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Is there an Australian Pastoral Poetry?

Abstract I: La Pastorale è un noto genere letterario diffuso in Europa dal Rinascimento al diciottesimo secolo. Esisteva anche in altre forme artistiche, soprattutto nelle arti visive, e dopo la sua scomparsa come genere distinto alcuni dei suoi elementi costitutivi sono sopravvissuti nel ventesimo secolo, per esempio nella musica. Con la diffusione della cultura europea nelle colonie l'influenza della pastorale si è estesa ad altri paesi, con esiti differenti. Di recente, il termine 'pastorale' ha riacquisito importanza nella letteratura in inglese, non solo in Gran Bretagna ma anche, in particolare, negli Stati Uniti e in Australia, assieme ad un incremento della scrittura legata alla consapevolezza ecologica rispetto al mondo naturale, soprattutto nel caso del paesaggio. Questo ha portato, negli ultimi decenni, a delle ridefinizioni del termine 'pastorale'. Saranno perciò esaminati una serie di poeti australiani per verificare se, e come, la loro scrittura sul paesaggio ha una relazione con, o incorpora, elementi della pastorale. Il poeta australiano John Kinsella, in particolare, è stato un portavoce riconosciuto a favore di una nuova definizione della pastorale. Le sue opere ripercorrono il passaggio da una ridefinizione politicamente attiva e anticoloniale della pastorale ad un coinvolgimento principalmente etico, nonché più sereno e armonico, con il mondo naturale.

Abstract II: Pastoral was common as a European literary genre from the Renaissance until the eighteenth century. It existed in other artistic forms as well, especially in the visual arts, and after its demise as a distinct genre elements of it persisted into the twentieth century, for example in music. With the colonial spread of European culture the pastoral influence also extended into other countries, with a mixed fate. Recently, the term Pastoral has come back into prominence in literature in English, not only in Great Britain but also, notably in the USA and Australia, with the growth of writing motivated by ecological involvement with the natural world, especially landscape. This has led to re-definitions of the term Pastoral in the last few decades. A number of Australian poets are looked at to see whether, and how, their writing about landscape might relate to, or incorporate elements of the

Pastoral. The Australian poet John Kinsella, in particular, has been a widely published spokesperson for a new definition of Pastoral. His published works trace his move from a politically activist anti-colonialist redefinition of Pastoral towards a quieter, more harmonious, and essentially ethical engagement with the natural world.

What is Pastoral?

There is little dispute about what is meant by the term Pastoral, what I specify as the *Traditional* Pastoral, as it manifested in sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century European literature, painting and music. It has generally been considered to signify an idealized picture of rural life, written by an urban artist for an urban readership. (The shepherds and shepherdesses depicted would have been, of course, illiterate in real life, something conveniently ignored within the genre.) The fact that its roots can be traced back to Virgil's "Eclogues" (42-39 BCE) and before that via Theocritus (3rd C BCE) to Hesiod's "Works and Days" (700 BCE ca) need not detain us. The Traditional Pastoral in post-Medieval culture is a Renaissance invention. Could it, and has it, survived the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution?

It has certainly received clear-eyed scrutiny from twentieth century critics. M. H. Abrams puts it succinctly: "the traditional pastoral ever since Virgil has been a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poets nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting" (Abrams 1999: 202). One thinks of Adam and Eve before the Serpent's cunning incursion into their rural perfection in "Paradise Lost", where their biggest worry must surely have been whether it rained on their picnics. More cutting than Abrams, William Empson called pastoral a "polite pretence" (Empson 1935: 18) "which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor" (Empson 1935: 17). Raymond Williams is harsher in his critique, arguing that pastoral can "serve to cover and evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time" (Williams 1973: 60). All three critics bring a political consciousness to bear on the genre.

One must not over-emphasise the role of the French and industrial revolutions in the demise of the Pastoral. Romanticism had its part to play too (one thinks of Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" (1797) or "Michael" (1800), and before him, of Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770) and George Crabbe's "The Village" (1783). But it is hard to find a better image of the disruptive incursion of the new mechanical age into what seems to have been an immemorial rural tranquility than the opening pages of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, with the building of the railway across the land where the Brangwens had, it seems for centuries, existed in some kind of undisturbed harmony with the land and its

natural rhythms. And one must not forget, in this context, the title of Leo Marx's ground breaking 1964 study, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. (The machine in the garden was not, as one might expect, a lawnmower, but the railroad and its accompanying technology.)

Nonetheless, Traditional Pastoral has continued in forms other than poetry, especially in music. In English music, one thinks for example of Frederick Delius (1863-1934). His beautiful "Florida Suite" (1887) was written after his stint as a manager of an orange grove in Florida. It was inspired by the rhythms and qualities of the music of black workers, but without the slightest hint of the post-bellum poverty and injustice of the American Deep South. Then there is George Butterworth's (1885-1916) setting of Houseman's "A Shropshire Lad" (1911-12), and Vaughan Williams' composition "The Lark Ascending" (1921) and his 3rd Symphony, titled "A Pastoral Symphony" (1922), like Beethoven's. Williams (1872-1958) was an avid collector of rural folk music, but there is a world of difference between his music and that of his Hungarian Modernist contemporary, Bela Bartok (1881-1945).

I would like to mention one other example of Traditional Pastoral in modern forms which, for want of a better name, I would call the Heimat program, or homeland or locality program. This is a phenomenon of German television and, for all that I know, it could exist on other networks too. Each program, some as long as an hour in duration, is a beautifully shot study of some rural area, for example of the Lake District of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or the river Lahn, with its villages, farms, woodlands, animals, and traditional occupations. One might see a woman making mustard, or baking traditional cakes for a wedding, or weaving or embroidering or making lace. One might see a cooper crafting a barrel, or testing and tasting some home-made fruit wine, or engaged in some other traditional, apparently immemorial occupation. In these programs it never rains, and there is no sight of the autobahn, or of the wind farm just over the hill, or of the nuclear power plant in the process of being decommissioned a few kilometers away. Contemporary Traditional Pastoral? Well, yes.

At this point, perhaps prematurely, certainly tentatively, I wish to offer my own not entirely original definition of Pastoral. By Pastoral, I mean a genre or mode, written or otherwise created from an urban vantage and employing a rural subject matter, in which an underlying tension between urban and rural can be discerned or unravelled. This tension is crucial to my definition, as it is in a less obvious sense a continuation of the political consciousness noted in the three earlier critics. The tension serves to disguise itself, as in the Traditional Pastoral, as harmony, sweetness and light. For example, it is only by a strenuous effort of neglect, or ignoring, that the camera can be made to point steadfastly away from all that is not tradition and harmony. It is only the overwhelming power of tradition and class that enabled Delius to betray no trace of the suffering of his black workers in his idyllic music.

On the other hand that tension can rupture the pretence of harmony, exposing the discrepancies and injustices and malignancies of the urban/rural relationship. But that is not what one calls Traditional Pastoral.

Australian landscape poetry

If one accepts my tentative definition of Pastoral, both potentially positive and potentially negative, one might want to ask whether landscape poetry is inescapably Pastoral by its very nature, or whether it can be pastoral at all. With the development of a literature in English in Australia in the nineteenth century, elements of the English Pastoral inevitably migrated to the continent. But in such a radically unfamiliar antipodean environment, coming to terms with the landscape became a primary concern, especially with the poets and painters. What relation, if any, did their landscape poetry and paintings bear to Pastoral?

In this context I think it is useful to follow Paul Kane's distinction, in his essay, "Woful Shepherds" between Pastoral as a genre, and Pastoral as a mode that can appear in many different genres. (In this distinction Kane, and I, differ from Paul Alpers in his *What is Pastoral?* – in that Alpers considers all Pastoral as mode rather than genre.) While conceding that there was a genre called Pastoral Poetry from the Renaissance until the eighteenth century, (what I have been calling Traditional Pastoral), Kane argues that at other times "Pastoral moves freely across many genres and always has... but it is not, in itself, a genre" (Kane 2004: 270). If we accept this distinction between pastoral as a genre (which had a specific time and place) and pastoral as a mode (which does not), one can use the term more flexibly and precisely. In his book *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature Oriented Literature* (2000) P. D. Murphy expands on this: "By a mode I mean a philosophical or conceptual orientation rather than a style or structure (which are what constitute a genre)" (Murphy 2000: 4). When I turn later to discuss the work of John Kinsella, the Australian writer most identified with the term Pastoral today, this distinction is relevant.

Ivor Indyk starts his chapter on the Australian pastoral in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* with these words: "If we define pastoral as the poetry of fulfillment and ease, in which the world of nature acknowledges and celebrates the desire of man, then we should have to admit that there are not many genuine examples of Australian pastoral" (Indyk 1988: 353). I would disagree with Indyk's characterization of Pastoral, as being somewhat too simple. Nonetheless one can agree with him when he claims that "Australian nature or landscape poetry... is... a tortured affair" characterised by estrangement and isolation (Indyk 1988: 353). As such, it would most certainly not qualify as Pastoral as characterized above. And it contradicts the rather strange claim by Corey

Wakeling, in his Introduction to a recent anthology, *Outcrop*, for the “fervency with which colonial poets took up the pastoral mode” (Wakeling, Corey & Balius 2013: 13).

Several nineteenth century poets, notably Charles Harpur (1813) and Henry Kendall (1813-1882), did write poems celebrating rural ease and fulfillment. “A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest”, by Charles Harpur, is probably the most famous instance, ending as it does with these peaceful lines:

O, 'tis easeful here to lie
 Hidden from noon's scorching eye,
 In this grassy cool recess
 Musing thus of quietness (Harpur 1973: 25).

Yet even in such a moment of peace as this poem celebrates, we are gently reminded that noon's eye, the sun, can be ‘scorching’. (This is the ‘Et in Arcadia Ego’ theme explicated so brilliantly by Erwin Panofsky in his analysis of Poussin's (1594-1665) painting of that name.) And in Harpur's more gothic “The Creek of the Four Graves”, what looks at first to be an idyllic bush landscape turns out to be the site of a gruesome multiple murder (Harpur 1973: 3).

The characteristic note in nineteenth century Australian literature's response to nature is set, however, not so much by the poets as by prose writers such as Henry Lawson (1867-1922), Barbara Baynton (1857-1929), Joseph Furphy (1843-1912) and Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946). The opening of Lawson's most famous story, *The Drover's Wife*, epitomises a bleak vision of the Australian landscape:

The bush consists of stunted, rotten native appletrees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which were sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization (Lawson 1944: 89).

In such a forbidding and inhospitable environment, the best one can hope for is to survive with whatever dignity and courage one can muster. In Barbara Baynton's stories in *Bush Studies*, such as “Squeaker's Mate” (Baynton 1972: 54) and “The Chosen Vessel” (Baynton 1972: 132), one finds an even grimmer vision, the bush becoming a heartless participant in grotesque abuse, rape and murder, offering neither refuge nor consolation to the victims.

The painters' response to nature, at the end of the nineteenth century, could not have been more different. Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) painted *Fire's on, Lapstone Tunnel*, a picture of a tunnel disaster, in 1891, and Tom Roberts (1856-1931) painted a pastoral disaster in *The Break Away* in the same year. But instead of the estrangement and threat registered in the literature, we find in these paintings exultation in, celebration of, colour and light. Other contemporary Australian painters, also painting *en plein air*, such as

Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917) and Charles Conder (1868-1909), share this celebratory quality. It has marked the 'Heidelberg School' as distinct from the European Impressionists, to whom they've been likened.

So Australian painters constructed one landscape, and the writers another. However the alienation and distrust in early Australian writers has gradually been replaced, in many writers today, by a delight in, and love for, Australian landscape and a moving sense of belonging *within* it. Subject/writer and object/nature have moved towards the kind of integration that Lawrence Buell, in his book *Writing for an Endangered World*, calls "environmental connectedness" (Buell 2001: 17) and "place-connectedness" (Buell 2001: 28). This is something especially pertinent to some recent work by John Kinsella. (In a different context, this is a phenomenon explored by Peter Read in his book *Belonging*.) This may partly be explained by a growing understanding and care for a land no longer felt to be alien and threatening. Another factor may be a greater understanding of, and respect for, the indigenous peoples' traditional relationship to the land, even while it is complicated by an awareness of the colonisers' role in their dispossession. It has also been complicated by an awareness of ecological threat that the late nineteenth century artists – both painters and writers – did not feel. The threat now is not to the human from nature, but to nature from what we humans do to it. I will briefly attempt to trace the development and nature of this 'place-connectedness' or integration, and to see whether it is compatible with either characterisations of Pastoral that I have outlined above.

Kenneth Slessor's (1901-71) "South Country" comes immediately to mind, as a confirmation of Indyk's judgment that Australian landscape is 'a tortured affair'. Here is an unrelentingly harsh landscape where birth occurs in the most primal and difficult way:

...even the dwindled hills are small and bare,
As if, rebellious, buried, pitiful,
Something below pushed up a knob of skull,
Feeling its way to air (Slessor 1986: 132).

Is the land really so hostile to thought? Or to humanity in general? What were Slessor's thoughts on the land's indigenous inhabitants, one wonders, whose relation to the land could not have been more different? What is clear, however, is that Slessor is writing within the construction of landscape exemplified by, and largely created by, the earlier prose writers.

In contrast to Slessor there is Judith Wright (1915-2000). Her commitment to the rights and welfare of the indigenous peoples is too well documented to need elaboration, as was her love of Australian nature and her efforts on behalf of conservation. The other side of this consciousness, however, was that Wright's poetry was suffused with guilt for what her predecessors had done. Writing poetry for almost four decades after Slessor fell silent, Wright pointed the way forward. But the burden of the guilt she had assumed

always divided her from what she wished to celebrate. In this respect she could be considered to display that tension I consider a characterization of Pastoral.

David Campbell (1915-79) was a poet and grazier who lived near Canberra. Campbell wrote poetry in many modes, but those he wrote about his experience as grazier are most relevant here. The little poem, "Droving", is an exquisite expression of belonging to the land by working within it, and of generation – the 'tall son' with 'his girl' to whom, he hopes, his farm will be passed on, so that the cruelty of time and mortality is blunted. It is short enough to quote in full:

Down the red stock route, my tall son
Droves with his girl the white-faced steers
From the high country, as we would years
Ago beneath a daylight moon.
But now these two must bring them down
Between the snow-gums and the briars
Hung with their thousand golden tears,
To camp beside the creek at noon.
And finding them so sure and young,
The flower-fat mob their only care,
The days I thought beyond recall
Are ringed about with magpie song;
And it seems in spite of death and war
Time's not so desperate after all (Campbell 1973: 92).

In his essay titled "Squatter Pastoral", Chris Wallace-Crabbe defines in Campbell's writing "a peculiar serenity, a lyrical plainness of style, which is also the expression of region and occupation", to which he gives the name "squatter pastoral" (Wallace-Crabbe 1990: 75). In addition he notes elements of traditional pastoral genre, such as "simple swains, shepherdesses, sweaty nymphs or hayseeds", which also appear in Campbell's poetry (Wallace-Crabbe 1990: 76). In "Droving" we find such traditional pastoral elements as the young swain and his female companion at ease beside the creek, the rural setting, and even the shadow of time and death, the 'Et in Arcadia ego' theme. Bearing in mind Paul Kane's distinction between genre and mode, one could say that while a number of Campbell's poems, including "Droving", display pastoral elements, they do not strictly belong to the Traditional Pastoral genre. Neither do the poems of John Shaw Neilson (1872-1942), despite their quiet and subtle celebration of the natural and the non-urban, because they are neither nostalgic nor self-deluding, and Neilson himself was a poor rural worker who wrote unmistakably from that context. Like John Clare (1793-1864), he most definitely did not write from an urban vantage for an urban readership, one of the characteristics of traditional Pastoral. And neither did Campbell.

It could be argued that in following Empson and Williams, my definition of pastoral is too narrow for today's literary practice, especially Australian. Still, definitions are only useful if they define, and there is a danger that *any* poetry dealing with landscape and the rural may be called pastoral, thus making the term cover too much ground to be of any real use. As Alpers wrote in 1986, "modern studies tend to use "pastoral" with ungoverned inclusiveness" (Alpers 1986: Preface). Ivor Indyk comes close to that, I suggest, although his essay contains fine discussions of John Shaw Neilson and David Campbell. The English critic Terry Gifford offers one way forward. In his book *Pastoral*, Gifford postulates what he calls the "post-pastoral", which achieves "a vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human" (Gifford 1999: 148). Avoiding the artificialities and escapism of modern British and American exemplars of traditional pastoral, the post-pastoral is conscious of our exploitation of the natural world and the harm we do to it, while also responding to, even celebrating, its complex vitality. Gifford is redefining the Pastoral as an ecologically responsible literary activity, whether poetry, fiction, whatever, regardless of its genealogy in literary history.

Landscape poetry as such (and I want to stress that 'as such') cannot therefore be, and should not be, confused with Pastoral. There are as many versions of landscape poetry as there are of Pastoral – more probably. Much landscape poetry can employ elements of the Pastoral mode without being traditional or any other kind of Pastoral. And much landscape poetry that displays Buell's 'place-connectedness' fails to display that tension that I consider a characteristic of Pastoral. But some does.

Three contemporary Australian poets

In an essay titled "The Purposes of Landscape Poetry: Ecology or Psychology?" (2010) I have previously discussed the work of three Australian poets who, like Campbell, have been writing what can loosely be called landscape poetry. The geographer Dennis Cosgrove writes that landscape "is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of the world" (Cosgrove 1984: 13). Even more succinctly, he writes that "Landscape is a way of seeing the world" (Cosgrove 1984: 12). In my earlier essay I discussed the poetry of Philip Hodgins (1959-95), Les A. Murray (1938) and John Kinsella (1963), to discern what 'purpose' their poetry served each of them. By purpose I mean the underlying, or over-riding, psychological or social, or in the case of Murray, spiritual imperative animating their poetry.

Philip Hodgins

Of the three poets I discussed only the third, and youngest, John Kinsella, can meaningfully be associated with the term Pastoral. Both in his poetry, and in his writing

about poetry, he displays a clear continuation and creative transformation of Pastoral within contemporary post-colonial Australian literature. On the other hand, while both Hodgins and Murray are excellent poets, their poetry serves different ends and springs from different preoccupations. Hodgins died of leukemia at the tragically early age of thirty-six, and one can only speculate on what he would have written had he lived longer. Some of his poems deal mercilessly with the horrors of his illness and its therapy. But Hodgins was a farmer, and much of his poetry deals with the details of rural life. Keenly aware of the ups and downs of farming life, Hodgins in no way idealises or romanticizes it. His landscape or, more precisely, rural poetry displays the same ruthless, clear eyed realism as do the poems about his illness. Also, written from within a rural point of view, they do not display the kind of tension that I consider a defining element of Pastoral. It is significant that in a poem alluding to Virgil, "Second thoughts on the Georgics" (Hodgins 2000: 100), it is Virgil's treatise on agriculture, animal husbandry and beekeeping, not the Pastoral *Eclogues*, that is referred to.

Les A. Murray

Les A. Murray is perhaps the best known Australian poet today, despite Kinsella's prodigious output. Much of his earlier poetry explicitly contrasts the rural with the urban world, very much to the detriment of the latter. For example, "When Sydney and the bush meet now / there is no common ground" (Murray 1994: 132). This has led many people to see him in some way as a poet only of the country. This however is a mistake, as his output has an impressive breadth and depth of concern. Even a relatively early poem, "An absolutely ordinary rainbow" (Murray 1994: 24) describes how the sight of "a fellow crying in Martin Place" transforms the everyday ordinary urban scene into an epiphanic scene of something approaching a miracle.

In fact, the animating spirit of Murray's whole oeuvre as a poet is a spiritual one. A long sequence such as "Walking to the Cattle Place" (Murray 1994: 77) reaches back to a pre-agricultural era "beyond roads or the stave plough" (Murray 1994: 63), an era which for Murray exemplifies a mythic sacredness inextricable from the exigencies of everyday life. Each of his numerous books is dedicated 'To the glory of God', whether articulating the world from the point of view of insects or animals, or from that of an urban dweller (as Murray was for many years) or from someone living in the country (as he now does). His poetry thus has a spiritual or religious dimension that Hodgins unflinchingly refuses to accommodate. This is also something incompatible with Pastoral as it has been understood, and as now I define it.

John Kinsella

Of all Australian poets, Kinsella is the one most closely associated with the term Pastoral. He is a passionate advocate of what he terms “international regionalism”. In a recent interview in the Griffith Review (Kinsella 2003: 41), for example, he defines this as “a way of discussing and viewing the local in an international context”. Equally, it is a way of bringing the international to bear on the local, of giving it a renewed life within a local context. Two books of his essays are particularly relevant here. In the collection of lectures, *Contrary Rhetoric* (Kinsella 2008), he has a chapter titled “Is there an Australian Pastoral?” (Kinsella 2008: 131-161). But of more relevance is what he writes in the slightly earlier book of essays, *Disclosed Poetics* (Kinsella 2007). Part I of that book is titled Pastoral, landscape, place...” In the first section, titled “Definitions of pastoral?” he writes, “Traditionally, pastoral worked as a vehicle of empowerment for the educated classes through the idyllicising and most often romanticizing of the rural world” (Kinsella 2007: 1), and a bit later, “The pastoral is fundamentally the city’s idea of the country” (Kinsella 2007: 5) and also “the pastoral is a mirror to the monopolizing of comfort, power, control” (Kinsella 2007: 5). In other words, for Kinsella the Traditional Pastoral genre is a vehicle for asserting the superiority of the city and its power over the rural and, by extension, over nature. If there has been an Australian Pastoral (and in *Contrary Rhetoric* he writes, “There have been many Australian rural poets, but few pastoral poets”) (Kinsella 2008: 131) it would necessarily have a colonizing aspect, one that would assert its dominance not only over nature but also over the indigenous people.

It is for this reason that Kinsella sees the need to totally reject that stance; what he proposes is a new version, a Post-Colonial version of Pastoral. He writes. “I feel an obligation to overturn the language of exploitation and disempowerment that has characterized the pastoral” (Kinsella 2007: 11). And “The radical pastoral poet wants radical change” (Kinsella 2007: 10). And again, “the aim of radical pastoral is surely to highlight (even rectify: it is a machine for change) abuses of the non-human ‘natural’, of inequalities and injustices in hierarchical interactions” (Kinsella 2007: 7). Kinsella’s debt to Raymond Williams is obvious, but his subsequent call for a revolution of language is his own. “So where do we find the radical pastoral?” he asks. I quote at length:

What about the death of a fox on the vacant lot, the churchyard being pesticed, graveyard losing more and more of its bush periphery, sports ground so saturated in herbicide and pesticide sprays that it glows. Window-box pastorals of the city are not a revolution, but a realigning. We have to think tangentially (Kinsella, 2007: 15).

Clearly Kinsella’s affinity with Terry Gifford’s understanding of the term is apparent. And since Empson affirmed that there is more than one version of Pastoral, Kinsella has chosen this term for a poetry that radically realigns city viewpoint and rural reality. And which, given Australia’s colonial past, radically wakens us to the disempowerment and injustice suffered by the country’s indigenous peoples. It is, inescapably, a political pastoral.

Kinsella's most extended exercise in his new version of Pastoral is to be found in three volumes of poetry: *The Silo* (1995/1997), *The Hunt* (1998) and *The New Arcadia* (2005). The last of these even pictures on its front cover Poussin's painting *Et in Arcadia ego* (1637-38), and of course calls to mind the poems by the Italian poet Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530) and Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). But Kinsella's Arcadia is a far cry from the harmonies and courtliness of the traditional Pastoral. *The Hunt* in particular expresses Kinsella's anger at the way nature has been despoiled by bad farming practices, and at the dispossession of the country's indigenous inhabitants. All three books are set in what in Western Australia is called the Wheatbelt, a vast stretch of land inland from, and to the north of Perth, devoted to the farming of wheat. This is an area that Kinsella knows intimately, and where he now lives. The poems detail not only the damage done to the land, but also to the people living there, whose lives can be brutalized and emotionally impoverished. In many of them the language is fractured, jagged and discordant, articulating the fracturing of Kinsella's way of seeing the world, his landscape. In *The New Arcadia*, for example, he angrily laments the cruelty and ignorance with which some farmers slaughter the local parrots (called Twenty-eights) by shooting and poisoning:

they rouse the farmer's gun
and the malicious ones who poison
wheat and watch as the flock
chokes on tongues (Kinsella 2005: 66).

Kinsella adopts Terry Gifford's term anti-pastoral, and uses his own term, poison pastoral, for this kind of writing. (Gifford's term appears in his *Green Voices*, a study of modern British Pastoral.) This is where Kinsella's call for a revolution of language to disrupt and overturn the hidden assumptions of Traditional Pastoral comes into play, and it is a manifestation of the tension that I consider essential to my understanding of Pastoral.

By the time he published *Jam Tree Gully* (2012) Kinsella's discordant landscape, his way of seeing the world, and consequently discordant language has abated. In fact, there were elements of this development already in *The New Arcadia* where he could at times assert the unity of language and landscape. For example in one poem he states "I borrow words / from before I could speak, the tones of wandoo and mallee, / intricacies of roots..." (Kinsella 2012: 142). Wandoo and mallee are two kinds of native vegetation, and the calm syntax of the poem is itself a reflection of this new-found harmony between the language of nature and the language of the human. In the words of Robert Macfarlane, in his recent book *Landmarks*, there is "a sense of reciprocal perception between human and non-human" (Macfarlane 2015: II, unpaginated).

This more harmonious note, in which the natural and the human align in syntax, comes more to the fore in *Jam Tree Gully* (a jam tree is a type of eucalypt), and even more so in the more recent collection, *Divine Comedy: Journeys into a Regional Geography* (2008).

Consequently Kinsella's overt interest in radical pastoral seems to have waned, though elements of it are still to be found in his recent collection of small prose pieces, *Tide* (2013), with their depiction at times of the cruelty and brutality of country life. In some of this more recent poetry there are still people shooting animals or maybe even other people, the spraying of poisons, the almost intolerable heat, drought that withers the little trees he has planted, rain that washes the topsoil downhill. But in one of his essays he alludes to a desire to settle firmly in one place – in the country – and absorb himself into its life – just as Murray did. And that is exactly what he does in these recent poems. They are a luminous and joyous witness to the intricacies and complexities – and contradictions – of what happens in one small part of the country when one dwells in it - dwells *on* it - with intense concentration. When one not only takes from it, but gives oneself to it. To go back to Buell's phrase, they are a poetry of 'place connectedness'. Or to use Macfarlane's words, they are examples of a language which can "restore a measure of wonder in our relations with nature" (Macfarlane 2015: *ibid.*).

Given the political conscience of Kinsella's oeuvre, the consciousness that gave rise to his radical or poison Pastoral, there is one further and crucial element in this more recent poetry. It is animated by a delight in the wonders and beauties of so much of the natural world, certainly. But also by his belief that he is doing the right thing, by an *ethical* affirmation. His guiding spirit is the American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), who is frequently quoted in the poems' epigraphs. It is an ethics of respect, of giving oneself to the natural world in such a way that its riches are given back in response. The earlier disharmony, discord between the natural and the human, is resolved in this relationship, and the discordant language has been resolved into harmony too. This is the poetry of someone for whom the terms Pastoral, radical Pastoral, even poison Pastoral, have been of use in a realignment of interests, ethics and language. And now they can be put a little to one side – at least for the moment. The book's short final poem, "Envoy: On Melodeclamation", encapsulates this:

How has the stony earth
so effectively hidden the bones
of the people who came first?

Maybe the stones
are those bones
and we can't distinguish –

or won't – the sounds of native birds
accompanying our words,
fulfilling our wishes (Kinsella 2013: 157).

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