disturbing history that belies it. She narrates the story of the Cypress Hills Massacre, for example, by describing the experience of a tour:

> I climb out of the vehicle with trepidation, unsure what to expect, only to find myself beside a crystalline brook, encircled by sunlit hills, in the most benign and picturesque setting one could imagine. Our guide, meanwhile, is intent on continuing his story by showing us the lay of the land. See that willow-fringed meadow, bordered by an arc of the stream? That's where the Nakodas were camped in their buffalo-hide tipis. The two log buildings on the site, one nearby and the other partially visible through the bushes across the creek, represent the whiskey posts where Messrs. Solomon and Farwell, respectively, conducted their business. And so the scene was set for terror.[82]

Here, Savage sets up purposeful reversals between a naturalised, picturesque interpretation of the scene — a purposefully clichéd idyll of clear water, sun and meadows, with a typically picturesque framing of hills and willows — with the reality beneath. The Edenic, empty meadow is missing any sign of previous inhabitation, while the log buildings, usually associated with the nostalgia of a more morally upright and frugal agricultural past, in fact represent whiskey posts. Savage also contrasts a romantic image of 'Messrs. Solomon and Farwell', which

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[82] Savage, p. 104.

is redolent of the respectable nineteenth-century gentlemen conducting business, with the reality of their trade in alcohol. At the end of the tale, Savage notes that she has 'a vague recollection of being handed over to a summer student in the red-serge uniform of the North-West Mounted Police, who took us to Farwell's post and did his best to beguile us with the romance of the Wild West'.[83] At this point, however, she is no longer listening, as 'whatever it was the good "constable" had to say was wasted on a mind still reeling with gunshots and children's screams.'[84] She concludes instead that it is:

> [b]etter to go outdoors. Better to see the flash of warblers in the willows, to smell the spicy aroma of sage, to hear the bright gurgle of the creek as it speeds under the footbridge. Better just to be here and try to accept the solace of this land that refuses to let us forget.[85]

At this point, both Savage and the summer student are engaging in a form of imaginative speculation, but Savage notes that the romantic version is no longer sufficient. Instead she returns to the land, which offers consolation. The consoling function of nature is, of course, another nature-writing cliché, but in this particular case nature consoles us at least in part because it 'refuses to let us forget': a fuller interpretation is possible, Savage seems to suggest, if the viewer knows what to look for.

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[83] Ibid., p. 106.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

Nature Writing as Narrative Technique

As I have hinted at above, the narrative technique that Savage deploys for her exposition of the Cypress Hills landscape depends on the adoption, but also strategic manipulation, of several well-worn nature-writing tropes. Just as Savage is able to see unconformities of different kinds — albeit with some help — she is unlikely to have been ignorant about prairie landscape or its previous residents when beginning the book in the early 2000s: after all, she was a member of the board of directors of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and from 2010 was teaching oral history methods at Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge. Nevertheless, Savage casts herself as the unschooled and unsophisticated writer — very much like Butala's protagonist — that the reader can learn alongside.

She also develops a number of other tropes that are typical of nature writing as a whole, and of Butala's *Wild Stone Heart* more specifically. For Savage, like Butala, history manifests itself in physical signs: in remnants found on or in the ground, particularly stone circles, which she soon learns to identify and just as quickly becomes fascinated with. And also like Butala, she makes it her mission to 'find out who these stone people were, learn what had become of them, and see how their story intersected with the myth of agricultural settlement'.[86] She then continues: 'If I had wanted a reason for being in Eastend, I now had it. *My mission, should I choose to accept it*'.[87]

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[86] Ibid., p. 72.

[87] Ibid., p. 71.

The similarities between the two writers begin to multiply. Savage, like Butala, structures the book around a personal transformation narrative — a narrative with a decidedly supernatural dimension. Like Butala, she suggests that she is haunted. Her daughter mentions that the hills are 'sad' and 'spooky' and that 'something bad must have happened', while Savage and her husband are woken by dreams of 'unaccountable melancholy'.[88] More specifically, she is troubled by an image seen in her 'mind's eye' of her grandmother and a young Beaver woman facing each other across a clearing, neither speaking: 'No matter how often I had conjured them there, they never approached each other, and neither uttered a word. The silence that lay between them seemed impenetrable.[89] Again like Butala, it is through her engagement with history that she attempts to overcome this haunting. She describes being repeatedly called by a voice telling her that she is called to 'stop', 'stay put', and 'pay attention' to the land and to what the land might be telling her.[90] At one point, this voice manifests itself in a young coyote. In the first instance, her response to this calling means investigating who made the stone circles. In tracing the history of the people who might have made the tipi rings, she learns and writes of the destruction of the buffalo ecosystem, the 1873 Cypress Hills massacre, treaties and hunger camps.

Savage's move to the nature-writing genre appears to have been a successful strategy: *A Geography of Blood* has been far more commercially and critically successful than any of her previous works (winning the 2012 $60,000

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[88] Ibid., p. 50, p. 51.

[89] Ibid., p. 33.

[90] Ibid., p. 17.

Hilary Weston Prize), and it has reached a far larger audience. She notes that people were 'talking to me and reading it in a way that hadn't happened to me before, with the books I'd done'.[91] However, Savage's use of the first-person memoir form is not simply a sales strategy for a fundamentally factual narrative. Rather, an important characteristic of *A Geography of Blood* — one which begins in the very first word of the book's title — is its *resistance* to treating itself as a definitive history of the region. Savage clearly embeds provisionality and contingency into her interpretation of local landscape, in particular through the development of ever-expanding layers and connections that preclude the creation of a 'full picture' of place.

Contingencies and Connections

In *A Geography of Blood*, Savage is constantly seeking to contextualise: to make clear the connections between herself, the immediate landscape she encounters, and wider historical and global affairs. This contextualising work is sometimes performed through straightforward reference to wider historical or geographical forces and events, but it is sometimes wider and deeper still, even quasi-religious. Answering the voice telling her to 'pay attention to where you are', she observes first that 'we stood on the divide between the mundane and the numinous'; later that 'we were in the yard of Stegner house […] whirling through space on the skin of a living planet'; and finally that 'we were in Eastend […]

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[91] Jessi Gowan, 'Candace Savage honoured with Hilary Weston Prize for A Geography of Blood', *Priarie Post*, 21 November 2012, <http://www.prairiepost.com/entertainment/arts/item/3276-candace-savage-honored-with-hilary-weston-prize-for-a-geography-of-blood.html> [accessed 1 June 2016].

travelling through time, through memory, the invisible dimension'[92] At times she seems overwhelmed by this web of interrelated processes, both physically and intellectually, referring to herself at one point as 'out of place here, dazzled by these spinning horizons and this unbounded sky that bleeds off into infinity'.[93] Savage attributes her 'unmoored' feeling first and foremost to a lack of history, but she also puts it down to a sense that her learned historical frame is inadequate, and has become itself unfastened. She emphasises the failure of certain traditional historical frames to adequately describe place or to operate as ways of understanding one's place in the world:

> I gazed out of the window into the heavy dark and recalled how my own sense of Western history had, over the years, gradually come unmoored. I remember sitting in Sunday school one morning (in the minister's study at First United Church in Vermilion, Alberta, to be precise) and suddenly seeing with irrevocable clarity that the assurances of Christianity, and of a divinely ordained plan, were an illusion.[94]

The language of views and viewing in this passage is striking. The reader perceives Savage 'gazing' out of a window, into nothing ('heavy dark'). Savage in turn brings to mind an earlier image of herself, sitting in the minister's study, and 'suddenly seeing with irrevocable clarity' that Christianity was an 'illusion'. The only literal view in this kaleidoscope is Savage's staring into darkness and, we

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[92] Savage, p. 17, p. 20, p. 33.

[93] Ibid., p. 8.

[94] Ibid., p. 31.

infer, perceiving nothing. Not all sights are equal (some may be mere 'illusions'), but the prevalence of the metaphor of sight as a figure for knowledge and understanding suggests that truth is a matter of opening one's eyes to see what is patently there to be seen, rather than a matter of patient study of propositional knowledge in books. Indeed, as I argue throughout this thesis, 'sight' (and more generally perception) used in this way is not mere metaphor, but reflects and expresses much deeper connections between aesthetic, moral, and political judgement and understanding.

For Savage, the enclosure of place within traditional historical frames — in both historical and physical terms — is inadequate. Her emphasis on the need for new frames that acknowledge the historical, geographical, and political connections between people and peoples, reflects the American historian Elliott West's ecologically oriented statement in *The Way to the West* that 'understanding the West is never by clean lines but by indirection and by webs of changing connections among people, plants, institutions, arrivals, politics, soil, weather, ambitions, and perceptions'.[95] Similarly, Savage's response to her perceived inability to put together a full interpretation of place becomes an attempt to make connections, both with people (e.g. through conversation), and between historical and current events. From her desk in the city, she sweeps through 'books, articles, websites, videos', learning stories and theories from ethnographers and archaeologists alike. She talks to the guides at the T-Rex museum and the local commemorative sites, participates in an archaeological dig, and arranges to speak

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[95] Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), p. 166.

to members of the Nekaneet First Nation and to women at the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, a minimum security women's prison. She stages fictional dialogues between herself and deceased figures (in particular Wallace Stegner and Chief Nekaneet). Finally, in the book's closing pages she speaks to Narcisse Blood, a Blood Indian teacher and filmmaker, who states the connection thesis most clearly: 'To understand the Cypress Hills, he says it's not enough to know them in isolation, as an island apart. They have to be seen in relationship'.[96]

It is this pervasive sense of connection that is a central part of Savage's philosophy of landscape. While Savage is clearly interested in the bioregional, her wider impulse is ecological, revolving around connections between seemingly separate events and entities, and attuned to the significance of the history and landscape of which she writes. In so doing, Savage effectively creates what Maher has referred to as a 'deep map' in which 'the multiple histories of place, the cross-sectional stories of natural and human history [are] traced through eons and generations', and in which 'a plethora of interconnected stories [is captured] from a particular location, a distinctive place' (see also section 1 above).[97]

In *A Geography of Blood*, this focus on connection can be seen in three particular areas. Firstly, Savage highlights the tensions between the local, the regional, and the national. The extirpation of the buffalo, the massacres, and the hunger camps are all cross-hatched with decisions made in Ottawa or overseas, with the introduction of the railroad, and with market forces: 'The Cypress hills

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[96] Savage, p. 152.

[97] Maher, p. 11.

are a landscape that connects all the dots'.[98] Secondly, she highlights connections between the past, the present and the future. As she writes,

> If Old and New are defined as distinctly separate strata, then scholars can assign the meanness of Western history to a distant and semi-mythical past that seems to have no connection to the present. But sadly for our peace of mind, that's not the way things happened. Instead, as the Cypress hills have been at some pains to teach me, the New West of our daily lives lies conformably, if uncomfortably, on a foundation of abuse and loss […] As the descendant of incomers to the Canadian prairies, I am the intended beneficiary, however unwittingly, of an ecological and humanitarian atrocity.[99]

Finally, she notes connections between human and more-than-human worlds when she asks: 'what if, beyond our need for one another, we humans also have an urgent, inarticulate need for the more-than-human world'.[100]

In Savage's case, the three aforementioned modes of connection (the local and the national or supra-national; the past and the present; the human and the more-than-human) are central to her notion of what nature writing is about. This

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[98] Savage, p. 98.

[99] Ibid., p. 152.

[100] Ibid., p. 81. 'More-than-human' was first coined by the American philosopher David Abram as a way of referring to a world that includes, but also exceeds, the human, thereby putting pressure on human/non-human or nature/culture dichotomies. See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Book, 1996).

is illustrated by her title: 'A Geography of Blood'. Geography, *geo/graphe* in ancient Greek, is literally 'writing' about 'land'. As such, it is a synonym for the genre of nature writing, but of course it also imports associations and expectations derived from social scientific enquiry about the numerous interconnections between people and societies. Savage's book constitutes a 'geography of blood' because of the massacres it describes, but it is also about 'blood' in the sense of genealogy and bloodlines. At the most basic level, it is a description of her own lineage, and hence her entitlement to belong to Eastend and to Canada. Savage's dream mystery of the two silent women is finally resolved after she has been to consult the 'family historian' (her aunt), who finds some history suggesting that their family had lived 'side by side' with a Cree-speaking family for 'a good seven, eight years', but no one in the family had mentioned them, 'not even once'. [101] And the banishment of her 'ghosts' eventually occurs when the disconcerting image of the two silent women is replaced in her mind by an image of 'two women at a table, talking'. [102] Thus, like Butala, Savage seeks reconciliation, but does not find it so neatly: her Eastend is necessarily contingent, essentially unfinished, and her emphasis is on continuing conversation rather than conclusion of any kind. The title of her book hints at this contingency — this is merely a possible geography — and her final line confirms it: 'To be continued'. [103]

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[101] Ibid., p. 181.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., p. 186.

Conclusion

Savage's and Butala's respective projects to 'unearth' history and memory from the small corner of prairie landscape around Eastend are, superficially at least, strikingly similar. Both are motivated by the fundamental question of how landscape can and should be 'seen' in a context where the naturalised image of the prairies (as an idealised refuge from urban life and updated golden age idyll) is an interpretation of landscape far removed from its living present-day existence as well as its recent violent past. Both works, in differing ways, offer a level of contingency in their own interpretations, working towards what the American cultural historian and literary critic Neil Campbell believes a 'new spatial, cultural geohistory' of the west should entail: 'not a unified and totalising story but one in which many voices speak, many, often contradictory, histories are told, and many ideologies cross, co-exist, and collide'.[104]

The two writers' approaches to a more ethically appropriate aesthetics of landscape differ strikingly, however, in their treatment of expert knowledge and discourse. Savage seeks to popularise and disseminate expert knowledge (in which she shares) and uses the nature-writing memoir form to do so. Her personal journey, while also discussed, is somewhat secondary to this imperative, acting primarily as a vehicle for conveying information and perspective. By contrast Butala, who is equally scholarly, equally interested in different systems of knowledge, and to some extent an equal part of the academic establishment, sets out to write a tale that puts her own personal journey at centre stage, despite her

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[104] Neil Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 20.

own stated misgivings. She is interested in, and accords a grudging respect to, expert knowledge, but that knowledge is dealt with in a much more ambivalent and sometimes overtly suspicious way. As she writes in *The Perfection of the Morning,* 'I am torn between the facts and history and the truth of the imagination, and it is to the latter, finally, in terms of my personal history, that I lean'.[105]

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[105] Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2004), xvii.

Walking

Introduction

At the outset of this thesis I introduced two key questions that currently plague environmental aesthetics: to wit, how is it possible to 'frame nature' when it necessarily exceeds any given frame; and how might philosophers and writers evaluate such 'natural environments' appropriately on their own terms — as Ray Hepburn rather problematically puts it, 'as nature', rather than as an adjunct to human needs and concerns.[1] Central to both questions is how human perceivers are situated in relation to the environment they perceive, from the traditionally picturesque distanced view — which supposedly allows the viewer to synthesise a large scene — to Arnold Berleant's more recent model of a fully immersive experience of place.[2]

While human experience of the so-called natural environment (or, perhaps better, of areas that show fewer immediately obvious signs of human impact) is arguably as varied and difficult to define as the places themselves, contemporary modes of perception might broadly be divided into four types, albeit overlapping and contradictory ones. The two modes most associated with a stereotypical

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[1] Ray Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', in *British Analytical Philosophy: International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method*, ed. by Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 195–209.

[2] See Allan Carlson and Arnold Berleant, eds, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 16–17.

tourist experience can thus be identified as, first, the 'snapshot' view — the picturesque view found in guidebooks and at national park outlooks, often photographs in turn shared on Facebook or Instagram; and, second, a fast-moving experience of landscape from a car, train, or 'plane. A classic tourist mode of experience might, for example, involve driving or being flown to Niagara Falls, walking over to an outlook post, and taking a photo resembling the ones in countless guidebooks. In contrast, contemporary nature writers as studied in the first two chapters of this thesis often insist on a third — what we might call a 'residential' — mode of experience, often with a bioregionalist focus on learning about their 'home' more deeply.[3] The focus of this chapter, however, is on a fourth mode of experience that has a long history in nature writing. This is what might be termed the 'ambulatory' experience: a moving but slower (and therefore potentially mindful) experience of landscape, now often associated with the long-distance hike, pilgrimage, or quest.

The Walking Narrative

The walking narrative in its current form can be traced, at least in part, to the late eighteenth-century picturesque walking tour, in which eager pedestrians like William Gilpin and his followers could view, sketch, and reflect on the natural environment and its contents.[4] Such tours were often supplemented by handbooks, which were designed to help the typically middle-class wanderer to

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[3] A clear discussion and critique of bioregionalism appears in Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 220–222.

[4] See Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989).

respond to the destination in a suitably tasteful way.[5] Another link between contemporary walking narratives and the long eighteenth century comes from the fact that the contemporary travel text often doubles as spiritual autobiography where, as the literary critic Carl Thompson describes it, the journey undergone is figured as a 'key stimulus to a new understanding of the traveller's life'.[6] While this genre has a long history of its own, its current form has clear links to Romantic writers like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and, later, Henry David Thoreau, whose 1850s' essay 'Walking' argues for walking to be undertaken mindfully as a kind of spiritual act, 'absolutely free from all worldly engagements'.[7]

The contemporary English nature writer and academic Robert Macfarlane has recently suggested that a revival of the pilgrimage is occurring worldwide, 'with pilgrim numbers rising even as church-going figures fall'.[8] Macfarlane notes that while the modern pilgrim might also travel by aeroplane or car, he or she is 'most often on foot and over considerable distances — for physical hardship remains a definitive aspect of most pilgrimage: arduous passage through the outer landscape prompting subtle exploration of the inner'.[9]

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[5] Ibid., p. 73.

[6] Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 114.

[7] Henry David Thoreau, 'Walking', in *The Essays of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. by Lewis Hyde (New York: North Point Press, 2002), pp. 147–178 (p. 152).

[8] Robert Macfarlane, 'Rites of way: behind the pilgrimage revival', *Guardian*, 15 June 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/15/rites-of-way-pilgrimage-walks> [accessed 1 July 2016].

[9] Ibid.

Recent Australian and Canadian narratives of the ambulatory vary hugely, from Arno Kopecky's sailing expedition into British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest in *The Oil Man and the Sea* (2013) and Trevor Herriot's three-day walk alongside fields of monoculture from his back door in Saskatchewan in *The Road is How* (2014), to the works under examination in this chapter: namely Karsten Heuer's five-month trip (accompanied by his wife, Leanne Allison) following the caribou migration from Old Crow, Yukon, to calving grounds near Kaktovik, Alaska, in *Being Caribou* (2006)*;* and Maya Ward's three-week walk to the source of the Yarra River in and near Melbourne, Australia, in *The Comfort of Water* (2011).[10] Nevertheless, a common theme for these writers, as has been the case in other examples studied to date, is that the 'right' mode of perception is central both to the narrators and to the texts themselves.

This raises the question of whether there is anything distinctive about the walking narrative as a sub-genre, and if so what that might be. Macfarlane articulates a theme common to many writers and critics involved with the genre by arguing that it is specifically the act of walking (or other mindful 'passages through place') that allows knowledge to be 'grown along the way'.[11] The walking narrative, he suggests, is 'both site-specific and motion-sensitive': it is an

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[10] Arno Kopecky, *The Oil Man and the Sea: Navigating the Northern Gateway* (Madeira Park, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013); Trevor Herriot, *The Road is How: A Prairie Pilgrimage through Nature, Desire, and Soul* (Toronto: Harper, 2014); Karsten Heuer, *Being Caribou: Five Months on Foot with an Arctic Herd* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006); Maya Ward, *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage* (Yarraville: Transit Lounge, 2011).

[11] Macfarlane, 'Rites of Way'.

ongoing, continuous process rather than one discovered simply at various stop-off points.[12] The associated conception of a 'right' view is an almost complete reversal from the Gilpin-esque guidebook. The aim here, instead, is that the distance between viewer and view should be broken down entirely so that the pilgrim can 'think *with* landscape'.[13] This is the opposite of picturesque distance. In the works under scrutiny in this chapter, distanced views and '*with* landscape' thinking are regularly deployed as aesthetic strategies. Both have limitations. Beauty, particularly in terms of developing or questioning a normative aesthetic, remains a key concept throughout.

Walking is also related to conceptions of belonging within place, i.e. the 'right' kind of walking is related to the 'right' way of perceiving.[14] The aim (or at least an aim) of both is to achieve an appropriate relationship between the narrator and his/her environment that permits him or her to feel a justified sense of belonging in that environment. Walking narratives typically involve the narrator 'earning' a sense of place that does not exist for those merely driving along roads or hurrying through for some other purpose. Part of the issue, then, is about differentiation, for the authors of walking narratives are generally anxious not to be considered as tourists, even if they sometimes uncomfortably realise that the differences are not so clear-cut as they had hoped. [15] 'Ambulatory' and

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See Chapter One for a further discussion of this; 'right' ways of seeing and doing things are also discussed in Chapter Four.

[15] Maya Ward, in a passage near the start of the book, explains why she came to set out on her walk up the Yarra: 'In my process of searching for a way to sink deeper into my home place, I was

'residential' narratives are not opposites, it turns out; instead, at some level the difference between them is one of perspective, since a 'residential' narrator will typically describe a region around his/her home, and an 'ambulatory' narrator will be traversing an area that can itself be described as a single region (even if a large one, such as the North American Arctic).

Activism, Environmental Aesthetics, and the Pilgrimage

One apparent feature of walking (or, as I will call them here, 'pilgrimage') narratives which I would argue is more than coincidental is that many are explicitly, or at any rate clearly, activist texts. Thus, of the four works mentioned above, Karsten Heuer's *Being Caribou* is avowedly an effort to persuade US policy-makers not to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; while Arno Kopecky's sailing expedition into British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest in *The Oil Man and the Sea* is the record of a sailing expedition intended to raise awareness of the destruction that would inevitably be involved in the scheme to pipe oil from the Alberta tar-sands to a site in the forest for onward export by supertanker.[16] Maya Ward's and Trevor Herriot's narratives, for their part, may

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drawn to tales of pilgrimage. These journeys often took place in other lands; often ambitious, often long, usually walked, they were undertaken by those seeking connection with something larger than themselves. The pilgrim was a seeker. Those seekers sought that which is only revealed over time, through devotion to the task, through mental and physical effort'. Ward, *Comfort of Water*, p. 25.

[16] Kopecky's work is therefore not a walking narrative, but might still be considered to be an 'ambulatory' text using the four-part classification proposed above. Kopecky emphasises the relatively slow speed of the sailing boat, and the impact that has on the narrator's perception and experience of the landscape. Kopecky, *The Oil Man*.

not be designed to oppose or advocate for any particular project, but nevertheless they expressly set out to raise consciousness of harmful environmental practices and more appropriate alternatives (in Ward's case, deforestation on the one hand and permaculture and indigenous revegetation on the other; in Herriot's, the effects of large-scale monoculture, feeder farms, and heavy oil development activities).

Awareness raising and advocacy in favour of a more ecologically appropriate relationship between human and non-human environments are not of course peculiar to walking narratives. But there is something about the walking narrative that tends to lend itself to environmental advocacy. As I explore in more detail below, there are multiple potential explanations for this phenomenon, but one underlying and recurring theme is the notion of a 'quest' that is more or less inherent to the concept of the walking narrative as it currently appears. The walk (still more clearly if it is conceived of as a pilgrimage) tends to involve an arduous journey, with two particular implications. First, it draws attention to and appears to justify some kind of claim to an audience on behalf of the narrator. There is something compelling, not unlike a form of celebrity, about someone who has had the persistence and skill to keep up by foot over five months with a caribou herd travelling over hundreds of miles of Arctic tundra. Someone who might otherwise be politically hostile or indifferent to the narrator's message might reasonably be expected to show some interest in what he or she experiences during this quest. Second, the very notion of a quest implies some form of development. The journey becomes both symbol of and vehicle for a change in consciousness and understanding on the part of the narrator: one that he/she hopes can be replicated

to some degree by his/her audience. For this reason, a walking narrative is intrinsically well suited to a text that is seeking to prompt a form of change of perception, consciousness, or behaviour on the part of its readers.

Related to the notion of the walking narrative as quest is the idea that it functions as pilgrimage: as religious or quasi-religious ritual, both rite of passage and putative source of spiritual enlightenment or divine grace. I explore below some of the literary implications of the pilgrimage theme as it appears in the texts under consideration. In brief, not only does a conception of the sacred equate or approximate to the sort of 'right relationship' with nature that the texts advocate, but the idea of the narrative as a record of an extended religious ritual might be seen as lending it an enhanced significance. This allows a particular experience of the narrator's (e.g. seeing a caribou being shot by a hunter, or seeing effluent flowing into a river) to stand as a symbol for something of more general import, such as a commentary on humanity's relationship with the non-human. In narratives of this kind, the beautiful landscape or serendipitous event becomes a parable for how 'balance' (always a potentially problematic concept) can be achieved, just as the polluted landscape or disappointing moment is exemplary for what is wrong with our relations with the non-human.

Aesthetics plays a crucial role in the literary and activist strategies deployed by Karsten Heuer and Maya Ward in their respective narratives. These two texts exemplify to a high degree the relationship between aesthetic and moral/political discourse that I described in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Once again, the narrator as twenty-first century successor to the picturesque

walking tourist is well placed to evolve such aesthetic strategies (even if the result cannot always be judged a success). Since the backbone of both texts is representation of the surrounding environment — interspersed with personal reflection, geographic, scientific, social and historical context, and a narrative record of the events of the walk — the reader's attention is naturally focused on how the landscape looks (also feels, smells, sounds), and on contrasts between one stretch of landscape and the next. The narrator is then able to use such descriptive details to emphasise moments of discontinuity or dissonance between places as they 'ought' to appear and the place actually being perceived. Part of the journey may involve development in the narrator's own aesthetic evaluation of the environment. Aesthetic representations of place can thus be used for emotive effect in support of the text's activist message. More generally, a central concern of each of the two texts is to promote a sense of the 'fragile beauty' of the landscape being walked through, and to afford a reminder of its value as something worthy of protection and respect. I aim to discuss the specific and often crucially important role that aesthetic questions have had in political debates associated with the texts under scrutiny. For the authors in question, their respective strategies of aesthetic representation are partly successful, but the normative aesthetics deployed in both cases can also occasionally lead to an overly simplistic division between 'untouched' and 'human-made' landscapes — one which obscures ongoing connections, good and bad, between people and place.

Maya Ward's *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage*

The Comfort of Water narrates its author Maya Ward's three-week walk from Melbourne to the source of the river Yarra, including, in addition to the narrative of the walk itself, background history of Aboriginal dispossession and environmental degradation in the area. As well as an author, Ward is an environmental activist, educator, and urban designer working in Melbourne, Victoria. Like Heuer, she is a first-time author who comes to writing for the primary purpose of activism. *The Comfort of Water* is to some extent an attempt to force the experience of an ecologically aware Melburnian into the classic poses of the heroic pilgrimage narrative. In large part, this ploy succeeds: the book has been well received, earning glowing praise from writers and critics like Mark Tredinnick (see Chapter One) and Nicolas Rothwell, and it occupies a much-needed place as a narrative for Melburnians and Australians generally to contemplate their relationship to river catchments and water, forests and deforestation, and other equally important socially and environmentally significant issues. Still, the text demonstrates moments of tension and dissonance where the conventions and expectations of the genre, as applied to an extended walk through and near the city of Melbourne, result in a narrative whose emotional register threatens on occasions to become overwrought.

In what follows, I seek to chart how *The Comfort of Water* treats the landscape of the Yarra catchment area aesthetically, with a focus on the subversive treatment of picturesque imagery and themes. My contention is that Ward's is a text with a strongly normative aesthetic strategy, and also one that makes use of picturesque and more recent 'instrumentalist' aesthetic techniques of

transformation, subversion, and association in ways similar to those described elsewhere in this thesis (see especially Chapters One and Two).[17] More specifically, Ward sets up scenes that would traditionally be associated with the picturesque, but reveals these scenes to be negatively impacted by nearby human activity, which at times is quite literally made up of rubbish produced by Melburnians. This is a partly successful strategy, which manages to point out connections and overlaps between supposedly 'natural' scenes and local human activity, but it ultimately becomes a relatively dichotomous representation in which most non-indigenous human activity is rendered automatically ugly, with no allowance made for a middle ground. In my analysis, I look in particular at two trajectories that are evident in and important to the overall narrative structure: first, the unfolding of the narrator's intended quest (and how that quest is frustrated and refashioned); and second, developing aesthetic representations of landscape in the text.

Imagining the Walk

Ward's walk begins as an act of imagination before it becomes a physical reality. She notes in an interview that the walk was first created for a theatrical performance: 'Walking the Yarra seemed an exciting but daunting idea that I didn't seriously contemplate until I created a theatre piece imagining what it would be like — that was when I realised that it is important to bring a dream into

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[17] See in particular my discussion of Mark Tredinnick's work in Chapter One of this thesis. For instrumental aesthetics, see my discussion of Yuriko Saito's approach in my introductory chapter.

reality'.[18] Similarly, the first views of the Yarra and its surrounding landscape are imagined representations. Near the start of the book, the Yarra is 'seen' for the first time on a map as Ward and her friend begin to plan the journey:

> Oh, but it was such a long way! I could barely see my friend at the other end of the map room. We'd gone along to see Melbourne University Library's topographicals; we'd requested all the maps that the river runs through. Then we laid them out end to end on the library tables. Luckily the library was virtually empty, as we needed almost all the tables. I realised the vastness of the journey in front of me, as we cooed to each other over the distance of the maps, me at the mouth, she at the source. The land was laid out there in my imagination, contour lines unfolded into hills and valleys, thin curling blue ink became clear meandering streams that cradled the blue of the sky. I planned my quest for the coming summer.[19]

The visual representation here is idyllic to the point of unreality; unsurprisingly perhaps, the description is entirely generic, with nothing to anchor it to the specific colours and contours of the Yarra catchment area. Admittedly there is an underlying irony to the scene, which is that the previous chapter (the first substantive chapter of the book) has already introduced the Yarra, answering the

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[18] Ward, quoted by Vin Maskall, 'The Long Yarra Walkers: A Personal Pilgrimage' (Environment Victoria, 2005), <http://environmentvictoria.org.au/Content/the-long-yarra-walkers> [accessed 2 July 2016].

[19] Ward, p. 28.

question of how it was formed by telling two contradictory creation stories. The first, a Dreamtime story of the Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri Tribe), tells of how the Woiwurrung headman Barwool travels down from the source of the Yarra, freeing the land by cutting 'a channel up the valley with this stone axe'.[20] The second, a colonial story from 1803, tells of New South Wales chief surveyor Charles Grimes travelling up the Yarra from its mouth, describing it as 'the most beautiful he had yet seen', but mainly for reasons of colonial-style productivity that have since proved costly.[21] Ward's maps are the legacy of Grimes and his fellow colonial surveyors; and Ward and her friend have the river and its surrounding landscape laid out on tables just like a surgeon with a patient's body or a military general with maps. However, these maps become transformed by an act of imagination into a picturesque landscape. They also supply material for a quest whose mission is to bridge the continuing distance between the two competing creation stories: 'An origin story is a powerful thing. A story we may live by whether we know it or not. […] I didn't know how to believe in either story. So I had to make the river for myself'.[22] That the Yarra is still 'contested ground' has to do of course with legal ownership, but it also has to do with representation: how stories are told, how place and beauty are represented, and to what ends.[23] Towards the end of the pilgrimage, Ward describes a symbolically important

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[20] Ibid., p. 21.

[21] *The Comfort of Water*, pp. 22–23.

[22] Ibid., p. 23.

[23] See Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 137.

moment where the pilgrims lose their map: 'Lose the map. Throw away the key. Walk the land, and know these marks as real things, a lived life'.[24]

The description is striking, too, for its epic insistence on the 'vastness' of the journey ahead. The hyperbole is by no means unfair: the intended walk of over 245 kilometres is not insubstantial, and there seems to be no record of anyone having undertaken the journey on foot for at least a hundred years before Ward.[25] But there is still a discrepancy between the epic register of the language, which seems fitting for the sort of voyage of discovery that Ward describes as the archetype for her own pilgrimage, and the three-week walk that Ward and her companions ultimately carry out.

There is a second (very much shorter) imagined view of the land, this time immediately before the start of the walk, when Ward stands on the beach and looks over the waters of a bay. 'On the far side of the bay', she says, 'a few hills rose up in the distance. The Great Dividing Range, the mountains we were headed for, lay further east, not yet visible'.[26] The walk thus begins with an imagined view over to mountains that are 'not yet visible', and from which Ward will in due course look back to see the city and the whole of her walk up to that point.[27] Once again, unsurprisingly, there is no visual detail and little specificity. But the references to beach, bay, hills and mountains already suggest in and of themselves

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[24] Ward, p. 247.

[25] Ibid., pp. 36–37.

[26] Ibid., p. 42.

[27] Ibid., p. 206. (This passage is considered below.)

a form of harmonious natural beauty, while human interference is carefully airbrushed out of the (imagined) scene.

These two scenes stand as the visual representation of what Ward wishes to find on her walk: a form of coherent and connected beauty. *The Comfort of Water* is a text notable, even more so than *Being Caribou,* for the degree to which the narrator has defined in advance the transformative experience she seeks and expects to encounter through the narrative. To this extent, it may be contrasted with some of the texts considered in earlier chapters, which tend to record the effect of a transformation that the author has experienced, either without seeking it or without realising until retrospectively that the transformation has taken place (see Chapters One and Two). Ward's own quest is explicitly conceived of as a response to anxieties about belonging:

> With inadequate tools to understand my surroundings, a sense of displacement and an ache to belong gnawed at me. In my process of searching for a way to sink deeper into my home place, I was drawn to tales of pilgrimage. These journeys […] often long, usually walked, […] were undertaken by those seeking connection with something larger than themselves. [28]

And still more clearly: 'The notion of walking the length of the Yarra grew from my quest to live with clarity and sanity in the place I call home'. [29]

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[28] Ibid., p. 25.

[29] Ibid., p. 24.

In a striking passage at the very start of the pilgrimage, as she shoulders her backpack, Ward gives a lyrical statement of what she hopes that pilgrimage will achieve:

> I imagined how stories would be alive in places all along the way, days and days of walking and chanting, walking and chanting, woven together into neural pathways, the brain grooved to the shape of the land. Paths of mind, heart and country, traversed over a lifetime. Stories passed down the generations, regenerated each time the song was sung. The ancestors, the people, the land, becoming one thing, enchanted through chant, grown together through song, and each singing made them anew.[30]

The pilgrimage is described throughout as an experience of listening to and learning from these songs, and from the river itself. Having discussed songlines and notions of connection to land in various religious traditions, Ward concludes: 'I was interested in what, if I listened carefully, I might overhear'.[31] She and her three fellow pilgrims begin and end meetings with silence, reverential acts of listening to the river;[32] she frequently describes other experiences of listening;[33] and she imagines the lyrebird as being the perfect talisman for her enterprise:

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[30] Ibid., p. 44.

[31] Ibid., p. 26.

[32] Ibid., pp. 30–31.

[33] For example, to the contrasting sounds of a white-striped freetail bat and to the freeway (p. 100); to currawongs (p. 96); to nothing in particular (p. 125); to frog song in the one remaining Yarra billabong (p. 168); to the recollections of the daughter of an original squatter in the upper reaches of the Yarra (pp. 242–243).

'Lyrebirds live their lives well in one place, return all to the earth, and tell the whole truthful story in beauty. What a wonderful role model'.[34] The pilgrimage itself becomes Ward's own song: 'Like a gong struck, I rang with meaning. This is the story and we have been given it. This, now, is the story of our sacred journey'.[35]

What is clear from all this is that *The Comfort of Water* is a text with a firm view of what it wants to achieve. It anticipates a narrative arc, from city to mountain, from river mouth to source, from alienated city dweller to integrated and comprehending witness of sights, stories, and experiences. The text also features a similar form of anticipation of an aesthetic, social, and normative order: a felt conviction that the pilgrims will find (or ought to be able to find) clear meandering streams, a vision from the mountains to the river mouth and vice versa, and a unity of '[t]he ancestors, the people, the land, becoming one thing, enchanted through chant'.[36] In the next section, I examine further how this expectation, and its frustration or fulfilment, operate on an aesthetic plane.

Normative Aesthetics in *The Comfort of Water*

On the walk itself, Ward advances a somewhat dualistic mode of aesthetics in her descriptions, in which the 'natural' is generally equated with beauty, and the human-disturbed is presented as being distinctly un-picturesque. Ward sets up scenes that might normally be associated with the picturesque, but

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[34] Ibid., p. 217.

[35] Ibid., pp. 307–308.

[36] Ibid., p. 44.

uses this language to describe the uncanny distortions that now appear as a result of human interference. Particularly at the beginning of the walk (where the industrial and commercial manifestations of the city are most in evidence), but also continuing throughout, such scenes combine picturesque language with an apparently dystopian reality.

As Ward and her friends begin the walk, she notes:

In front of us we could see the cranes (named, I suppose after those long-necked birds, and looking like a mechanical distortion of those lovely endangered creatures) for loading and unloading container ships. Obese, steroidal, almost comically oversized, these ships deliver consumer goods from all over the world. For their return trip they are filled with bits of the country cut up or squeezed and sold; coal, ores, trees, wheat, wool, wine.[37]

This scene, one of the very first of the walk, is striking for its unpacking of the crane metaphor and the conjunctions this produces. This opens the way for aesthetic language appropriate to descriptions of animals' bodies to be applied to cranes and container ships: the former are a 'distortion', and the latter 'obese, steroidal, almost comically oversized'. Up to this point, the evaluative aspect of the passage is entirely aesthetic. The final sentence then expands on the violence implicit in the first two sentences by describing how nature is threatened, not just by man-made re-imaginings (with the cranes becoming a kind of Frankenstein's monster), but also by being 'cut up or squeezed and sold'. The notion of cutting

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[37] Ibid., pp. 45–46.

up and selling 'bits of country' ought to be somewhere between absurd and impossible, but in this passage it becomes only too easy to imagine. The overall effect is the representation of a hubristic and profligate subversion of the natural order, the power of which is plaintively contrasted with the 'lovely endangered creatures' that live in the country that is being cut up, squeezed, and sold. Picturesque language is used here both to create a sense of the proper order of things and to emphasise its subversion.

This same basic model is followed in the following description of the Stony Creek Backwash, home to White Mangroves:

The semi-submerged trees were a dark line ringing the bowl of the backwash, along with a fringe of bright and slimy plastic; rubbish washed in and out by the tides. In front of the Mobil Oil Terminal, near where the giant oil tankers docked — this was where the mangroves nestled.[38]

Here the view is set up in typical picturesque fashion: the trees in the foreground, framed against a 'bright' fringe, and 'nestled' in front of a backdrop. This is made uncanny by the fact that the bright fringe is slimy plastic rubbish (once made of oil, and showing where this oil eventually ends up — as rubbish), while the background is that of the giant oil tankers. Lest this not be clear enough, Ward immediately follows the safety of the word 'nestled' with a comment that it was 'To their peril. For the whole ecosystem was destroyed by an oil spill in the

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[38] Ibid., p. 47.

1980s. What we saw that day was recent regrowth'.[39] This last word, 'regrowth', comes as a surprise at the end of the passage, and implies the redemptive possibility of nature; indeed, renewal, reconciliation, and revegetation become increasingly important themes over the course of the book. The writing of this whole description of the mangroves in front of the oil terminal is curiously ambiguous: the use of picturesque language and descriptive techniques implies that there can be a beauty about modern and human-influenced landscapes, even as the text emphasises a contradiction between 'natural' and 'non-natural' states.

Even in some of the text's most consciously touristic scenes, the view is 'spoiled' by unsightly litter. After leaving the backwash, Ward sees 'the Yarra that most Melburnians knew; the tourist shot, the place of festivals, water pageants and celebrations', a sentence that stresses the limitations of ordinary visual representations and experiences of the river, and — by contrast — what the pilgrims hope to achieve with their more complete visual experience.[40] The scene clearly opposes the clichéd tourist snap to the more sensitive, ambulatory mode of viewing. The pilgrims themselves become casual tourists:

We sauntered under the curvaceous lemon-scented gums, then the avenue of Moreton Bay figs right by the water. Pied cormorants were sitting on a litter trap that had been secured to the riverbank, which was filled with floating debris; drink bottles and polystyrene oddments. These birds' preferred perch is in the trees where branches overhang the water, where

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p. 52.

they can spot the movement of dinner in the river below. In the absence of the indigenous red gums, which lean far over the water, the birds use what they can.[41]

These scenes happen in the very early stages of the journey; but as the 'pilgrims' journey up river, there are a number of incidents where picturesque language is used to similar effect, i.e. to point to a contrast between a natural and pre-colonial harmonious order and a destructive and unsustainable modern one. This is frequently done by referring to a single bird or flower holding out against the otherwise overwhelming force of modernity.[42] In other scenes, the river itself is described in picturesque or anti-picturesque language to bring out the effects of sewage, deforestation, damming or revegetation.[43] A good example is Ward's description of Yarra Park Bend, where a picturesque description emphasising colour and variety is followed by a scientific line of explanation: 'The tilling and building of the European settlers broke the plant roots that once held all the soil tight, and ever since the water has looked like mud'.[44] In another passage, Ward describes the sight of a red box forest, something that Ward had initially found un-picturesque, but now comes to see as 'not a place to be understood in isolation, but rather as one of the many interlinked terrains the river runs through, all with ecosystems perfectly adapted to their conditions'.[45] With appreciation of variety

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[41] Ibid., pp. 52–3.

[42] Examples include a yam daisy (p. 89), the last remaining billabong (p. 168), and a single blue wren, contrasted with the massive grey wall of the Yarra dam (p. 277).

[43] Ibid., p. 61.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 133.

and associative understanding comes a sense of beauty: an example of picturesque transformation (or, in contemporary terms, aesthetic fusion) that has been seen in several of the texts considered in this thesis so far (see Chapters One and Two).

Representative Limitations

While Ward succeeds to some extent in outlining the complexity of beauty in a compromised landscape, her narrative remains plagued by a romantic over-simplicity where the polluted and the pristine stand at stark odds. Ward's work has been described as 'extravagantly poetic', and indeed reading *The Comfort of Water* can be a frustrating experience.[46] To be sure, there are nuanced passages discussing her ambivalence about revegetation (potentially little more than the 'activity of a nature-loving, aesthetically minded middle class' who poison European weeds previously foraged by older Mediterranean migrants), or demonstrating a taste for self-irony ('was I going to have an epiphany every time I got wet?'). But these are often overshadowed by an extreme sentimentality that threatens to obscure the complexity of the problems facing the area by promoting a one-dimensional view in which the pre-colonial past is an idyll where 'everything, the only thing that you knew, was home', and indigenous characters — in so far as these appear at all — fulfil primitivist functions.[47]

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[46] Stella Clarke, 'Walking manifesto traces the Yarra to its source', *The Australian*, 2 July 2011, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/books/walking-manifesto-traces-the-yarra-to-its-source/news-story/aaca7bc0f8ce9535b7a81eaa75280576 > [accessed 1 July 2016].

[47] Ibid., p. 93.

In a moment of epiphany about two thirds through the book, Ward, now well into her quest, describes going to a lookout to gaze back at Melbourne:

The skyscrapers of Melbourne's centre were like a few short blades of grass seen over sand. I found myself speaking aloud to what I saw, addressing all that was spread out below me.

As I spoke, my voice rose and fell like the hills that ringed the valley. My sound trekked down the path we had walked, my words floated down to the sea. I chanted the rhythm of the steps to come, to the land unseen behind me, and I heard my own song come down from the source. The air was thickening. A mystery unravelled in the name of this place, a Wurundjeri word, *Toolebewong*. We Too belong. We Too Belong.

As I spoke I watched the rain flow off the mountain, gathering into tributaries, I saw all the land as one, all flowing to the river.

And as I spoke, I combed my long hair. I untangled knots; I freed the strands until finally my hair was flowing. The movement felt gentle, unhindered. My hair was flowing, pouring down my body. I too was the river.[48]

Here, in a singular moment of belonging, Ward intimates (albeit via one of the most clichéd tropes of nature writing) that she and the river are one. She suggests that her journey has — through the 'rhythm of [her] steps', through her listening and singing — earned her the right to belong. Despite these protestations of 'oneness', however, Ward sets herself up as if undertaking the archetypal 'promontory

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[48] Ibid., pp. 205–206.

description' of the colonial traveller, or what Mary Louise Pratt has sardonically described as the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' scene. [49] Ward's authoritative pronouncements fill the valley (and city) below seemingly without irony, conveying a sense of mastery along with her self-given right to belong.[50]

Ward's conclusion to her narrative is equally unsettling. At the end of the journey, her arrival at the source of the river is a crushing disappointment, a scene entirely at odds with the journey's triumphant conclusion as she had imagined it in the library at the beginning of the book. As she writes:

> We were standing at the edge of a clearcut, a massive logging coupe. The ancient forest around us was gone. The forest had only just been destroyed; it was still smoking from the burn-off they do when they finish their cut. There were piles of ashes, red embers beside the road. There were the bases of once great trees, now blackened stumps. There were trees cut down and not used, just burnt and left there. Senseless, stupid, heartbreaking destruction. This is what happens in our water catchments.[51]

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[49] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 197.

[50] As the postcolonial critic David Spurr writes, 'In our own largely postcolonial world, the commanding view still reflects the writer's authority over the scene surveyed, but the perceptual appetite is more likely to find itself unsatisfied, and the writer's tone to be one of disappointment or disillusionment'. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 18.

[51] Ward, p. 306.

Ward is horrified, but finds that looking at the clearcut provides her with a 'beautiful and strange' feeling of truth: '*This is what I am, this is what we are, this is what we do. This is the source, the true source, as much as anything. It must be so, or else we are outside the world. Pretending the world is a sweet little path by a river is not truth. Not mine, not truly, no matter how badly I want to live inside that fairytale*' (italics Ward's). [52] This, she and her friends decide, is reconciliation. Here, Ward extends her earlier narrative technique of revelatory landscape, in which potentially picturesque scenes are reconfigured by showing their ugly modern aspects, to a conclusion suggesting that 'seeing nature properly' requires recognising human interference in nature and its frequently negative effects.

Almost immediately following this, though, Ward and her friends follow a tiny creek into an uncut part of the forest, the 'aqueduct tributary on the slopes of Baw Baw, the source beyond the source'.[53] Here they lie together on the moss, imagining the birthing river, and hug one another: 'We forgave one another, we forgave the world, everything and all […] The distance between me and the sun was nothing. The time between the beginning and the end was nothing. The distance between me and the ancestors vanished — they were there, beside us, within us, they had always been there'. [54]

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[52] Ibid., p. 307.

[53] Ibid., p. 308.

[54] Ward, p. 310.

Disappointment set aside, Ward finds it in her to afford forgiveness and reconciliation, both with the landscape and with its imagined indigenous ancestors. The scene again takes the imagined journey of the walk to suggest a solution to the problems of environmental degradation and the dispossession of indigenous peoples (see also Chapter One). Ultimately, however, Ward's lack of self-awareness in these passages relegates this forgiveness and reconciliation to an entirely imagined plane, such that she and her friends appear to be in danger of playing out what Canadian literary critic Jenny Kerber refers to as settler 'fantasies of ecological primitivism'.[55] The heightened emotion of the pilgrimage narrative becomes the distinctive factor, negating the need for material action or concrete change.[56]

Karsten Heuer's *Being Caribou: Five Months on Foot with an Arctic Herd*

The second work under consideration in this chapter displays an obvious contrast in terms of the scale of the quest. Canadian wildlife biologist and park warden Karsten Heuer's *Being Caribou: Five Months on Foot with an Arctic Herd* (2006) narrates his and his wife's joint attempt to follow the migration of the Porcupine herd of caribou in 2003 from Old Crow, Yukon, to Kaktovik, Alaska, and back again. While the journey is described as being on foot, in the event the journey involves two flights (by aeroplane and helicopter) and a period of canoeing in addition to the majority methods of skiing and hiking. More explicitly than Ward's, the journey is intended directly as a work of activism, an attempt to

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[55] Jenny Kerber, *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), p. 16.

[56] Ibid., p. 16.

raise awareness of the 'story of the caribou' in order to help prevent drilling in the animals' calving grounds, which are located in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).[57]

The ANWR has long been a site of contention, and the issue of exploratory drilling on its coastal plains has been a political controversy well covered by the media for the last forty years or so. In the early 2000s, as Heuer and his wife (Leanne Allison) were planning and undertaking their trip, the US Senate and House of Representatives voted numerous times over the question of whether to permit exploratory drilling for natural gas and crude oil.[58] The issue is still not settled. Figures for the numbers of jobs created and amount of recoverable oil, as well as the amount of the reserve affected by exploratory drilling, were and remain under contention.[59]

The political issue, however, is as much about aesthetics as about numbers: how the refuge is represented is key. In a speech to the Senate in January 2001, Alaskan Senator Frank Murkowski used a blank sheet of white paper to show how the ANWR coastal plain looks 'about nine months of the year'

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[57] Heuer, p. 230.

[58] For an account, see Graeme Wynn, *Canada and Arctic North America: An Environmental History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), pp. 306–308.

[59] Douglas Waller, 'Some Shaky Figures on ANWR Drilling', *Time*, 13 August 2001, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,170983,00.html> [accessed 20 June 2016].

(i.e. covered in snow and ice).[60] That same year, George W. Bush followed this with a joking suggestion that people should 'travel up there and take a look at it […] make the determination as to how beautiful that country is'.[61] A similar reliance on visual imagery can be found in the voices of the opposition: for example, on 19 March 2003, in a debate for a Senate vote on an amendment to prevent drilling, Californian Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer argued that her 'colleagues on the other side kept talking about oil drilling as if it was beautiful', and countered this by using popular landscape photographs by Subhankar Banerjee (2001) of polar bears, caribou, and wildflowers to show that 'this is what we're trying to protect, this beauty'.[62] For the pro-preservation voices, the refuge has long been represented as being a part of untouched nature. (This is still the case today in outgoing US President Barack Obama's plans to designate the Coastal Plains as a 'pristine' wilderness area).[63] Such imagery provides, as the

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[60] Senator Frank Murkowski, quoted in Bryan L. Moore, *Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 11.

[61] The White House, *Press Conference by the President*, 29 March 2001, < https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010329.html> [accessed 20 September 2016].

[62] *Oil Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, online video recording, C-SPAN, March 19, 2003, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/175611-1&showFullAbstract=1> [accessed 20 September 2016]. For further discussion of this and other debates that have made use of Banerjee's photos, see Finis Dunaway, 'Reframing the Last Frontier: Subhankar Banerjee and the Visual Politics of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge', *American Quarterly,* 58.1 (2006), 159–180.

[63] The White House, *Protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, online video recording, YouTube, 25 January 2015, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hey_WIAFVA&feature =youtu.be> [accessed 5 August 2016].

historian Finis Dunaway points out, an 'attractive frame' for environmental groups; but it also adds to 'a simple, bifurcated vision of unspoiled landscapes that need to be preserved in contrast to the polluted spaces where most people live and work'.[64]

Dunaway argues that this encourages an imagined pristine wilderness that is 'cordoned off from the modern world, protected from the corruptions and contradictions of history'; and one which also, as in the particular case of the ANWR, obscures 'how much this landscape is tied to the rest of the United States and, indeed, to much of the world'.[65] The Canadian geographer Jonathan Luedee has similarly noted that representations of the ANWR as blank sheet 'wasteland' or 'pristine wilderness' are both false, obscuring the many connections between humans, animals, and landscape in the North American Arctic.[66]

The 'real story' of ANWR

Perhaps unsurprisingly in this context, the aesthetic dimension of the debate is made central to Heuer's journey. Heuer and Allison's five-month trip is posited on their website as an explicit acceptance of Bush's invitation to 'travel up

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[64] Dunaway, p. 175.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Jonathan Luedee, 'Representing Northern Environmental Histories', <http://niche-canada.org/2013/12/02/representing-northern-environmental-histories/> [accessed 5 August 2016]. Further, as Fabienne Bayet has suggested, 'the doctrine of terra nullius lives on under the conceptual banner of wilderness: a land without human interaction or impact'. See *The Great New Wilderness Debate* ed. by J. Baird Callicott, and Michael P. Nelson (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 318.

there', 'take a look at it', and judge 'how beautiful' it is.[67] Heuer thus plans the

trip with an explicit purpose, suggesting that existing narratives about the area are

insufficient.[68] Despite the multiple reports, maps, proposals and opposing articles

and documentaries, Heuer says, 'I realised that all I was hearing were politicians,

environmentalists, and scientists citing numbers and statistics that can't really be

compared: six months' worth of oil versus 27 000 years of migration […]

Nowhere did I find a story of the caribou herd itself'.[69] He describes having had a

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[67] The White House, *Press Conference by the President*.

[68] As a Canadian commenting on US Arctic policy, Heuer is well positioned to illustrate the differences between Canadian and American perceptions of the Arctic at large. These differences are made explicit in Allison's documentary film: for example, when she and Heuer cross over the border from Yukon (Canada) into Alaska (USA), Allison comments that 'If it weren't for the line on the map, you'd never know it out here that we're crossing a major significant border […] for us its no big deal but for the Caribou it's huge: in Canada where they've just been their calving grounds are fully protected and where we're just about to head they're not'. Heuer, who is filmed carrying a plastic George W. Bush doll along for the walk as part of the sardonic effort to 'see how beautiful that country is' himself, observes that while Bush (the doll) has been in Canada he has been 'riding along […] outside of his jurisdiction […] a tourist'. After crossing the line, however, he tells Bush: 'you're in charge now, it's all up to you'. However playfully it is all meant, Heuer and Allison thus set themselves the task of teaching both Bush and, later, American voters how to see, with the accompanying contrast between Canadian and American policies on environmental protection carrying an implied superiority of vision (both moral and perceptual) on the Canadian side. Heuer's 'Canadian-ness' appears to confer a moral probity that the disconnected Americans lack, and this might be read in turn as part of a wider propensity in Canadian literature to assert a form of moral superiority over the United States (see, for example, George Elliott Clarke, *Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012], p. 26).

[69] Heuer, pp. 8–9.

glimpse of the caribou migration two years previously while working as a seasonal warden at Ivvavik National Park: a 'sea of passing animals' including 'ten thousand caribou, twenty-four golden eagles, two foxes, thirteen ravens, a pair of rough-legged hawks, one peregrine falcon, countless gulls and terns, and eight grizzly bears'.[70] Like Ward, Heuer imagines his trip before he implements it: he and Allison plan photography and video, and both of them are clearly expecting to capture some of the region's diverse wildlife, and to add a significantly more detailed picture than Murkowski's 'blank sheet of paper' allowed.

However, the 'real story' of the value of the arctic landscape, Heuer argues, is about more than this. It is about the journey made by the caribou, which is characterised (like human pilgrimages) by effort and risk. The 'real story', he goes on,

> could not be found in numbers of barrels of oil or among the Native people or even the caribou that depended on that particular swathe of ground. It lay instead in the effort and risk the caribou took to get there and back from their wintering grounds this year. Four mountain ranges, hundreds of passes, dozens of rivers, countless grizzly bears, wolves, mosquitoes, and Arctic storms — those were the risks, that was the real story and the time had come to try to get the story out.[71]

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[70] Ibid., pp. 2–3.

[71] Ibid., p. 10.

To share in this story, Heuer and Allison, too, must take up the risk in order to earn the right to witness (effort, again, is key to this). The epigraph on the frontispiece of Heuer's text is a quote by J. S. Haldane: 'We must be broken, altered, uplifted and broken again before we can even taste the nature of truth's intensity'.[72] The aim (and imagined content) of Heuer's journey is thus threefold. He plans, first, to 'go up there' and find beauty, proving George W. Bush wrong; second, to earn access through sheer effort to the 'real story' of the ANWR and its animals by 'being caribou' or more generally by being part of the 'procession of predator and prey'; and finally, on return, to be successful in his activist aims and convince the US government of the importance of the refuge.[73]

To a large extent, Heuer fits the expected mould of both his imagined journey and the walking narrative more generally. Of the works under examination in this chapter, Heuer's is the closest to the traditional adventure tale. Surviving five months on foot in what he describes at one point as 'the most inhospitable place on earth', the narrative is driven by the simple but effective motivating factor of keeping up with the caribou, and is punctuated by moments of dangerous thrill.[74] For Heuer, this includes filmic horror scenes of close encounters with grizzly bears, life-threatening crossings of the rapid Firth river, and moments of near-starvation while waiting for food drops.[75]

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[72] Ibid., front matter.

[73] Ibid., p. 164.

[74] Ibid., p. 20.

[75] In his study of the spliced mode of travel/writing, *Extreme Pursuits*, Graham Huggan suggests a sub-genre of 'eco-travel writing' that closely fits Heuer's work. For Huggan, such writing is largely co-extensive with nature writing but 'does not necessarily downplay the movements or

The swashbuckling adventure style is tempered, however, by the concurrent aim — a standard trope this time of *nature* writing rather than *travel* writing — of 'being caribou'. Heuer and his wife suggest they set out not to dominate or conquer the landscape in typically colonial style, but rather — in keeping with other modern nature pilgrims — to be at one with the landscape and its inhabitants, eschewing modern technology as far as possible and aiming to differentiate themselves from other tourists so as to make sure that this is not 'just another cross-country hiking trip'.[76] A further risk seems to exist here, namely that of lapsing into sentimentality, but Heuer largely succeeds in warding this off by exhibiting a certain amount of humour and self-awareness about his engagement with such potentially high-romance tropes.

Aesthetic Development

Heuer's aesthetic evaluation of the tundra generally follows the trajectory that might be expected of the genre, showing a gradual positive change in perspective over the course of the quest. Heuer and Allison are flown onto the tundra, for example, on two separate occasions: first, at the beginning of the trip, to Old Crow; and second towards the end, after a short visit to Kaktovik. Their first real-life image of the new landscape is something of a disappointment:

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achievements of the traveller-writer'. Nature writing's focus on portrayal of the environment thus 'exists in almost constant tension with travel writing's traditional counter-impulses towards entertaining fabulation and self-glorifying myth'. See Graham Huggan, *Extreme Pursuits: Travel Writing in an Age of Globalization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 53–54.

[76] Heuer, p. 69.

Now that we'd been flown, towed by snowmobile, and dropped off in the middle of a vast, foreign landscape, the scale of our endeavour hit with an unwelcome weight. I looked at the forest of tiny trees blanketing the surrounding hillsides, felt the huge, frozen river groan and crack beneath me, then pushed toward the snow-covered bank, dizzy and overwhelmed.

The view from the plane window as we flew from Inuvik to Old Crow a few days earlier hadn't helped. Despite the bright, sunny weather, what had unfolded beneath us appeared to be the most inhospitable place on earth. Not a tree in the buckle of mountains and tight valleys. Not a speck of colour in the folds of white tundra. Nothing moving across an ocean of snowdrifts and wind scoops visible from 15,000 feet up in the air.[77]

At this preliminary point in the narrative, it appears that Bush and Murkowski are correct. The first view is a threat to the entire project: for the landscape is not only the 'most inhospitable place on earth', but thoroughly un-picturesque: no variety, 'not a speck of colour', no movement, no signs of life whatever ('not even a tree'); just folds of white tundra that are unsettlingly reminiscent of Murkowski's blank white sheet. On the ground, the view is sublime but unpleasant, vast, and unwelcome. Artificially transported to their starting point, they have not yet experienced the land in a close up or ambulatory way. The distanced, far-off view, normally associated with ownership, has made Heuer feel foreign and out of place, and the scale is oppressive. This deflating experience is matched by his language, which seems incapable at this point of describing the landscape with

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[77] Ibid., p. 20.

any real explanatory or aesthetic effect: the only visual reference is to a 'forest of tiny trees blanketing the surrounding hillsides'. The language is so inadequate to the task that even the word 'forest' comes across as a mere metaphor, and a mixed metaphor (in so far as it 'blankets' the surrounding hillsides) at that.

Towards the end of the book, when Heuer and Allison are deposited back onto the tundra after a short stay in Kaktovik, this time by helicopter, the view is again seemingly inhospitable and unvaried, 'just a thickening blanket of mist that squeezed us closer to the ground […] a puzzle of flooding creeks, meltwater pools, and patches of soft snow'. At this point, though, the two of them beg to be dropped right into the landscape. While the pilot (who has clearly not experienced the landscape in the same way) questions their sanity, Heuer and his wife have by implication earned the right to interpret the landscape differently: 'I checked with Leanne again and she nodded in a way that said she'd swim through all of it before going back to Kaktovik'.[78]

When Heuer finally reaches the calving grounds, he writes:

> I thought of all the ways in which I'd heard [them] described — Olaus Murie's "Garden of Eden," Roger Kaye's "Sistine Chapel," the Gwich'in's "Sacred Place Where Life Begins." And then I thought of the television clip I'd seen of Alaskan Senator Frank Murkowski […] waving a sheet of blank paper.[79]

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[78] Ibid., p. 116.

[79] Ibid., p. 136.

Heuer sets up this passage in order to make a contrast between those who 'know the land' (e.g. Canadian naturalist Murie, Alaskan environmentalist Kaye, the local Gwich'in) and those who don't (Murkowski). Here, at the apex of the journey, is Heuer's opportunity to add his own — now fully earned — version to the representations of the calving grounds:

> Lying there at eye level with the tundra, I noticed things that weren't obvious from a standing position: clumps of caribou hair were caught on the undersides of bushes, and beneath them, tips of bleached and moss-covered tines of old antlers poked from the ground. I'd seen dozens, if not hundreds, of the polished and blood stained antlers that the cows had cast in the previous days, but these rough, half-buried specimens were a new discovery. Crawling on hands and knees, I made my way to the closest of the bunch and gently tugged it free. Roots, old caribou hair, and pellets of half-decomposed scat sloughed off its pockmarked surface, revealing the teeth marks where countless rodents had come to feed. I reached into the hole, trying to measure how much of the earth beneath me was hair and scat, but what I found was yet another well-preserved tine. I rolled onto my knees and scanned the surrounding sea of tussocks, feeling as though I was understanding the magnitude of the calving grounds for the first time.
>
> How many antlers? I asked myself. How many layers? How much hair, scat, bone, and afterbirth? Buried how deep?[80]

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[80] Ibid., p. 135.

For Heuer, the 'real image' of the place is not blank at all, but it is also no picturesque idyll; instead, it is made up of 'half-decomposed' faeces, hair, bone, bloody tines and afterbirth. Heuer emphasises the extraordinarily rare and privileged perspective that he is permitted on these birthing grounds: he describes himself '[l]ying there at eye level with the tundra', 'crawling on hands and knees', and 'reach[ing] into [a] hole'. He has earned this privileged perspective — or so he sees it — through effort, risk, and dedication. He also likens himself to someone digging for buried treasure: 'these rough, half-buried specimens were a new discovery'. This is a scene which enacts the common nature-writing trope of understanding deriving from the land and from what is buried under it: in this case, Heuer feels as though he now understands 'the magnitude of the calving grounds for the first time' (see also Chapter Two). The caribou migration is so mighty a natural phenomenon that its uncountable by-products have literally produced an entire landscape. The fact that this landscape *is* caribou enhances the caribou's claim to protection of it. There is also a kind of reversal at work here that emphasises the enduring (and enduringly valuable) circle of life. The premise of much of the political argument surrounding the protection of the ANWR — and the premise of the book — is that these grounds are special because they produce the caribou. It turns out, however, albeit only when seen at eye level with the tundra, that it is the caribou that produce the landscape itself. [81]

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[81] Although Heuer does not make any explicit nod towards them, this passage has echoes of important literary and religious antecedents. One clear and very well known parallel might be with the prophet's vision of the valley of the dry bones in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. The equation of the uncountable with the valuable and the sacred is a longstanding literary trope. This is significant in the context of a book that attempts precisely to create a narrative of manageable

Contradiction and Discontinuity

In the passages discussed thus far, Heuer's journey follows a relatively expected trajectory in which, like many other nature writers, the narrator learns to see the beauty of, and feel a sense of kinship with, what is on first impression an inhospitable, un-picturesque, and alienating landscape. The wasteland of the blank sheet of paper has become the fragile (if not always beautiful) wilderness of the pro-preservationist lobbyists. This way of seeing, however, exists in tension with an apparent understanding that the ANWR cannot be so simply expressed. Thus, if these instances of 'learning to see' are largely expected, moments appear of apparent contradiction and discontinuity which call into question the simple narrative envisioned at the outset of the ANWR as a diverse but separate wilderness, and which begin to acknowledge the social construction of such an idea. Such moments also begin to complicate the dominant narrative of the journey, and the pilgrims' 'earned' superiority of vision that accompanies it.

Heuer discovers, for example, that far from an expected primitivist 'one-ness' with nature, the local Gwich'in people at Old Crow and Inupiat people at Kaktovik are by no means united in their views on exploratory drilling for oil. At Old Crow, for example, a Gwich'in man called James assures them that 'Old Crow was more than a quaint village of caribou hunters […] and the issue of

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human proportions out of a natural phenomenon: a landscape the very scale of which has tended to obscure popular comprehension.

whether or not to develop for oil and gas wasn't as clear-cut as we thought'.[82] He then asks, 'Why shouldn't we have everything that everyone else does? […] Nice things from the store, you know what I'm talking about'.[83] In response, Heuer becomes uncomfortable with his privilege; the incident sows doubt and confusion, an important early instance of aporia in the narrative: 'Who was I to say that he and his daughters and his grandson shouldn't have everything everyone else did at the expense of nature? Who was I to talk about what was right and wrong, what was comfortable or not, with my new Gore-Tex pants and jacket and my camera and lenses slung around my hip?'[84] To some extent at least, the encounter registers recognition on Heuer's part that the ability to 'see' and represent landscape correctly remains as much about class and race privilege as it did in the eighteenth century. This revelatory moment then sets up a question as to whether the remainder of the narrative will provide an answer to its author-protagonist's already nagging feelings of conflict and doubt.

While this question is never definitively resolved, Heuer's self-awareness is eventually extended to his otherwise romantic expectations for the pilgrimage and its significance. Heuer and Allison's professed aim to 'be caribou' is of course a necessarily impossible aim, in which he is regularly frustrated by his needs for food drops and home comforts: '*We are trying to be caribou, but are continually pulled back by our modern human needs*' (italics Heuer's).[85] Despite

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[82] Ibid., p. 26.

[83] Ibid., p. 28.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., p. 150.

Heuer's own reservations, several critics have found him to be remarkably successful. The Canadian ecocritic Pamela Banting, for example, breezily suggests that Heuer and Allison's recourse to walking may actually lead to new ways of knowing non-human animals, 'forms of insight that extend beyond the parameters of normative science and behaviourist approaches to animals other than ourselves'.[86] Banting suggests that, in this context, walking can act as 'a form of thinking', and that, most importantly, 'ambulation is a process shared by humans and caribou'.[87] For Banting, by '[w]alking the land, smelling and tasting it, exposing themselves to the perspectives of both predator (wolves, grizzly bears) and prey (caribou, humans)', Heuer and Allison are able not just to perceive the caribou, but to learn 'their routes, paths, speed of movement, and modes of perceiving and acting in the world'.[88] Nevertheless, as the literary critic Bart H. Welling warns, Heuer's 'critical anthropomorphism is grounded in a healthy respect for the irreducible physiological, behavioural, and emotional differences as well as the continuities between human beings and caribou beings'.[89]

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[86] Pamela Banting, 'The Ontology and Epistemology of Walking', in *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*, ed. by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), pp. 407–435, (p. 418).

[87] Ibid., p. 414.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Bart H. Welling, 'On the "Inexplicable Magic of Cinema": Critical Anthropomorphism, Emotion, and the Wildness of Wildlife Films', in *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*, ed. by Alexa Weik von Mossner (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), pp. 81–101, (p. 89).

For Heuer, too, there is a degree of self-irony and occasionally humour in scenes in which the need for 'purity' is measured against the delights of junk food, or when he forgets 'every wilderness ideal I'd talked about' and understandably asks to be flown to Kaktovik for a rest (and several greasy meals) after seeing yet another grizzly bear.[90] Finally, towards the end of the journey, after following tracks in multiple directions and 'ever widening circles', Heuer describes an epiphany:

> [I]t hit me. I stretched my arms skyward, threw back my head, and laughed.
>
> Our movements were being dictated by caribou whose movements were being dictated by bugs whose movements were being dictated by shifting winds […] We laughed at our stupidity, our idealism, our expectations, and then we laughed at how we looked: our greasy hair, our red eyes, our bug-bitten hands, our baggy, dirt-stained clothes and shiny, sunburned skin.[91]

Unlike Ward, whose epiphanic moment of belonging sees her looking out over the landscape, measuring her success and 'one-ness' with nature, Heuer suddenly finds that he is 'more confused than ever'.[92] He is not looking over the tundra, not even following any discernible trail; his epiphany, instead, is a rare moment of insight that they, their ideals, and even the entire journey itself have been as trivial

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[90] Heuer, p. 102.

[91] Ibid., p. 183.

[92] Ibid., p. 182.

as they are romantic, and as often meaningless as filled with enlightenment, the primary aim of the spiritual quest.

Ultimately, however, Heuer still manages to reach a perspective that he feels to be the 'true story' of the caribou, closely mirroring his stated expectations at the start. On arrival back at Old Crow, and in response to a hunter describing the caribou as 'real beauties', Heuer notes that 'We knew the truth […] Behind every animal lay a string across the tundra connecting moments of joy, courage, and suffering, and beside all of them was our own thread, circling from hope to renewal and back again'.[93] It is this perspective that he and his wife wish to present to their audiences as well as to the government aide they lobby in Washington, DC, as described in the epilogue. In the five minutes given to plead their case, 'Leanne and I did our best to give an overview of what we'd learned about caribou on our trip'.[94] The aide shows vague interest, and 'even wrote something down when we mentioned the skittish cows on the calving grounds', but she ultimately dismisses them: '"That sounds like a wonderful trip," she said, "but the bottom line for voters on this issue is cheap gas […] I know it sounds terrible […] but it's true"'.[95] This dismissal relegates the journey to just what Heuer had wanted to avoid, not a meaning-saturated pilgrimage but 'just another cross-country hiking trip'.[96]

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[93] Ibid., pp. 223–224.

[94] Ibid., p. 229.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., p. 69.

At this end point, it appears that the journey may have been a failure after all. Heuer and Allison had originally set out to use their pilgrimage as a vehicle for a change in consciousness that might then be replicated by their audience. Instead, the aide takes it for just another tourist jaunt, and fails to 'see' the tundra any differently. Heuer concludes that, this being the case, 'we need to work from the bottom up […] we need the people to feel the pressure from the voters'.[97] The discussion with the aide is thus presented as a kind of device, encouraging the reader to know how *not* to react to the 'story of the caribou'.

Conclusion

In Ward and Heuer's respective texts, the ambulatory narrative is presented as having a built-in expectation of attitudinal change or development. This is by no means absent in other sub-genres of nature writing: the difference — where there *is* a difference — is largely a matter of degree. A suggestion made by a number of critics is that the ambulatory mode might, if enacted correctly, provide a shortcut to a more holistic and embodied perception of place: a potential antidote to a traditional privileging of the visual.[98] Certainly, in the two main examples I have been discussing in this chapter, both picturesque, conventionally distanced views, and a countervailing version of Macfarlane's thinking 'with landscape' are regularly deployed as aesthetic strategies, albeit with mixed results. What is clear in both cases is that the overall quest structure appears to permit (or actively requires) the narrator to pre-define a 'mission'. Typically this may involve some sort of spiritual or non-cognitive development in the narrator's

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[97] Ibid., p. 230.

[98] See Banting, p. 414.

understanding, which largely accords with the other kinds of 'transformation narratives' to be found in this thesis (see Chapters One and Two). However, in the ambulatory narrative the change in perspective of the walker — all the more so if he or she self-presents as a 'pilgrim' — occurs under compression legitimated by the perceived effort of the task.

This returns us to the important question as to whether the quest narrative justifies its own form (see Introduction; also Chapter One). In successful narratives of this kind, the experience, scale of task, or significance of sights seen will generally be considered as legitimating the quest, and possibly also the 'pilgrimage' label that is sometimes attached to it. Another approach, as seen in Heuer's work, is for the author self-consciously to exploit the expectations and themes of the sub-genre for ironic, comic, or other effect, questioning the narrative even as it is enacted. By contrast, many of Ward's reflections, which are based solely on events of the walk, come across as insufficiently reflexive and emotionally overwrought. This suggests that an over-emphasis on symbols and significance, and on heightened emotions, runs the risk of leaving a conclusion that wants to be uplifting, but paradoxically feels flat.

Working

Introduction

The way place is viewed and represented relates not just to aesthetic issues but to real-world demands: to a greater or lesser extent, all of the texts in this thesis aim to provide advocacy for some aspect of the environment, the implication being that if only readers and writers could 'see right', it then follows that they would 'do right' as well (see also Introduction and Chapter One).[1] While for some authors, like Karsten Heuer (see previous chapter), 'doing right' is fairly discrete — protecting the ANWR from potential future exploratory drilling — for many others there is considerable ambivalence as to what form environmental action might take. There is a danger that the relationship with nature might become purely about perspective, and will therefore be divorced from meaningful action: this prompts writers to wonder, as Trevor Herriot does in a slightly different context, if 'voting Green, eating local foods, and knowing the names of things' is enough.[2]

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[1] Robert Macfarlane has suggested that each generation of writers 'finds itself trying to design the literary equivalent of the "killer app": the glittering argument or stylistic turn that will produce an epiphany in sceptical readers, and so persuade them to change their behaviour'. 'Rereading: Robert Macfarlane on *The Monkey Wrench Gang*', *Guardian*, 26 September 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/robert-macfarlane-monkey-wrench-gang> [accessed 14 June 2014].

[2] Trevor Herriot, *The Road is How: A Prairie Pilgrimage through Nature, Desire, and Soul* (Toronto: Harper, 2014), p. 15.

If it is true, as David Orr writes, that 'we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by *the experience of beauty*' (see also Introduction), then the question follows, not just of what we find beautiful or *should* find beautiful, but of what possible shape our actions might subsequently take.[3] The answer may be local and specific, or it may turn on more fundamental shifts of consciousness and behaviour: Wendell Berry argues, for example, that we do not need 'the piecemeal technological solutions that our society now offers, but [rather] a change of cultural (and economic) values that will encourage in the whole population the necessary respect, restraint, and care'.[4]

Direct action towards the environment is central to the two books under scrutiny in this chapter, both of which focus on forest restoration projects, but which provide very different accounts of the processes at hand. Germaine Greer's *White Beech: The Rainforest Years* (2014) is a record of a ten-year rainforest 'rehabilitation' project (Greer is not fond of the word 'restoration') that she runs on an abandoned dairy farm off Queensland's Gold Coast, while Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (2011) is an account of a season of her life as a professional tree planter working in the coastal regions of British Columbia, a job she held in total for seventeen

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[3] David Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.

[4] Wendell Berry, 'The Making of a Marginal Farm', in *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. by Bill Mckibben (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2008), pp. 507–516 (p. 515).

years.[5] As will be seen, both writers focus on the practical issues at stake in making changes to the environment; but as throughout this thesis, questions of practical action and decision are also linked to broader aesthetic and philosophical concerns. More specifically, both texts are concerned with how a working relationship with land is represented. For Gill, this involves setting a popular image of the tree planter as redoubtable 'green warrior' against an ambiguous, wage-driven reality. Aesthetics also underpins Greer's aim to encourage others to act similarly. Her book carefully establishes normative aesthetic and ecological frameworks in relation to her specific bioregion (sub-tropical east coast Australia), in which replication emerges as a major theme. As the project website explains, 'If you live on the east coast of Australia, or in any other remnant of Gondwana,[6] the best way to get involved is to start working towards the rehabilitation of a piece of subtropical rainforest country near you'.[7] I will argue later in the chapter that the project of encouraging replication is conducted in

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[5] Germaine Greer, *White Beech: The Rainforest Years* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Charlotte Gill, *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Deep Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2011).

[6] Gondwana is the name of the southern portion of the ancient super-continent (Pangaea), comprising the land-masses that in due course became Africa, South America, Antarctica, Australia and the subcontinent of India. The area previously known as the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves (Australia), which was listed in the World Heritage List in 1986, was renamed 'Gondwana Rainforests of Australia' in 2007, 'to better reflect the values of the property'. Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy, *World Heritage Places: Gondwana Rainforests of Australia* <https://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/gondwana> [accessed 10 September 2016].

[7] Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *Get Involved* <http://gondwanarainforest.org/how-you-can-help> [accessed 2 September 2016].

large part as an *aesthetic* campaign, in which what is upheld as 'authentic' and 'appropriate' Gondwanan landholding turns out to be a matter of taste.

While neither Gill nor Greer believes that her actions are unambiguously positive or that they can be considered to be 'saving the world', both are clearly acting in a manner which they feel can in some sense right a colonial wrong. Worldwide environmental degradation, with good reason, has long been configured as a consequence of the European Enlightenment, capitalism, and imperial expansion (see also Chapter Three).[8] Gill and Greer critically engage with this legacy, adapting it to the Canadian and Australian contexts, respectively, and assessing possibilities for regeneration and redemption in the face of continuing socio-economic competition and conflicting land claims. This leads both writers to wrestle with some of the fundamental questions that underpin the modern conservation movement. This chapter therefore looks briefly at some of the discourses, both historical and contemporary, that inform modern conservation theory and practice, before going on to a closer examination of the two primary texts.

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[8] As the cultural geographers William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan suggest, the Enlightenment was fundamentally about control: it 'placed faith in the capacity of the rational mind to order and conquer all — suggesting a superiority of mind over matter and of humans over "non-rational" nature'. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan, eds, *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2003), 3. See also Carolyn Merchant's commentary on what she calls the 'mechanistic worldview', which was explicitly challenged by deep ecology and the late twentieth-century environmental movement as a whole. Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 55.

What is 'Conservation'?

As the British geographer William M. Adams writes, nature conservation 'can [generally] be seen as a social practice that regulates (or seeks to regulate) relations between humans and non-human nature'.[9] For obvious reasons, this practice tends to focus on areas considered to be under some kind of environmental threat. Since the late nineteenth century, the history of conservation practice, particularly in North America (but also, to a lesser extent, Australia) has been described in terms of a dichotomy between 'preservationist 'and 'conservationist' ideologies. Definitions vary, but preservationist positions might generally be characterised in terms of advocacy for 'self-willed' land and 'protected areas' such as national parks and wilderness areas, while conservationist positions favour 'wise use' of land without any particular need for designated 'wilderness' blocks.[10]

On this view, conservation (or, perhaps better, conservationism, that cluster of not always compatible viewpoints that support conservationist ideologies) can be traced to the development of Enlightenment science and a

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[9] William M. Adams, 'When nature won't stay still: Conservation, equilibrium and control', in Adams and Mulligan, *Decolonizing Nature*, pp. 220–246 (p. 235).

[10] In the US, this division is often configured in the ideological divisions between Gifford Pinchot, former chief of the US Forest Service, and John Muir, contemporaneous president of the Sierra Club. For Pinchot, 'conservation' was 'wise use' of resources, a position since disparaged as 'a kind of modern religion which casts all of creation into categories of utility'. Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 23.

'mechanistic worldview' (Merchant) that configures nature as a 'standing reserve.[11] As the American environmental historian Carolyn Merchant points out:

> The mechanical framework with its associated values of power and control sanctioned the management of both nature and society. The management of natural resources depends on surveying the status of existing resources, and efficiently planning their systematic use and replenishment of the long-term good of those who use them.[12]

Priority is thus placed on *use* value rather than the *intrinsic* value of nature for nature's sake.[13] Preservationist positions, in contrast, are generally linked to the more holistic philosophy associated with Aldo Leopold's 'land ethic' and the later deep ecology movement, which at its core is associated with conceptions of interdependence, stability, and self-regulation.[14] For deep ecologists, priority is

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[11] Martin Heidegger, quoted in Merchant, p. 55.

[12] Merchant, p. 55.

[13] See Adams, p. 235.

[14] The 'land ethic', first developed by the American writer and environmentalist Aldo Leopold in the 1940s, refers to a biocentric mode of being which sees humans as an integral part of a wider (ecological) community. Plants, animals, and land all belong to this community and should therefore not be seen as resources available for exploitation. As Leopold famously suggests, 'a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise'. See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 224–225. Deep ecology is a radical environmental philosophy and movement, hatched in the 1970s, which calls for a new worldview in which humans are positioned within nature — interconnected and reciprocal — rather than above, dominating or controlling it. Deep ecology theorists and

given to the intrinsic value of 'nature' and 'wildness';[15] nature is to be preserved for this intrinsic value, not (or at least not primarily) for its potential use. As a number of more recent commentators have pointed out though, the split between these two positions has never been as clear as environmental historians have liked to see it.[16] As Alison Byerly has shown, purportedly 'preservationist' national parks rely heavily on management and resource use, offering the beauty of wilderness as a neatly parcelled commodity,[17] while both 'preservationist' and 'conservationist' models tend falsely to assume a relatively stable ecosystem that is to be preserved/conserved. Consistent with this, nearly all twentieth-century environmental movements have tended to posit a 'balance of nature' that must either be vigilantly protected or diligently restored.

Since the 1990s, however, ecologists have increasingly sought to challenge whether primary ecosystem stability exists, and to what extent 'natural population behaviour' is affected by anthropogenic action. Equilibrium ecology, in its most common usage, refers to a system that fluctuates 'around some stable

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practitioners hold as crucial that human and non-human life have intrinsic value, and argue for long-term population reduction. See George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (London: Shambala, 1995).

[15] See Adams, p. 235.

[16] See, for example, John M. Meyer, 'Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought', *Polity,* 30.21997) 267–284.

[17] Alison Byerly, 'The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 52–68.

point'.[18] In classical ecological theory, the return to this point following a disturbance occurs thanks to 'self-correcting mechanism'.[19] But as the ecologist Klaus Rohde points out, 'Communities […] may never reach equilibrium even in homogeneous and relatively constant environments, because multi-species interactions may lead to oscillations and chaos'.[20] This is not to suggest that anthropogenic interference is 'natural' and that the often detrimental changes to habitat, species distribution, and the population it produces should be written off as 'normal'. The question is rather whether these actions affect a 'balance of nature' or if they enhance 'naturally occurring disequilibria, perhaps with even worse consequences [to come]'.[21] Rohde and Adams both make the case that the naïve assumption of balance 'has led to an intrusive, and sometimes destructive, approach to conservation'.[22] Heavily interventionist attempts to protect or restore 'natural balance', they suggest, do not sufficiently understand ecological systems and may thus cause further disturbance. An ingenuous confidence in the balance of nature may also lead to the assumption that anthropogenic disturbance can be simply remedied by leaving nature alone.

Restoration & the Picturesque

Contemporary restoration ecology confronts the tensions between the different concerns held by conservation projects. A concern to protect wildness

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[18] Klaus Rohde, *The Balance of Nature and Human Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 1.

[19] Ibid., p. 2.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 1.

[22] Adams, p. 234.

for its own sake comes up against a concurrent need to understand, predict, and perhaps direct natural processes. The restoration of an 'original' landscape suggests, however, that such origins can be identified in the first place, whereas, as Adams notes, 'science cannot tell conservationists what nature 'ought' to be like, and it may not always even be able to describe what it used to be like, and how and why it has changed'.[23]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are parallels between the questions facing restoration projects and those attached to picturesque theory, which, as previously discussed, underpinned early conservation projects in both Australia and Canada (see Introduction). I have argued that the picturesque was originally intended as a reaction to landscapes subjected to some kind of 'assault' on nature. The picturesque landscape represents ideal nature, an artistic attempt 'to make the landscape […] look more like its natural self' (see Introduction).[24] As previously discussed, however, this creates an artificial version of 'nature' that never existed in the first place; and the same arguably goes for restoration, which is also frequently described as an art.[25]

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[23] Ibid., p. 228.

[24] Timothy Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 138.

[25] See in particular Frederick Turner, who posits restoration as an 'artistic imitation of nature' that imitates not merely what nature 'is', but what it 'does'. Turner suggests that 'the attempt to reproduce accurately the functions of nature forces the artist not only to increasingly close observation, but beyond, to increasingly stringent experimental tests of ideas. This labour, so understood, is not merely analytical, but creative, and its natural reward is beauty'. Frederick Turner, 'The Self-Effacing Art: Restoration as Imitation of Nature', in *Restoration Ecology: A*

The work of conserving landscape, then, by definition raises difficult practical as well as intellectual questions. Planting trees might on first impression be thought of as one of the most positive acts that a person could carry out, at least from a broad ecological perspective; and a piece of nature writing that tells of working (rather than merely viewing or meditating on) the land might be expected to be straightforwardly celebratory as a result. On the contrary, Gill and Greer have written probably the most morally searching, openly self-critical texts to feature in this thesis. This, I want to suggest, is in part a function of the inescapable complexities that surround the fundamental questions of what should be conserved, how, and in what context. These questions are probably always likely to come into sharper relief in the kind of text where the narrator has to put a spade in the ground and commit to a certain type of physical intervention. But they are equally a result of the fact that, as 'working' texts, Gill and Greer's respective books necessarily deal with distinct forms of social and economic organisation, asking particularly pointed questions about the employment of labour and the ownership of land.

To repeat, questions of conservation and restorative ecology frequently centre on aesthetics. While *Eating Dirt* and *White Beech* could be described as texts about 'doing' rather than about 'seeing', this would set up a false contrast: for image, perspective, and representation are all crucial to both Gill and Greer. Indeed, much of the task taken on by both authors is to expose incomplete,

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Synthetic Approach to Ecological Research, ed. by William R. Jordan III, Michael E. Gilpin and John D. Aber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 47–50 (p. 49, p. 50).

misleading, or harmful patterns of seeing. This includes — as I will now go on to show more fully — some of the images associated with conservation itself, such as the cliché 'Forests for the Future', written on the boxes of the tree seedlings planted by Gill, which prompts her to remark wryly: 'Nothing about this phrase is a lie, but neither is it wholly true'.[26]

Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe*

As previously announced, Charlotte Gill's *Eating Dirt* narrates the working life of an individual tree planter working in multiple landscapes over a single season, using this as a basis from which to discuss the wider history, economics, and politics of twenty-first-century logging in the Pacific Northwest. From a literary perspective, the text juxtaposes the advertised 'youth-and-adventure' allure of tree planting with the grim, exhausting, and morally ambiguous reality of life as a 'monotasking professional' serving in the very corporate interests she ostensibly contests.[27] Thus, while Gill positions herself to some extent (along with the others working alongside her) as a player in a story of redemptive action, she also raises uncomfortable questions about the corporate structures involved in Canadian tree planting as a putatively regenerative practice.

The work of tree planting is also tied up with questions of national identity, and with related class and race issues. The Canadian cultural geographers

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[26] Gill, p. 11.

[27] Ibid., p. 95.

Michael Ekers and Michael Farnan have suggested that many contemporary artistic representations of the tree-planting process effectively 'enshrine tree planting as an obligatory passage point through which White middle-class subjects can access both the 'pioneering' moments of the nation and the promised greener tomorrow of Canada's future'.[28] In so doing, they draw on Catriona Sandilands' argument that wilderness is presented as the 'universal representative symbol' of the Canadian nation and central Canadian identity. To parse this argument briefly, if wilderness is configured as both 'the land of our origins' and 'the marker of our ongoing spatial presence', then a necessary part of Canadian identity is showing respect to such spaces.[29] But as Eker and Farnan show, while within much contemporary art, depictions of tree planting and other 'acts of saving nature through labour are [presented as] distinctive characteristics of Canadian nationhood and identity', this is only within 'a socially purified account of what it means to labour' itself.[30]

The Green Frontier

Initially, Gill sets up a scene that looks remarkably like the kind of socially and environmentally redemptive tree planting Ekers and Farnan critically

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[28] Michael Ekers and Michael Farnan, 'Planting the Nation: Tree Planting Art and the Endurance of Canadian Nationalism', *Space and Culture*, 13.1, (February 2010), 95–120 (p. 95).

[29] Catriona Sandilands, 'Domestic Politics: Multiculturalism, Wilderness and the Desire for Canada', *Space and Culture*: 2.1, (January 2000) 169–177 (p. 177).

[30] Ekers and Farnan suggest that recent works by artists Sarah Ann Jonson and Lorraine Gilbert, for example, 'aim to provide meditations on the impacts of industrial logging and the heroic efforts of tree planters in confronting what is described as an environmental disaster'. Ekers and Farnan, p. 96.

analyse. The workers are described as engaged in some kind of 'green guerrilla warfare',[31] the reward for which is trees: 'We look out, at the end of the day, at our fields of seedlings. They shimmy in the wind. *There*, we say. We did this with our hands. We didn't make millions, and we didn't cure AIDS. But at least a thousand new trees are breathing'.[32] As the narrative progresses, however, things become increasingly ambivalent. Unlike Greer, who presents herself as a project director, Gill is part of a workforce operating in an industrial structure, and her primary experience of the landscape is doing piecework within this structure, which means acting and seeing in a particular way. For her, as for her fellow labourers, work involves a breathless combination of action, speed, and competition: she thus describes a 'culture of furious contagion', where young workers — mainly men — work 'like human pile drivers just to outdo each other'.[33] This is a direct result of the way that the job has been constituted economically. As Gill puts it, 'We don't know how to do our work without pitting ourselves against one another […] otherwise piecework is grindingly relentless'.[34] One end-result is that the workers are 'unattached to places, people, and rules, and sometimes even to principled ideas'.[35] Unlike most other writers in this thesis, Gill is far from being motivated by any romantic connection with place. In fact, the reverse is true: '[m]ost of the time we have no idea where the hell we are'. [36]

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[31] Gill, p. 2.

[32] Gill, p. 15.

[33] Ibid., p. 214.

[34] Ibid., p. 12.

[35] Ibid., p. 214.

[36] Ibid., p. 6.

Similarly, if most of the writers in this thesis are concerned with learning how to see, Gill reverses this trope: part of being a tree planter, indeed, is learning how *not* to:

> In our first years as tree planters the wooden carnage was shocking. The skin of the earth pulled back, revealing a sad, organic gore. We wanted to cry but couldn't. Said we would quit but didn't. A numbness of attention crept over us, of the sort induced by megamall parking lots. There was nothing to jazz our rods and cones. We were growing up, paying taxes, burning holes in our own pockets. We were learning to see without seeing.[37]

The juxtaposition of natural with non-natural imagery in the expression 'induced by megamall parking lots' is typical of Gill's writing. The experience of dwelling in the forest turns out to be comparable to an exhausting Saturday shopping trip. Conversely, the adjectives 'wooden' and 'organic' become associated with the nouns 'carnage' and 'gore', respectively. In the very first scene of the book, under the chapter heading 'the LAST PLACE on EARTH', the material references are to a 'dingy light bulb', raincoats, hulking logging machinery, toothpaste and polypropylene — and, of course, dirt: '*Permadirt*, we call it. Disposable clothes, too dirty for the laundry'.[38] The subsequent imagery of the book likewise insists on rejecting a simple distinction between human habitation (ugly/unnatural) and wilderness (beautiful/natural). Indeed, the book's front cover

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[37] Ibid., p. 46.

[38] Ibid., p. 1.

photo would not be out of place in post-apocalyptic science fiction, while the first sentence could easily have been written by the survivor of a prison camp: 'We fall out of bed and into our rags, still crusted with the grime of yesterday'.[39]

In 'learning to see without seeing', Gill and the rest of the workforce are learning to adapt themselves to a specific purpose: planting trees, getting wages. This constrained, brutal, and purely instrumental form of existence is implicitly contrasted with an alternative that is more holistic and attentive, and significantly less destructive; but Gill is cagey about saying whether such an alternative exists, and if so what it might look like. 'There may be "slow food" and "slow travel," [she says,] but there is no such thing as slow tree planting. Or logging gently, since tree-friendly wood has not yet been invented. Until then, if you want a piano or a paper plate or a hardwood floor — if you want an omelette, as they say, first you must break some eggs'.[40]

The same contrast between fast and slow, instrumental and transcendental appears in an earlier passage that opposes humans and trees as if the contrast between them were irreconcilable. Here, Gill gestures towards the possibility of an alternative (quintessentially aesthetic) response: the possibility of being impelled by beauty to act differently. But the passage, and its final sentence in particular, display little confidence that this will be the result of people's direct engagement with the forests of British Columbia:

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[39] Ibid., p. 1.

[40] Ibid., p. 201.

Our workplace is a crash site. Two forces in juxtaposition. One is old and slow, accumulating biomass. It wants nothing more than to build. The other is fast and rapacious — our appetites, seemingly without end. Most days we're too busy making money to see it this way, but sometimes we look up from the rubble and the wood chips. We feel the breeze cool the sweat in our eyebrows. We gaze down at the ocean, where this same earthly breeze ripples the water. Tide running one direction, wind running the other, like the quivering fur of an animal rubbed the wrong way. We feel a mild ache in our chests. A brush with a thing that's been lost forever. Or maybe we feel nothing at all.[41]

Not long after the scene above, the results of 'learning to see without seeing' are clarified. The first place Gill uses the term 'beautiful' in the book is to describe another view of a clear-cut:

Our eyes skim the land for a story of our day's wages, a hint about our upcoming fortunes. We catch sight of a stretch of beautiful dream-cream. Fresh logging, a sumptuous pancake, ploughed clean of debris, we guess, by an overzealous skidder driver looking to chew through some company time.[42]

As a tree planter, Gill's role is quite simply to plant trees as quickly as possible, as she is paid per tree she plants. The 'dream-cream' is aesthetically appealing to her

[41] Ibid., p. 162.

[42] Ibid., p. 24.

because of this. The clear-cut is ideal to plant in: it promises a better yield and an easier day; it is 'sumptuous' despite or perhaps because of the overzealous skidder. There is no small amount of irony here, of course, and it is clear from the outset that Gill is both like and unlike the 'tree-planting tribe' she describes.[43] This is most obviously because she is a woman, but further tensions exist between Gill's middle-class urban and her working-class frontier identities, and these tensions are one of the major sources of interest in the book.

About halfway through the book, Gill describes her position on clear-cuts in more detail:

Some people think a clear-cut is dead and ugly, but I don't. To me it is heavy with history and ruination and decay, the way a crumbled Doric column tells of extinct civilizations. Branches with chandeliers of trembling, rust-red needles. The corpses of creatures that once lived a dozen stories in the air litter the ground. I find the wrinkly remains of lungwort, which once hung from the upper branches. High-flying tree lettuces that perched in the crooks of the canopy. They look not like organisms that lived on mist and tree bark but like something a scuba diver might have plucked from the depths of the sea. I touch them and they turn to mush or to powder, or they crackle into tiny pieces. Perhaps mine is the thinking of scientists who find rat brains fascinating or surgeons who think

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[43] Ibid., p. 2.

of sutures as craftwork. A perception of strange beauty that comes from overexposure and the wilful overlooking of the obvious.[44]

This is a striking piece of picturesque literary description, one more striking still because of the rarity of this kind of aesthetic in *Eating Dirt*. Gill points to the notions of 'history' and 'ruination' that feature prominently in picturesque associative aesthetics (see also Introduction and Chapter Two). Contrary to initial expectations of clear-cuts as places of uniform absence and ugliness, this one turns out to conform exactly to picturesque expectations of variety and colour. Gill points (again with no little irony) to herself as a detached and educated observer, akin to a scientist or a surgeon. At the same time, though, she complicates her description, making it suspect through its rhetorical excesses. The chandeliers, Doric columns, 'high-flying tree lettuces' and (imagined) exotic sea creatures are so richly described that they almost seem fantastical. They are also dead: previously magical organisms 'that once lived a dozen stories in the air', but now 'corpses' that 'litter the ground'. Gill ends the passage by implying that her mode of viewing is pathological: '[a] perception of strange beauty that comes from overexposure and the wilful overlooking of the obvious'.

What are we to make of this passage? One conclusion might be that it is relatively easy to imagine beauty and to wax lyrical about it; and that this is possible no matter in what context we find ourselves. However, this would be inconsistent with the overall tenor of *Eating Dirt,* which moralistically insists on a difference between virgin forest and what is left after the loggers and tree-planters

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[44] Ibid., p. 85.

have done their worst. Instead, the point of the passage is to demonstrate how warped the aesthetic sensibilities of the overworked labourer can become, and to point to the original beauty of the forest canopy before it was chopped down. Despoliation cannot be imagined away; and the nationwide project of trying to imagine it away by talking about green forestry and other such 'greenwash' becomes, on analysis, little more than a collective 'overlooking of the obvious'.

Corporate Structures

Gill identifies the root of the problems she describes, and then extrapolates from the analysis. The issue, for her, is a standard problem with large corporations: 'the terrible karmic crimes entailed by piecework. That squidgy shame of people who work in high-volume situations. Those hatchery people who stir yellow chicks around on conveyor belts. Farmers of veal and lamb. People who deal in baby creatures. So much to overlook'.[45] This problem is identified as being structural — hence the reference to 'karmic crimes', indicating that action in one place produces retributive consequences in another — and as being devolved and disassociated. Society's guilt is outsourced onto scapegoats, the 'squidgy shame of people' performing the violent acts that are necessary to satisfy society's collective appetites. Alternative views are swiftly quashed: for example, the silvicultural administrator and quality control officer has never planted trees, and is promptly met with a scathing response: 'Janice has studied the studies and we have planted the plants, but never the twain shall meet'.[46] Similarly, when the team attends a large board meeting where a forestry consultant explains the

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[45] Ibid., p. 121.

[46] Ibid., p. 122.

'simple temperaments of trees' and suggests that trees should be treated as 'infant organisms', the team are collectively shocked: 'In our trade there is nearly no one who'll stand up for the forests until he's fired or retired'.[47] While the forestry consultant suggests the trees are the most important thing, most of the workers are cynical enough to realise that 'the most important thing isn't trees or people or even marmots, murrelets, or spotted owls. If any of those things were true, none of us would be sitting here right now. We'd all be elsewhere making a living, mixing cement or licking envelopes or sitting on tall poolside chairs supervising children while they swim'.[48]

Finally, about halfway through the book, the sad reality of working in the tree-planting business is baldly revealed to us. Tree planting, Gill shows, does not exist in a vacuum but is instead an integral part of Canada's resource-extraction economy. A tree planter's income is paid by logging companies and depends on a prior history of destruction; planting is thus as economically motivated an activity as the felling it supposedly repairs. As Gill further explains, before logging can occur inventories must be made determining the number of trees in a given area: 'a number derived from aerial photography, remote sensing data, satellite imagery, and surveys'.[49] But finding a limited number to log is clearly an impossible task, since '[t]he woods change every minute of every day, growing and shrinking, thriving and dying continually. If such a task were conducted on

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[47] Ibid., p. 121.

[48] Ibid., pp. 121–122.

[49] Ibid., p. 132.

hand and foot, it would keep an army of surveyors busy for several lifetimes, and once they were done, they'd need to begin all over again'.[50]

Following the making of inventories, decisions are taken about what is 'available to be harvested'; but as Gill points out, the meaning of 'available' is elastic, 'depending on how you look at trees and whether you are an environmentalist or a capitalist, an ecologist or a professional forester'.[51] Here again, meanings and valuations depend entirely on perspective — and even more on one's designated role within a corporate structure. The forest 'is measured not in trees or bugs or salmon-bearing streams but in cubic metres'. From this, an Annual Allowable Cut is given to logging companies, but logging companies can raise this number 'by investing in good silvicultural deeds like planting trees. And so tree planting is a promissory note to the woods. Because we plant trees, logging companies can cut more today. And that is the irony of us'.[52]

Forest-Looking Forest

The question remains as to whether tree planting can work. Gill answers this, perhaps simplistically, by noting that 'a plantation does not necessarily a forest make'.[53] Just as she reveals that the 'Green Frontier', when seen close up, is untrue, the same can be said of second- and third-growth forest, which are likewise expressed in broad aesthetic terms:

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[50] Ibid., p. 76.

[51] Ibid., p. 132.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., p. 227.

You don't need a PhD to note the difference between a virgin forest and a recycled one. The ground here is stones embedded in sand, covered over with crusts of sun-dried moss. Digging into it with my shovel is like working a spoon down into a jarful of teeth. I scrape handfuls of dirt together and shove them around the stems. Deep rainforest replaced with low-fat soil, a *trompe l'oeil*. A forest-looking forest.[54]

In focusing on deception here, Gill hints that some of the images peddled by the advertising agencies employed by logging companies are demonstrably false. One of the most fundamental problems is soil: 'It takes at least four hundred years to regrow an old forest naturally, but the kind of time required to make soil is millennial and geologic […] third-hand forest, when it grows, will be leaner than the one it replaces. And the next one more brittle still'.[55]

Meanwhile, the false image of the forest is paralleled with the false image of the job. As Gill writes, she used 'to think planting trees was wholesome and good, as long as you admired it from a distance […] from a distance it was the Mother Teresa of summer jobs.[56] The reality, however, is that planters are at best temporary inhabitants who 'didn't have to live on the shorn ridges or the pine-

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[54] Ibid., pp. 158–159.

[55] Ibid., p. 161.

[56] Ibid., p. 215.

beetled plains', and who are paid 'by the very same business that cut the trees down, which cancelled altruism out of the question'. [57]

Germaine Greer's *White Beech: The Rainforest Years*

If Gill's restorative quest turns out in the end to be largely a search for wages, Greer's involves finding morally acceptable ways of spending hers. After scouring the country for a suitable place for a rehabilitation project she plans to undertake with her botanist sister Jane, Greer finally purchases a AU$500,000 freehold of 'sixty hectares of steep rocky country, most of it impenetrable scrub' in the Gold Coast region of Queensland, Australia, a hot spot for tourists and retirees.[58] She subsequently employs local botanist David Jinks to take a flora survey of the area, and employs two young men, Simon and Will (recommended for their experience in regeneration work), along with an unidentified workforce to regenerate the area. After turning 'millions of dollars […] into trees' over ten years, Greer transfers the project to a UK registered charity, Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, and suggests it will be transferred to an Australian not-for-profit company in due course.[59]

Like Gill, Greer uses her account of these experiences as a platform from which to explore issues relating to the environment.[60] What results is not only a

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[57] Ibid., p. 215.

[58] Greer, p. 1.

[59] Ibid., p. 7, p. 339.

[60] Greer has less overtly autobiographical content than Gill, or indeed than other writers studied in this thesis. One explanation for this is Greer's celebrity: her life is already well documented, and she is keen, to some extent at least, to prevent her personality from becoming the focal point. It is

richly detailed botanical and cultural history of the area, but also a politically motivated exposé of what Greer believes to be the misguided belief structures, human errors, and social inequalities that have led to ecological devastation, both in her chosen bioregion (sub-tropical east coast Australia) and in other parts of Australia.

In this latter context, Greer's descriptions of her quest to find suitable land for her project give her the opportunity to discuss the variety of environmental and political problems that face desert areas in Central Australia and on the so-called 'Sapphire Coast' of south-east New South Wales. The rest of the book is comprised of chapters looking in considerable depth at her final chosen landscape: the work being done and future plans, current and previous flora and fauna, traditional owners and colonial history. This includes in-depth discussion of previous patterns of land use (and resulting environmental degradation) and the political and cultural reasons for these patterns: for example, the relationship between early colonial corporate structures, the timber industry, and logging habits in the area; the history and habits of botanists; the role of garden correspondents in national papers; and the impact of domestic gardening.

Intentions

Greer cannot be faulted for not having a clear aim for both her rehabilitation project and her book, although she simultaneously realises that neither can be quite that simple. Her aim for the first (the project) is to remove the

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significant that, apart in from a minor news item several years ago, her name does not appear on the regeneration project's website.

destructive weeds and feral animals introduced by settlers, and through propagation and management to rebuild the biodiverse habitat that might have existed in pre-settlement times. As the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest website states, 'The surviving pockets of Gondwanan vegetation are all different, each the result of its own idiosyncratic evolution. If this extraordinary biodiversity is to be preserved, a network of small reserves will have to be created'.[61] Her aim for the second (the book) is to 'convey the deep joy that rebuilding wild nature can bring';[62] and in so doing, to persuade others to replicate her project, if on a smaller scale:

> The same opportunity is out there for everyone. Supposing you live on an average suburban street. Under the tarmac there is geology, a soil type, a seed bank, and a memory of what used to be there, before the bush was ripped up, trashed and thrown away to be replaced by Norfolk Island Pines or Canary Island Date Palms and Buffalo Grass. You can stop mowing and weeding and mending what passes for lawn, and let your quarter-acre revert to Moonah Woodland and Coast Banksia or whatever. No need to put out the bird feeders, because Wattlebirds will come as soon as the Banksias flower and the Possums will move out of the roof space and back into the trees. If you can get your neighbours on side, you can combine

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[61]Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *Friends of Gondwana Rainforest*

< http://gondwanarainforest.org> [accessed 2 September 2016].

[62] Greer, p. 12.

your backyards, to make a safe place for kids to explore and for echidnas to mosey about in.[63]

Here as elsewhere in the text, Greer appeals to readers to try out their own projects, at one point asking them directly, 'if you'd like a seedling, let us know'.[64] As a reward, she offers an idyll: a redeemed paradise where possums are no longer pests and neighbourhood children and echidnas all play together in relative harmony. On the website, the aim to change mindsets and encourage change is stated even more clearly: 'In Australia, as in other parts of Gondwana, it is assumed that rare plants on private property are doomed. This mindset is part of what we want to change. Friends of Gondwana Rainforest can help landowners to identify the members of their individual communities, to remove permanently weeds and alien species, to propagate their native plants, and rehabilitate the forest'.[65] If you do this, Greer ambitiously implies, you can reverse past wrongs and potentially experience a form of redemption, albeit of a limited kind.

The book can thus be seen at one and the same time as a cognitive apology for Greer's project and her chosen method of conservation (detailing the history of land use and politics that makes the project necessary and the botanical evidence supporting her methods), and as a non-cognitive aesthetic advertisement inspiring others to do the same (see also Chapter One for distinctions between cognitive and non-cognitive approaches). Cave Creek, the website explains, 'is

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[63] Ibid., p. 12.

[64] Ibid., p. 287.

[65] Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *Friends of Gondwana Rainforest*.

our flagship project, where we learnt that it is possible to rebuild a forest extensively damaged by logging, clearing, quarrying and large scale invasion by weed species […] The aim is to inspire other landholders who are lucky enough to have remnant rainforest on their land to treasure all they have and ensure that it survives in all its astonishing richness'.[66]

As a result, Greer spends much of the narrative explaining to readers what the 'right' (intellectual, aesthetic, and sentimental) response to rainforest environments might be. She also embellishes her own aesthetic campaign with lavishly descriptive passages of place that advertise the beauty and intrigue of the forest, leading her fellow Australian Tim Flannery to describe her as 'one of the finest natural history writers to grace a page'.[67] While she professes to abhor romance and sentimentality (trees, for Greer, are absolutely not for hugging), she adopts several paradigmatically romantic poses of her own, expressing a wish on seeing a carpet snake 'to fall on my knees before such a beautiful creature', and deciding to purchase Cave Creek after being visited by a 'dancing' bird.[68]

It is not, Greer appears to suggest, that notions of beauty, worship, or other sentiment-soaked reactions to the environment and its inhabitants are necessarily inappropriate ones, so long as they are directed at appropriate targets: the 'right' projects, or the 'right' plants and animals in the 'right' places at the 'right' times

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[66] Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *Cave Creek Rainforest Rehabilitation Scheme*

 <http://gondwanarainforest.org/cave-creek> [accessed 2 September 2016].

[67] Tim Flannery, 'Conservation: Rewilding Oz', *Nature* 505 (23 January 2014), 480–481, p. 480.

[68] Greer, p. 195, p. 93.

(see also Introduction). Greer being a keen and formidably well-informed critic, the non-cognitive is always informed by the cognitive. The python and the echidna are all the greater objects of wonder, for Greer, because of their indigeneity, their rarity, and their extraordinary zoological properties; while she has no truck for an equivalent response directed to a jacaranda, since once its botanical and historical context is understood properly, it is no more than a rampant weed.

The 'Aesthetic Ought'

Greer thus develops and promotes a model of aesthetics, more particularly aesthetic taste, in which context is crucial. In so doing, she reflects the philosopher Yuriko Saito's suggestion that aesthetics can and should have a pedagogical, cultivating aesthetic literacy. As I previously mention in my Introduction, Saito argues that with appropriate cognitive appreciation of 'science, [its] environmental ramifications, and [its] social/cultural/historical significance', appearances, or at least our responses to them, 'ought to' become transformed in some way.[69] For Greer, then, things that are beautiful in one setting become ugly in another, and taste, augmented through scientific knowledge of bioregion, is the ability to recognise this. In Greer's eyes, planting non-indigenous or non-local plants (or allowing them to remain) is thus not only bad for biodiversity but, perhaps more importantly, is an offence against taste.

One clear example of this is her exposition of the history of jacarandas in Australia. The jacaranda is a Brazilian native beloved by many Australians. Greer

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[69] Saito, pp. 34–35.

traces the formation of taste for jacarandas back to the mid nineteenth century, citing the 1868 gardening correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who gushingly described a 'most beautiful flowering tree', which would 'now be within reach of all who love a garden'.[70] Eventually, Greer asserts, '[a]nyone without a Coral Tree and a Jacaranda in the front garden was deemed insensible to beauty'.[71] Her response to this is not to suggest that jacarandas have no place in the Australian landscape, but rather to assert that, as inappropriate invaders, they constitute 'a massive error of taste' — one which makes Queensland towns like Grafton and Ipswich, which have their streets lined with jacarandas, not beautiful but tawdry in her eyes.[72]

This development of normative aesthetics is repeated throughout the text. Pulling up a clump of Ruby Dock near Uluru, in apparent disregard for Parks Australia's 'Leave No Trace' policy, Greer tells protesting tourists that it is a weed, adding a scathing judgement: 'pretty, if you like that sort of thing, but [still] a weed'.[73] Similarly, oak trees become 'monsters' and willows, a favourite of Greer's in England, are 'bastards' when transported to Australia.[74] As she explains, '[w]hat's wrong with willows is what's wrong with all weeds. They're plants in the wrong place'.[75]

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[70] Quoted in Greer, p. 85.

[71] Greer, p. 85.

[72] Ibid., p. 84.

[73] Ibid., p. 74.

[74] Ibid., p. 47, p. 48.

[75] Ibid., p. 48.

Context, Greer further suggests, also has the ability to make flora more beautiful. For example, she describes the Common Rush as 'a very beautiful plant indeed, that throws up a waist-high spout of fine, dark, cylindrical green fronds, usually garlanded with flower or seed'.[76] This is not the case everywhere — '[e]lsewhere in Australia it can be a pest' — but 'in the rainforest it is a true beauty'.[77] Similarly, the rainforest sedge, *C. gracilis* var. *enervis*, 'is quite common, but in the forest it is more elegant than elsewhere'.[78] Greer advocates gardening, too, if only of the 'right' kind: she is not hostile to human interference with the natural environment *per se*. While lawns, for example, are 'that great British garden fetish', the 'dainty grass' of *Panicum pygmaeum*, Pygmy or Dwarf Panic, can be mowed and 'will make something like a lawn, but much prettier, if given a chance'.[79] Settler's Flax, meanwhile, 'could make wonderful accent plants in a rainforest garden […] If anyone could be persuaded to try to grow a rainforest garden, that is'.[80]

In all of these examples and more, Greer advocates a kind of situated aesthetics, a normative but nonetheless flexible aesthetic model that depends on a cognitive understanding of plants, how they work, and most crucially where they fit in a local bioregion. Factual learning and understanding, she suggests, will lead

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[76] Ibid., p. 208.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., p. 207.

[80] Ibid., p. 209.

people to see beauty differently.[81] She then goes on to describe her own 'Eureka moment' of falling in love with Australian vegetation while watching the botanist and environmental campaigner David Bellamy on television:

> Nobody had ever explained to me why Australian flowers were the way they were, and how fascinating their difference was. What Bellamy projected as he explained the structure of all kinds of Australian flowers, from the spectacular to the insignificant, was his wonder and intellectual excitement. By the time the credits rolled I had stopped wishing Australian blooms were like flowers in manuscript illumination and Dutch painting and I was ready to give them my full attention.[82]

Greer's Rehabilitation

Greer's repeatedly stated aim in the text is not just to inspire different modes of viewing but to instigate action: more specifically, further action on rehabilitation projects. At this point, it is necessary to consider Greer's understandings of forest ecology and rehabilitation in more detail. While she acknowledges that 'no one really knows how [plant succession] works', Greer nevertheless relies on a specific model of ecology and restoration.[83] While never

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[81] In so doing, Greer reflects a model of environmental aesthetics similar to Allan Carlson's normative 'natural environmental model', which posits that knowledge and education (particularly of scientific disciplines) is necessary for the appropriate appreciation of natural environments (see also Introduction and Chapter One): see his *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 11.

[82] Ibid., p. 86.

[83] Ibid., p. 101.

fully explicit in that she does not directly acknowledge or refer to any particular ecological theories or theorists (in contrast to the huge number of thinkers and writers referenced in botany and zoology), Greer still manages to outline a fairly clear competition-and-equilibrium model of ecology: [84]

> Forests are not just bunches of trees. Supposing you plant a few hundred trees on an acre of ground, for a few years they will grow on side by side like a plantation, until gradually the faster-growing trees will shade the others out. Some of the outstripped trees will die, others will accept life in the understory, and still more will wait for a neighbouring tree to fall. Meanwhile the trees that are pushing towards the sky will sacrifice their lateral branches, as the canopy lifts further and further off the ground. Trees that top out over the others will spread their canopies, snaring more and more of the light. On the forest floor a galaxy of shade-loving organisms will begin to appear — mosses, fungi, groundcovers, ferns. With them will come hundreds of invertebrate species. Eventually the forest achieves equilibrium, but this is not static. The key to the forest's

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[84] The competition model goes back as far as Charles Darwin, who suggested in *The Origin of Species* that 'Battle within battle must be continually recurring (in nature) with varying success; and yet in the long-run the forces are so nicely balanced, that the face of nature remains uniform for long periods of time, though assuredly the merest trifle would often give the victory to one organic being over another'. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Dover: Thrift Editions, 2012), p. 47. This view had previously been developed by Linnaeus and Adam Smith, who suggested that competition could lead to equilibrium. For further discussion of the history of these ideas, see Klaus Rohde, *Nonequilibrium Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 6.

survival is competition. Trees growing in forest communities behave differently from trees of the same species growing in the open. Even as the forest trees vie with each other for light, they are protected from extreme weather, from wind and frost and parching sun; often they are bound together by vines. The more time you spend in a forest the more aware you become that it is an organism intent upon its own survival.[85]

While she does not acknowledge it as such, Greer's model of forest-as-organism (existing in non-static equilibrium) refers back to a theory of plant succession developed by the early American plant ecologist Frederic Clements.[86] This theory, dominant for much of the twentieth century, held that ecologies went through 'continuous change towards a "climatic climax"', and likened 'vegetation formation' to a complex organism 'developing' through time'.[87] Though increasingly challenged, this model still underpins much conservation policy.[88]

In Greer's rehabilitation project, she and other members of her team aim to recreate this eventual equilibrium. It is a heavily interventionist scheme, involving the clearing of weeds and the propagating and replanting of indigenous species. Alongside this, Greer's workforce must manage the pioneer species that threaten

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[85] Greer, p. 16.

[86] See Adams, p. 224, or for more detail see David J. Mladenoff & William L. Baker, eds, *Spatial Modeling of Forest Landscape Change: Approaches and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 2–3.

[87] F.E. Clements, quoted in Adams, p. 224.

[88] Adams points in particular to the common conservation terms 'system, equilibrium, balance, succession, competition, climax' as deriving from Clements' theories. Adams, p. 226.

to establish monocultures; as she suggests, '[n]o wild species is altruistic. All the forest volunteers are in it for their own species'.[89] To an accusation that she is simply engaging in 'a very expensive form of gardening', she argues that 'if we can rebuild the original plant community, it will be strong enough to fight off the competition'.[90] Eventually, when equilibrium is reached, the forest will be able to support itself once more.[91]

Greer relies on this suspiciously outdated model of ecology for her project; also for her narrative, which suggests that if people can see and act properly, regeneration (and, at least potentially, redemption and belonging) will result. The project relies on an idea of forest equilibrium — a forest that has the capacity to support and manage itself — and on the strong nature-writing trope of restoration of lost harmony. The book's final scene shows this clearly, describing Greer leaning over a railing and spotting one of the more famously shy Australian inhabitants:

> An echidna. An *echidna*! *Tachyglossus aculeatus*. A creature more ancient than a marsupial. A monotreme! I felt weak at the knees […] Whenever a truly wild creature lets me see it behaving naturally, I feel a blessedness,

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[89] Greer, p. 111.

[90] Ibid., p. 111, p. 112.

[91] The website states what Greer means by this more explicitly: 'We call what we do rehabilitation because the greatest contribution is made by the forest itself. The forest decides what will and will not grow and how fast and where. As soon as a canopy is formed, the forest manages itself.' Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *Cave Creek* <http://gondwanarainforest.org/cave-creek> [accessed 21 September 2016].

as if I had been allowed to enter a realm far more special than the celebrity A-list. When I look up from a book, and see a few yards away a pademelon grazing with her joey, I feel vindicated, as if I had won acceptance as an animal in my turn. Lots of people are persuaded to spend lots of money on shelter and food for wild creatures, when all they have to do is to stop making lawns and weeding and tidying up, and turning the bush into an outdoor room. While it's not true that all you have to do is to let your garden run to seed, before wild vegetation and wild creatures will return to it, it is true that if you remove weeds and do your best to restore the original vegetation, the endemic animal species will reappear as if by magic. You won't be able to keep a dog or a cat or even hens, because all of them do tremendous damage to wild creatures, but you won't miss them, because all around you the bush will rustle with to-ings and fro-ings of a vast range of creatures great and small. A patch of rescued bush is a sanctuary where the special creatures who evolved with the vegetation can stave off extinction.[92]

The passage neatly illustrates Greer's intertwined cognitive and non-cognitive responses to nature. Her response to seeing the echidna is simultaneously to cite its Linnaean name, acknowledge its age, and feel weak at the knees; it is also significant as a variant of the 'belonging' trope discussed earlier in this thesis ('I feel vindicated, as if I had won acceptance as an animal in my turn').[93] In this instance, belonging is conceived of as something conferred by indigenous fauna.

[92] Greer, p. 338.

[93] Ibid.

By letting themselves be seen in proximity to the home that Greer has created, such creatures are taken to signal their approval: they indicate that she has made the right decisions, and has achieved a way of life that is morally acceptable because it is sustainable and not destructive of the region's indigenous animals, which apparently stand in for indigeneity itself (see also Chapter One).

There are several potential issues to think about here. First, such a project relies on the increasingly contentious idea of a model of ecological equilibrium that can be recreated. While equilibrium models continue to influence conservation policy in Australia and elsewhere, most ecologists now prefer the concept of non-equilibrium: again a much debated term, but broadly one which suggests that most natural ecosystems do not attain a climax community because the rate of change makes that impossible. Moreover, biodiversity often depends 'directly upon natural patterns of disturbance'.[94] For example, in the UK context, as Adams argues, an equilibrium approach to conservation practice has led to 'small isolated islands of semi-natural habitat marooned in a sea of chemical agriculture, roads and houses', an excellent achievement no doubt but an approach which still aims primarily to 'control nature, to ensure that its biodiversity is sustained, to provide it with special places, but at the same time, to keep its wildness under control'.[95] This control, Adams argues further, is a feature of all restoration projects: 'restoration is […] at one level, restoration of naturalness. At another, however, it is the reverse, since the whole science of restoration is based

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[94] Adams, p. 227.

[95] Adams, p. 241.

on the ability to predict outcomes and compare them to some template'.[96] Similarly, as Rod Giblett has noted in the Australian context, Greer fails to address or even acknowledge the paradox of 'rebuilding' wild nature, or indeed to discuss how 'wild nature' might be defined.[97]

Of course, Greer is not aiming to dictate the exact form 'her' forest should take. Adams differentiates between 'restoring form and restoring form-creating processes',[98] and Greer would most likely argue that she is doing the latter: what ecologist William R Jordan III describes as 'bringing in certain key "ingredients", and then letting nature take its course in shaping the result'.[99] For Greer, these form-creating processes are assiduously managed. Propagation, for example, is carefully monitored throughout, and when it turns out that too many black apple trees (*Planchonella* or *Pouteria australis*) have been planted, Greer remarks that 'we would have had to turn our rainforest into a black apple orchard if I hadn't taught the workforce their first bitter lesson and made them throw half the precious seedlings away'.[100] Still, she is adamant that she has no illusions of

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[96] Ibid., p. 238.

[97] Rod Giblett, 'Rod Giblett reviews White Beech by Germaine Greer', *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Ecopoetics*, 1.2 (August 2014) < https://plumwoodmountain.com/rod-giblett-reviews-white-beech-by-germaine-greer/> [accessed 10 August 2016].

[98] Adams, p. 239.

[99] William R. Jordan III, Michael E. Gilpin and John D. Aber, 'Restoration Ecology: Ecological Restoration as a Technique for Basic Research', in *Restoration Ecology*, ed. by Jordan, Gilpin and Aber, pp. 3–22 (p. 16).

[100] Greer, p. 250.

controlling the forest: 'as a newcomer to this community, I cannot delude myself that I should or can control it. I am glad to be the forest's fool'.[101] Greer emphasises instead the kingpin role that the forest itself has in her project: 'what I have to do is to remove some of the obstacles and the forest will do the rest'.[102] Giving up this control, in fact, is part of her educative journey towards the forest's regeneration:

> true it is that entering fully into the multifarious life that is the Earthling's environment, while giving up delusions of controlling it, is a transcendental experience. To give up fighting against nature, struggling to tame it and make it bring forth profit, is to enter a new kind of existence which has nothing to do with serenity or relaxation. It is rather a state of heightened awareness and deep excitement. As I limp back down the mountain with my pockets full of fruit, on my way to prepare the seed for planting, I know that as many will grow as should grow. I am like Ganymede in the talons of the eagle, caught up and carried along by the prodigious energy of the forest. If the forest has its way, paucity will be replaced by plenty; once the vanished trees return, an invasion will follow. Mosses, lichens, ferns, orchids, mites, weevils, beetles, moths, butterflies, phasmids, frogs, snakes, lizards, gliders, possums, wallabies, echidnas, all will reappear in their own sweet time.[103]

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[101] Ibid., p. 35.

[102] Ibid., p. 101.

[103] Ibid., p. 5.

For all its conviction and charm, the passage above is typically self-contradictory. Greer conveys the illusion of giving up control, but also recognises that removing obstacles may be a permanent process. For example, of her wish to restore native groundcover like Settler's Flax, she writes: 'the workforce […] think all these small natives will return as the forest builds itself, in their own time. I'm not so sure, because there are so many exotic creeping plants that will compete with them. […] So you may find me on my knees weeding the rainforest, like Canute trying to hold back the tide'.[104] It is a curious simile: precisely *unlike* the Danish king, Greer is seeking to harness rather than oppose the prodigious energy of nature. But through this striking figure of speech, she also acknowledges that the reality is not so simple: that the Cave Creek Rainforest Rehabilitation Scheme must necessarily be a constant struggle against the dominant flow of ecological invasion, degradation, and loss of biodiversity. That same attitude is expressed in the Friends of Gondwana Rainforest website:

> The completion of our flagship project at Cave Creek is now almost in sight. What will have to follow is maintenance; the number of shade tolerant weeds rampaging up and down the east coast of Australia increases every year. What we hope is that more and more of our neighbours will see that what we are doing is intensely rewarding and will decide to regenerate their own bits and pieces of rainforest, even clubbing together to create significant stretches of habitat. We also hope to inspire people living in other fragments of Gondwana to acquire remnant rainforest and actively to rehabilitate it. We dream of seeing Friends of

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[104] Ibid., p. 209.

Gondwana Rainforest in all those parts of the world where it is in danger
of extinction. We understand that where there is intense population
pressure the areas involved will of necessity be small, but we shall never
give up hope that, when we finally learn how to manage this most
exuberant and multifarious of all planets, ancient subtropical rainforests
will come into their own again.[105]

In this approach, as Adams shows, a notion of control is never truly lost; rather,
'physical restraint is exchanged for knowledge-based ability in order to predict
how nature will work'.[106] Learning to manage may not be a new, control-free
method of engaging with non-human nature. Instead, as Adams argues, we 'have
control not by controlling nature's every move, but, more cost-effectively, by
thinking nature's thoughts'.[107]

Another potential aporia is that Greer's project relies on a notion of
original landscape that seriously under-examines social questions about exactly
what 'original', 'natural', or indeed 're-indigenisation' might mean. As Adrian
Franklin comments,

The orthodoxy in Australia holds that native animals are those that were
here at the time of *white settlement*. However, this traps environmental

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[105] Friends of Gondwana Rainforest, *What Next?* < http://gondwanarainforest.org/next> [Accessed
2 September 2016].

[106] Adams, p. 240.

[107] Ibid., p. 240.

action in the enigma of an ecosystem they can never aspire to restore: the extensively burned pre-colonial landscape of Aboriginal Australia, or indeed the dominance of acacias on the continent before they were displaced by eucalypts. By this logic the dingo that came before the whites visited Australia is a native animal but the brumby is not because it came just after.[108]

Nor are these merely ecological issues. As the British ecocritic Timothy Clark argues, such regenerative projects may even 'feed an unacknowledged and problematic kind of eco-nationalism or even eco-cleansing (indigenous equals good, introduced equals bad), a policy dubious in itself for its dogmatism and with uncomfortable overtones in a country often torn by debates about human immigration'.[109] As Clark reminds us, introduced animals and hybrid flora are now a part of culture, and removal may not be the only answer — or even the most acceptable one at that.

Conclusion

As I have been arguing in this chapter, Gill and Greer are both aware — albeit to varying degrees — of the distance between hoped-for regenerative results and the persistent socio-economic realities that underlie them. For Gill, there is a large gap between the cosy image of 'forests for the future' and the relentlessly

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[108] Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation: The True Story of Animals and Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006), p. 147.

[109] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 155.

profit-driven forestry industries in Canada. Greer, a landowner herself if markedly more aware than Gill's employers of the intricacies of forest ecology, writes a far more positive version: the modern redemption tale of a woman who gives her life savings to rehabilitate a forest, and a forest which itself comes back from a near death. In her epilogue, Greer thanks all 'the denizens of the Cave Creek rainforest, vegetable and animal', suggesting that 'their lust for life is what has transformed my uncertain efforts to rebuild the forest into a triumph over the forces of depletion. This it is that makes me dare to hope that it is not too late to save this most enchanting of small planets'. But, more like Gill, she is aware that she may be doing little more than grasping at straws: 'I wasn't doing it out of altruism. I didn't think I was saving the world. I was in search of heart's ease and this was my chance to find it'.[110]

Any action necessarily opens itself up to criticism, and it is not hard to find problems with the forest ecology as well as the aesthetic and economic models that Gill and Greer present. For both, however, action is at least an attempt to try something: as Gill writes,

> After we quit we'll never stop wondering what it meant to the world, if anything at all, these little patches we made, our hectare groves that dot the countryside. In one hundred years there will be no sign of our crew, perhaps not even a trace of anything we made or did or built in our lives except perhaps our children's children. And yet, more seedlings have been planted in the province of British Columbia than there are people living on

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[110] Greer, p. 3.

earth. It would take one person many lifetimes — more than one thousand years of walking — to touch a hand to every tree trunk.

Forests for the Future. Forests Forever, as the slogans and T-shirts say. Not a salve or a fix for the planet, not exactly. We gave the trees some small purchase in the world, and they gave us the same in return.[111]

In this passage, Gill registers a perspectival shift, but in the opposite direction from usual. Nature writing often focuses on the individual and the local, but here Gill tries to give a sense of the macro level: the huge number of seedlings planted, the potentially massive cumulative significance of all those tree planters and planted trees. And despite her many misgivings, she ends on a note of hope where humanity and trees are not totally irreconcilable, and her own 'small purchase' in the world has brought its equally modest return.

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[111] Gill, p. 230.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a series of questions about the aesthetic construction of place in recent Australian and Canadian nature writing. Is it possible to 'frame' a natural environment in a book? What tools or skills should a writer have in order to represent place appropriately? What might make a writer a legitimate perceiver of place? These are questions that, as has been seen, writers in both countries continue to grapple with.

While Canada has a long history of nature writing, nature writing in Australia remains an emergent genre, and the thesis consequently represents the first sustained comparative literary analysis of its kind.[1] In it, I have sought to

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[1] To my knowledge no book-length study of contemporary Australian nature writing currently exists, though several articles are available. These include NJ Kelly, 'Singing up the Silences: Disruption and Invocation in Australian Nature Writing', *AJE: Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, 1 (2011), 18–26, and CA Cranston, 'Tasmanian Nature Writing and Ecocriticism' in *Australian Literary Studies in the 21st Century: Proceedings of the 2000 ASAL Conference Held at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, 6–9 2000*, ed. by Philip Mead, (Hobart: ASAL, 2001), pp. 59–67. Essays on related studies can be found in CA Cranston and Robert Zeller, eds, *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and Their Writers* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007), while analysis of the wilderness myth in Australian and Canadian novels can be found in Kylie Crane, *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). See also Tom Wilson, 'Introduction to the Post-Pastoral in Australian Poetry', *Landscapes: The Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*, 3.1 (2013), 1–17, and Australian poet John Kinsella's series of essays and commentaries on the tropes of pastoral, Australian

consider how literal and metaphorical views of the environment are constructed in Australian and Canadian literary works written and published over the last fifteen years or so; and I have also assessed how aesthetic value is determined and constructed in these works. My approach, in brief, has involved bringing together theories of contemporary environmental aesthetics (particularly notions of normative aesthetics) and literary analysis.[2]

In my introductory chapter, I suggested that Australian and Canadian writers could be seen as implicitly or explicitly reframing the picturesque: as reworking the familiar tropes of colonial picturesque writing. This could, I suggested, involve an active challenge to conventional practices and perspectives, but also the reclamation or repetition of these practices. In conducting a journey through the writing of home and the writing of the prairie, through narratives of pilgrimage and narratives of work, this thesis has assessed the notion of reframing the picturesque by critically analysing different modes of viewing landscape in both the present and the past (chapters 1 and 2); by exploring issues related to normative aesthetics (chapters 3 and 4); and by considering questions of taste (chapter 4). To a greater or lesser extent, all of the writers in this study have

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landscape and poetry in 'Spatial Relations of Landscape: a Poetics' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Edith Cowan University, 2005).

[2] The two disciplines of environmental aesthetics and literary ecocriticism have arguably operated in tandem over the last fifty years, but only relatively rarely have they been brought together in the way I have attempted here. One notable exception is Terry Gifford's development of the aesthetician Emily Brady's notion of 'imagining well' in his analysis of John Muir. See Terry Gifford, *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 52–53.

worked from an implicit premise that *seeing* and representing the environment in a 'better' way might lead to *treating* the environment more sustainably. The narrative arc of this thesis is an attempt to test this theory by moving from perception to action. The first two chapters thus focus on general problems of framing and perspective before more specific questions are asked in chapter 3 about the relationship between environmental aesthetics, ethics and activism; then the final chapter moves further still towards the practical, considering some of the aesthetic and representational issues faced by those actively involved in conservation and land management.

Seen more holistically, the thesis has examined how recent nature writing from both Australia and Canada (albeit not necessarily in the same ways) has increasingly engaged with the politics of representation, registering concern for how to represent non-human places 'truthfully' and non-violently in countries where belonging, ownership, and decision-making about land continue to be central issues. However, uncomfortable questions remain to be asked about the influence of colonial aesthetics on contemporary constructions of place, and about the ethical and political implications of such constructions in a world where aesthetic issues cannot be separated from wider political and social concerns.

At the close of this thesis, then, it still needs to be asked: *has* the picturesque actually been reframed, or has it merely been re-enacted, in the new nature writing of Australia and Canada as it has emerged over the last couple of decades? Have some texts managed this reframing more successfully than others, and in so doing effectively engaged with the politics of environmental

representation in the formerly colonised countries from which they spring? An attempt to rank the texts in terms of their effectiveness would neither be easy nor particularly useful. All of the works in this study have strengths and weaknesses: a single text might contain a nuanced approach to one problem and a superficial or clichéd response to another. Nonetheless, some concluding comments can be made on these texts' responses to the main issues raised in this thesis, and in the remainder of this concluding section I will go on to offer some evaluative remarks before reflecting one last time on contemporary nature writing and its publics, on its social and political implications, and on its practical effects.

Among the many issues raised in this study, three in particular merit further consideration here. The first is nature writers' various attempts to reframe colonial modes of viewing by working, for example, against the objective, distanced view of the picturesque gaze, or by challenging the European cultural associations that led early settlers to view landscapes as blank or unvaried. As I have emphasised throughout, it is true that many of these writers aim explicitly to work against such ingrained habits of perception, and some of these attempts are highly effective. Mark Tredinnick's repeated attempts to fracture a simple cognitive representative frame offer one largely successful example (chapter 1); Savage's commentary on so-called 'unconformities' another (chapter 2). Other writers, however, are often in danger of repeating standard colonial writing practices: an obvious example of this can be found in my critical discussion of Maya Ward's 'promontory' description in chapter 3. A related issue is whether ongoing environmental problems can be resolved purely on the imaginative plane. Responses which appear to suggest that merely spending 'quality time' in a

particular landscape (see my discussion of Tim Winton's work in chapter 2) amounts to finding one or another form of forgiveness, risk relegating social and environmental problems to *mere* questions of perspective rather than problems that require urgent material redress.

The second vexed issue (or better, set of issues) pertains to indigeneity. While most of the authors studied in this thesis engage with questions of diversity, the vast majority of the texts I have covered are by white, university-educated authors whose privileged backgrounds are to some extent at least a legacy of the colonial histories of their countries.[3] And while all the authors address questions of indigeneity in some form, these questions tend to be addressed in a limited or generalised fashion that runs the risk of ignoring differences between individuals who, while they might share basic values and a keen sense of injustice, are by no means the same. As Brisbane-based artist Vernon Ah Kee (a member of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples) explains, there is a continuing struggle to encourage white Australians to see Aborigines as 'fully realised people'; the general attitude, he argues, is 'overwhelmingly paternalistic at best'.[4] This remains a struggle to a greater or lesser extent for all of the authors who feature in this thesis. Thus, while some of them make a conscious effort to differentiate between individuals (consider, for example, Candace Savage's work

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[3] This is not surprising: after all, nature writing, especially though not exclusively in formerly colonised countries such as Australia and Canada, is a genre that tends to start from the kinds of angst and guilt that are characteristic of white settler privilege.

[4] Vernon Ah Kee, in Larissa Behrendt (moderator), *From 1967 to 2067: a UTS Big Thinking Forum* (Panel Discussion at the Sydney Festival, University of Technology, Sydney, January 18 2017).

with Piyêso kâ-pêtowitak, aka Jean Francis Oakes, in chapter 2, or Karsten Heuer's discussions with James Itsi and Randall Tetlich in chapter 3), for others indigenous peoples exist as an amorphous, historically constituted group (see Sharon Butala's reflections on the possible former inhabitants of her home in Chapter 2, or Tredinnick's descriptions of the Gundungurra people in chapter 1).

Finally, as I identified at the outset of this thesis, a persistent challenge for advocates of normative environmental aesthetics is that any notion of an 'aesthetic ought' for a particular environment needs to contend with definitions of 'the natural' that are often rigid or unquestioning, unduly western-centric or anthropocentric: in other words, it carries the issue that the wrong norm (or the wrong 'natural') might be prescribed. This is an ongoing issue in what remains a limited field: within this study, for instance, Germaine Greer's rainforest rehabilitation project relies on a potentially problematic definition of indigenous landscape (chapter 4), while Tim Winton blithely refers to the redemptive power of the 'gold standard' landscapes to be found in Australia (chapter 2). The most effective engagements with this issue can be seen in the various 'reframings' that allow for ambiguity, celebrating beauty while being aware of nuance. For example, Charlotte Gill's reframing of the popular image of the tree-planter reflects the ambiguities of contemporary forestry practices (chapter 4), while Tredinnick's featured landscape in *The Blue Plateau* regularly shifts and fractures, resisting any normative pattern or point of view (chapter 1).

Aesthetics, as Jonathan Maskit among others has pointed out, requires working out 'connections with place': a much larger task than can be answered by

seeking recourse to science and the various, broadly cognitive approaches that scientific analysis supports.[5] As I have shown, nature writing since the start of the twenty-first century has often revolved around the interplay between cognitive forms of knowledge and non-cognitive reactions to them. A critical analysis of aesthetic descriptions, images, and tropes of the kind applied to the literary works under scrutiny in this thesis can help us understand the complex territory such works inhabit between artistic products and activist texts. Environmental aestheticians such as Yuriko Saito have shown how we (as readers, consumers, citizens) are moved not only or even primarily by cognitive belief structures, but as much or even more so by non-cognitive modes of thought. The latter are in large part a function of the narratives we tell about how we fit in or belong to our environment; and such narratives are frequently expressed in aesthetic terms. It follows that to consider how these narratives record, construct, and potentially elicit non-cognitive, romantic, and transcendental responses to place is a crucial exercise. I have argued, in turn, that attentiveness to aesthetic language and imagery offers powerful insights into some of the representational strategies adopted in these texts.

Can nature writing save the world? The answer to this question must be a firm 'no'. As the American author Verlyn Klinkenborg has remarked, while 'writers in every generation take a crack at finding the crystalline argument that will induce an epiphany in skeptical readers […] every generation fails, in part because skeptical readers so seldom pick up this kind of writing or submit to its

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[5] Maskit, pp. 52–53. See also Introduction, and my discussion of William Adams' work in chapter 4.

evidence'.[6] There are dangers, as well, that nature writing will preach to the converted, and that in doing so it will provide a form of easy moralism: one that allows individual readers to express disapproval of current or historical environmental attitudes and practices without building the kinds of grounded community awareness without which it becomes impossible to act. Notwithstanding, in Australia in particular both nature writing and its readership have transformed over the last couple of decades.[7] In 2003–4, Mark Tredinnick and Peter Hay independently noted that an Australian tradition of nature writing (at least in prose) was largely absent.[8] But much has changed since then: over the last five years or so, several major nature writing prizes have been established, and in 2014 Don Watson's *The Bush* won the New South Wales Premier's Book of the Year, a rare accolade for a non-fictional text. Meanwhile, earlier this year (2016) Picador publisher Alex Craig described nature writing as currently the

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[6] Verlyn Klinkenborg, 'No Heaven on Earth', Bookforum (2008), <http://www.bookforum.com /inprint/015_03/2721> [accessed 20 September 2016].

[7] This is perhaps not a huge surprise given the current global environmental crisis. As Robert Macfarlane points out regarding the much larger (and earlier) spike in British nature writing, 'It is no coincidence that a literature celebrating the natural world should have emerged at a time when the natural world is so conspicuously under threat'. Robert Macfarlane, 'Environment: New Words on the Wild', *Nature* 498 (2013), 166–167, p. 167.

[8] Tredinnick, *A Place on Earth*, p. 29, and Peter Hay, quoted in Charlotte Wood, 'A Place on Earth: Nature Writing in Australia', <http://www.charlottewood.com.au/nature-writing-in-australia.html> [accessed 20 September 2016]. As Cranston and Zeller point out, however, there are examples of Australian nature writing that have 'for one reason or another not made their way into literary critical consciousness'. *Cranston and Zeller*, p. 17.

most 'urgent and fascinating field of non-fiction writing'.[9] All the signs — in Australia as in Canada — are that nature writing, far from being consigned to an idealised history, is very much part of our present moment and will remain so for decades to come.

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[9] Jason Steger, 'Bookmarks: News and Views from the Book World', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/bookmarks-news-and-views-from-the-book-world-20160405-gnymui.html> [accessed 20 September 2016].

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