

‘This is dog country’: Reading off Coetzee in Alex Miller’s *Journey to the Stone Country*

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Alex Miller’s *Journey to the Stone Country* (2002) opens ‘as if’ in the style of Coetzee’s campus novel, *Disgrace* (1999), with an academic misdemeanour: the discovery by the novel’s protagonist, Annabelle, that her husband, Steven Kuen, is conducting an extramarital affair with a student.¹ Annabelle flees from the scene of injury, Melbourne, and returns to her familial home, Queensland. Subsequently, Miller’s novel sheds the skin of genre, metamorphosing into a different if still familiar form, the Australian western, much as Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* is transformed with David Lurie’s removal from Cape Town to Salem, the location of his daughter’s smallholding. One could see Miller’s nod to Coetzee as a kind of local greeting, Coetzee having embraced Australia if not yet the Australian western, since his controversial departure of South Africa in 2002. While Elizabeth Costello, the Irish-Australian novelist of *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) initially personifies this interest, latterly, in *Slow Man* (2005) Coetzee expands his terms of reference to reconsider Australia’s settler histories in skilful ventriloquism of its post-war literary traditions.² Miller’s nod to Coetzee does not fade in this opening snapshot of anguish and disgrace. Rather, it expands into a creative acknowledgement of a shared legacy, as both writers divulge a common set of difficulties in addressing the fabric of postcolonial settler cultures, where questions of complicity, responsibility and restorative justice now take centre stage. These are primed by the increasingly fraught relationships around land, modes of occupation and divergent discourses of indigeneity and belonging, all of which are newly repositioned by the legal and socio-political challenges of the post-Mabo³ and post-Apartheid

¹ Miller’s conspicuous use of ‘as if’ as subordinate conjunction in *Journey to the Stone Country* registers a range of hesitations about his subject matter and the locations from which his characters speak.

² Coetzee’s account of the role of photography in the re/production of (Australian) identity in *Slow Man* is suggestive of Thea Astley’s dissection of the colonial archive in *Reaching Tin River* (1990) while Paul Rayment’s insistence that the ‘national-identity business’ is a matter of passing continues a long running fascination with fakery, imposture and passing in Australian writing, notably in Peter Carey’s work.

³ I use ‘post-Mabo’ to foreground the Mabo Judgement (1992) (revoking ‘terra nullius’) and the cultural convulsions that followed as a distinctive passage in the socio-legal formation of Australia. Following Felicity Collins’ and Therese Davis’ (2004)

eras. Here, the politics of land rights law in the one (Australia), and the faltering execution of land redistribution policies in the other (South Africa), pitch indigenous and non-indigenous histories of place, systems of land husbandry and customary care, and relationships to country, into new kinds of conflict and dialogue.⁴

Why Coetzee?

This article explores intersections and divergences between Miller and Coetzee on the terrain of the animal with reference to *Disgrace* and *Journey to the Stone Country*. It argues that Miller mobilises the terrain of the animal excavated in *Disgrace* in order to stage his own consideration of the challenges facing Australian belongings post-Mabo. Maria Takolander, reflecting on a political climate in Australia hostile to the literary and in which ethics is an “uncomfortable topic,” in light of ongoing tensions between Australians, recently described Coetzee’s influence on Australian literature, as tantamount to a haunting.⁵ The transformative account of “literature’s repressed power” (38) evident in *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man* demonstrates, in Takolander’s view, “literature’s potential to take possession of the self—to make a zombie of it—and, through exposing the reader to otherness (both the fundamental otherness of him or herself as well as of others), [to] effect transformations within the space of the self that could be called humane, defined here as an ability to imagine oneself as other” (38). While Takolander’s account digests the role of reading in the cultivation of a Coetzeean ethics of sympathy, other critics, notably Chris Danta, Tom Herron, Kate McInturff and Wendy Woodward, foreground Coetzee’s ongoing mobilization of the lives of (non-human) animals to demonstrate the contours and limits of “the sympathetic imagination” (*Elizabeth Costello* 80) in exploring our capacities, rights, and responsibilities to imagine ourselves into the lives of others—in theory and in practice—always asking, at what cost to the animal, and with what effects on human and animal, and interhuman, relationships?

Miller’s crisscrossing dialogue of dogs and bullocks in *Journey to the Stone Country* inaugurates its revisiting of *Disgrace* with an overt focus on dogs as figures of extraordinary suffering and human neglect. Of all the

deployment of the term, ‘after Mabo’, ‘post’ indicates, like its predecessor, the charged legal grounds on which belongings are located since Mabo.

⁴ Elizabeth Anker’s assessment of *Disgrace* foregrounds its scepticism about law and its operations in post-Apartheid South Africa, noting how it “suspends the expectation that the law plays a determinate role in advancing justice and effectuating social restoration” and “interrogates the law for its excessive reliance on procedure, its distortions and denials of nondominant epistemologies, its dependence on the vagaries of disembodied principles, and its ready enlistment to serve inequitable causes” (Anker 234).

⁵ These tensions came to the fore in the storm of protest raised by a series of high profile government interventions in indigenous communities, designed initially to address concerns about responses to child abuse in central and Northern Australia. See, *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* ed. Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson (North Carlton: Arena Publications, 2007).

animals that occupy Coetzee's bestiary, dogs are the touchstone in his dramatisation of suffering animal life to explore questions of blame and shame, responsibility and complicity, generating extensive commentary in the critical readerships addressing the novel's ethical terrain.⁶ David Lurie's stumbling entry into an awareness of animal experience in his care for dogs, his "becoming-animal" (Herron) or "becoming sacrificial animal" (Danta), is central to Coetzee's injunction to confront the possibilities and limitations of the sympathetic imagination in its encounters with alterity. While cattle are not a dominant feature of *Disgrace*, they were central to the enterprise of settlement in South Africa, as well as Australia. "In effect," Timothy Clark suggests, "settlers and their animals formed a kind of social unit, one whose members were to a degree mutually intelligible through each other's signals" (26), so the spread of cattle across the continent marks also the extending "jurisdiction of their human owners" (26). Cattle are increasingly visible in interrogations of the politics of colonial encounter and the shape of ecological imperialisms in both places.⁷ Zakes Mda's revisiting of the meanings of the Xhosa cattle-killings in the Eastern Cape, in *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and Henry Reynolds' plotting of the killing of settler cattle and sheep as indigenous resistance in *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981), respectively, question the material and cultural role of cattle in shaping pastoralism in both locations, and in anti-colonial resistance to settler expansionism in the mid to late nineteenth century. This emphasis is continued in recent explorations of pastoralism in the twentieth century in Marlene Von Niekerk's *The Way of the Women (Agaat)* (2007) and Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth* (2006) for example. The bovine, like the canine, thus constitutes a vital and violent site of intersection between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures sharing divergent and overlapping histories of place.

In Miller's novel, this intersection is framed by the re-emergence of the colonial frontier as a central topos of public discourse in the 1990s, when the frontier, newly redrawn by the 'history wars', is troublingly recharged as *the* site of colonial violence. One effect of this has been to attenuate more complex accounts of the frontier other than as a synonym for violence, leading to forceful calls for a wholesale reappraisal of frontier historiography (Attwood and Forster). Such injunctions demand

⁶ *Disgrace's* attention to dog/animal life and death is preceded by an account of its importance in the moral education of what we apprise to be the young Coetzee in *Boyhood, Scenes from Provincial Life* (1998). Coetzee's subsequent address of Lurie and the question of the animal are central to many critical interrogations of *Disgrace* in Wendy Woodward, Tom Herron and Donna Haraway.

⁷ Cattle make random appearances in *Disgrace*. Lurie agrees to help Bev Shaw in her ministry of animals, but jokes that he will do so only if he doesn't have to call her Bev for it "reminds" him of "cattle" (79). Itemising the signifiers of Petrus' status, Lucy notes: "He has a cow that will calve in the spring. He has two wives, or a wife and a girlfriend [. . .] By Eastern Cape standards he is a man of substance" (77). Elsewhere in *Disgrace*, cattle appear only as meat or milk, in the various references to either the mechanised killing of the abattoir or the cultural prominence of the *braaivlajs*.

greater recognition of the frontier not, as commonly perceived, as “a site of extreme lawlessness” but rather as a “threshold space replete with law” or as a key “point of articulation between international and domestic law” (Evans). In this frame, the frontier is the “necessary complement of sovereignty” and the story it has to tell is of how “the sovereignty of (indigenous) others had to be materially transformed in order to assimilate and legitimise (settler) sovereignty” (Evans). Miller’s novel partakes of this nuance. Moreover, his colonial frontier is a potent site for the mutual constitution of law, sovereignty and nation, in a novel animated by competing accounts of what indigenous and non-indigenous law is and does. He documents the continuing effects of the suspension of the rule of law in the treatment of indigenous peoples, during and after pastoral expansion on the frontier.

Dogs are not at the centre of Miller’s ethical concerns in the same way they have come to preoccupy Coetzee and his critical readerships. As Tom Herron delineates, Coetzee plots, to varying degrees, Lurie’s journey away from “quasi-philosophical” (471) encounters with animals into a deeper awareness of animal alterity and tentative engagements with the question of animal subjectivity in and for itself. Miller, by contrast, is less concerned with these questions, being still preoccupied by the continuing seductions of the animal as repository of allegory and metaphor and by its various historical resonances in Australian locations as an index of indigeneity. In halting and fragmentary ways, however, Miller’s mobilisation of the animal illustrates some of the limits and cultural injunctions that shape encounters across difference, the truculence of difference in Australian locations. Thus, dogs *and* cattle occupy a very specific place in Miller’s questioning of the contours of Australia now, not least because they amplify the continuing origin of current unsettlements in the nature and history of the colonial frontier.

This is not to suggest that the only animals of importance in Miller’s work are imported ones, as that would overlook what I take to be his consciously partial referencing of the indigenous animal and its life. The importance of non-human indigenous animals (goannas, for example) in indigenous narratives of country is recognised at several points in the novel, which I don’t treat in detail here, because, more often than not, Miller’s focus is directed less at what such appearances mean in indigenous modes of being in country, than at the forms of anxiety and unsettlement they invoke in his non-indigenous protagonists. He is wary of delineating how exactly indigenous animals figure in indigenous modes of being in country while at the same time wanting to recognise that they do have a distinctive place. At very least we can say that he recognises the persistent presence and claim of indigenous animals and the interrelationship between indigenous animal and human life in indigenous accounts of country (here represented by the stories of Bo and Panya). The absence of indigenous animals from the vision (though not from the hearing) of the inheritors of frontier pastoralism in the novel references

wider anxieties about the homeliness of the continent, being too the locus of settling, nativist desires.

Un/settling Animals

Miller's animals, I argue, allegorize conflicting modes of occupation or relationship to place. His dogs suggest the deleterious effects of a particular mode of frontier pastoralism, once ascendant but in terminal decline, deliberately under question by its contemporary location on contested grounds. By contrast, his wild bulls signal a more elusive but adaptive mode of occupation, a circumscribed habitation that speaks to and of post-Mabo understandings of the contingencies of place. As with Coetzee, Miller's animals are embedded in distinctive and overlapping discourses of race, hybridity and indigeneity, so their respective deployment of the animal is always uneasily in conversation with ongoing histories of racism in colonial and postcolonial locations. In colonial racism, animal and indigene were frequently assigned the same category of (subordinate) otherness. Indeed, at some times, concern for the animal frequently overrode concern for the rights of the indigene, as noted in Thea Astley's plotting of the peculiar hierarchies of mateship in frontier Queensland in *It's Raining in Mango* (1987): "mate/ horse/ dog/ missus/ wog/ poof/ boong/ that's the pecking order" (97). Miller's dogs and cattle are introduced species to the continent, instruments and symbolic figures of a transplanted pastoral vision. Yet, as Libby Robin notes, the arrival of European agriculture and industrialism on the continent, roughly simultaneously, means that both the material histories of frontier pastoralism and the imported literary genre of pastoral, so dependent on a sense of being "at home" or "in place", developed distinctive features in Australian contexts.⁸ Typically, embattlement rather than ease marks Australian experience on the frontier and thus, as Robin reiterates, the pastoral has historically offered "little literary traction. Australia had postindustrial pastoralism without Arcadia" (294).⁹ On the frontier, as Henry Reynolds illustrates, the success of the animal was, in part, predicated on the erasure of indigenous resistance to settlement. Yet more recent histories of Australian pastoralism illustrate the clear dependence on indigenous labour in upholding established pastoral economies,

⁸ Robin focuses on 1788 as a key moment of ecological intervention. Deborah Bird Rose (2004) situates the beginnings of environmental conquest about "10,000 years" earlier "when our ancestors domesticated cattle" (74), making visible a different continuum, qualifying the division into contrasting pre- and post-contact realities, an idea that has had the effect of installing notions of pre-contact (indigenous) husbandry as unremittingly good and post-contact (non indigenous) practice as wholly destructive.

⁹ Nevertheless, versions of Australian pastoral heavily reliant on the idea of Australia as a new Arcadia continued to appear, for example, Sydney Long's attempts "to populate the bush with classical gods" (Smith 103) in *By Tranquil Waters* (1894) and *The Spirit of the Plains* (1897). Coral Lansbury's *Arcady in Australia* (Carlton Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1970) explores the pressures that attended the literary re/creations of Australia as Arcady.

indicating also histories of interdependence between indigenous and non-indigenous.¹⁰ In different ways both animal and indigene were the subject of colonial power, surveillance and control, but such readings must also account for the more various relationships indigenous peoples have with pastoralism and with non-indigenous animals since their introduction.¹¹

Miller, like Coetzee, is careful to keep the legacies of past hierarchies in view. Herron explores how Coetzee's account of Lurie's expanded sympathies is always complicated by an acknowledgement of "a deeply embedded racism" (488) that makes its presence felt in Lurie's "persistent zoomorphism," the attribution or projection of animal characteristics onto others, notably black men (488). In Miller, these habits of thought are shown to take different though no less problematic forms, in the ease with which, in the settler imagination, indigenous animal life on the continent, its modes of occupation and ways of being continue to operate as trope for the indigene and indigeneity. Indigenous animal life, often invisible but not unheard, gives a certain shape to loss in Miller's account of Annabelle's address of indigenous presence, marked by the privilege and anxiety that attend her locations as the granddaughter of white pastoralists. "The landscape and the original people," as Libby Robin observes, "are coupled in different ways when 'we' are not the original people of the place" (295). So, when Annabelle hears the wild dogs howling in the ranges, the "forlorn voice of the dingoes" (185) is "scarcely real," elusive and estranging, "echoing along the rocky walls of the escarpment as if they called in answer to some longing within themselves" (185). Heard but not seen, present but also multiplying and dispersed (echoing along the walls), the call/claim of the indigenous animal is here mobilised by Miller to amplify the disturbances to the foundations of Annabelle's belongings, as he progressively plots the challenges to her habits of thought in tracing her painful unlearning of familiar ways of seeing. In this process she faces both the limits of her cultural knowledge and the ethical challenges posed by the consideration of the incommensurability between indigenous and non-indigenous modes of being in place. Here Miller's use of the

¹⁰ Julie Evans in "Beyond the Pale" notes how the majority of calls to suspend the rule of law regarding the treatment of indigenous peoples, creating a site of exception between international and domestic law, are consistent with the period of pastoral expansion (1840s onwards). Thalia Anthony provides instructive overview of Aboriginal labour in pastoralism, with reference to Northern Queensland in "Criminal justice and transgression on northern Australian cattle stations," *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, ed. Ingereth Macfarlane and Mark Hannah (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2007).

¹¹ Both dogs and cattle have a diverse history of representation in the Australian cultural imaginary, indigenous and non-indigenous. At 'Antipodean Animal' (King's College London, July 08), the exceptional motility of the dog in the Australian cultural imagination was evident with papers exploring dogs and dingoes in public statuary and war memorials, the films of Mark Lewis, the cartoons of Michael Leunig, the fiction of Henry Lawson. At the same time, I would note the substantial history of the dog in indigenous cultural production, in foregrounding discourses of race, hybridity and belonging, as in Sally Morgan's figuration of Curly in *My Place* (1988).

indigenous animal hovers precariously between plotting the effects of the injurious affinities of colonial hierarchies and repeating them. Such affinities have a tendency to live on long after the ideologies which give rise to them have been dismantled, as we see in Annabelle's encounters with Arner, a young Aboriginal man, on her return to Queensland.¹² Miller's mobilisation of Annabelle's encounters with Arner illustrates the recurrence of tropes of indigeneity in the settler imagination, where indigene and indigenous animal morph in figuration of the otherness of indigenous modes of being on the continent. So, even as Miller is seeking to acknowledge and plot, with some faithfulness, indigenous relationships to country and their expression in indigenous knowledges and histories—in which animals have a distinctive place—a question remains about the terms under which such engagements take place.

Dog country

Dogs regularly appear in *Journey to the Stone Country*; indeed, their presence is critical to discourses of habitation and occupation. Dogs matter most when Miller plots the lives of those on the margins; they might be seen then to link provocatively occulted locations in the national imaginary. Dogs make and mark entrances. They situate Annabelle's journey with Bo, the Aboriginal cattleman from her childhood, whom she meets again on her return to Queensland, and with whom she travels towards the 'stone country' of the novel's title. This return is interrupted by the recounting of a testimony by Panya, a last surviving witness of the murders committed by Annabelle's grandfather and other pastoralists, in order to secure land, *the* ultimate project of settler colonialism (Wolfe). Panya charges Annabelle and Bo with complicity in the purposeful forgetting of this violence and the continuing desecration of sacred places, a charge which brings both of them into new arrangements with preconceived notions of place and race. Dogs figure prominently in their encounters with those struggling to survive in the new order: the Hearn and their expanding pack of dogs, eking a living on inhospitable terrain; Elsie and Tiger and their sunburnt "watchdog" (318) Pig, whose claims for a share in "Land Council grants" (323) are contested by infighting in

¹² Annabelle, lost in Bigges' library, hears an army of termites ('white ants') steadily "rustling" within the books, "shuffling across a landscape of infinite extent, persistent and continuous . . . in obedience to a restless urge to be on the move. Millions of white ants at their blind work, recycling the world and returning it to some kind of cosmic dust, heartless, unconscious and inert" (181). Her anxious meditations on the redundancy of European cultural systems are incorporated into a subsequent vision of Arner: "She raised her own hand in greeting but he did not respond. Behind the lenses of his sunglasses no doubt his eyes were closed. Dreaming or meditating within the vast stillness of his body. She imagined him as the queen of the termites, transmitting his mysterious purpose, donating meaning to the blind and wilful labours of the infinite tribe, dwelling in a dimension without time" (182). In Arner, Annabelle' recognises a kind of indigenous sovereignty, albeit in an imported *lingua franca*, but it is a vision that hinges on a collapse of animal and indigene (termite and man) reducing indigeneity to instinctive persistence.

the political organisation of Aboriginal claims to place; and, finally, Panya and her “shivering” grey dog, whose history disrupts the forms of belonging rehearsed by Annabelle and Bo, but who is figured by Miller as trapped by her traumatic history and wider failures to address indigenous claims.

When Annabelle retreats from Melbourne she seeks refuge with Susan Bassett, a former colleague, who, in the wake of land rights legislation, sets up “the first cultural survey business in North Queensland to service the requirements of the new Cultural Record Act,” pitching Susan squarely between “the traditional owners and the multinationals” (15). Cultural remains, Susan confides, now have a newly charged status in the older “game” or “power” play over indigenous and non-indigenous claims to place. Annabelle’s meeting with Bo, newly repositioned and professionalized as a “cultural field officer” (15) on terrain bisected by the competing claims of pastoralists, mining interests and the Jangga peoples he represents, initiates the central relationship of the novel whose resolution hinges on the revelation of the hidden legacies of their youth on adjoining stations. Bo’s presence on Verbena Station as a result of the interracial marriage of his white grandfather and Jangga grandmother, being the subject of distinctive social taboos, is central to the charged histories of frontier pastoralism presented.¹³ It is also Miller’s entry into the traumatic events that have defined colonial encounter on the frontier—interleafing between indigenous and non-indigenous belongings.

On the first stage of this journey, Bo and Annabelle visit Zigzag station, the home of the novel’s struggling pastoralists, the Hearn. That their approach marks an entry to and reanimation of Bo’s relationship to country is signalled by Bo’s intimation of a greater presence attending their arrival. “Old Man Dog watching us” (127), he exclaims. This animation is soon superseded by the more voluble greeting proffered by the “bunched pack of dogs of all colours galloping up the road to meet the vehicles, barking and leaping and snapping at each other” (128). The spectacle of the dogs and the ramshackle appearance of the station prompt Bo to comment: “It’s Zig and Zag all right. Looks like they’ve decided on breeding dogs ahead of bullocks . . . I don’t blame them. This is dog country” (129). Such a designation dismisses the Hearn and the station as an inverse image of pastoral plenitude, reiterating both their embattlement and the hostility of the terrain, reinforced in the image of their dogs, with “open wounds on their legs and bare, scarified patches of mange along their backs” (129). The “one eyed brindle bitch” that approaches Bo, “begging to be patted, her nipples pink, raw looking and distended with milk,” seems to amplify the distortions of the natural order that the Hearn represent, “too late,” as Miller has it, “in their dream of

¹³ Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (2007) catalogues taboos that accrue around white men with Aboriginal families.

pioneering”(144).¹⁴ Coming from Bo, this outburst underlines how the visible markers of settlement are more tenuously situated post-Mabo, enlivened anew by the animate invisible claims embodied by “Old Man Dog.”

Miller’s excitable if suffering dogs evoke the “mob of scrawny mongrels” (84) confronting Lurie in *Disgrace* when he agrees to help Bev Shaw in her ministry of animals. Here, Coetzee and Miller share a concern with the appeal that the suffering animal makes. Dominant accounts of Coetzee’s work point to the ways in which the body, or what Coetzee terms the “authority of its suffering” (“Interview: Autobiography and Confession” 248) is a key counter in facilitating recognition of the other, as a precondition of understanding. This, as Jane McInturff has it, recognises in the other both commonality (a shared or common embodiment) and, crucially, “difference - in power and in suffering” (11). At the same time, McInturff cautions, “in focusing on other beings as bodies, this formulation risks reducing the other being to the status of object,” an instrumentality that constricts rather than releases ethical engagement. She suggests rather, that

The crucial . . . ethical difference between different modes of recognising the authority of the body is in recognizing the body not in its utilitarian functions (in its ability to provide labor or sexual pleasure) but precisely in its non-utilitarian functions (as the source of ‘pity and terror’) (*Disgrace*, 98). The difference in these forms of recognition lies in the difference between body as object and body as being. Coetzee’s assertion of the importance of imagining the body of that other in its non-utilitarian being allows for an ethics of sympathy that does not deny difference or objectify difference as it recognises it. (11)

Coetzee’s interest in how the recognition of the embodied non-utilitarian being of the other might become the basis for more ethical encounters across the terrain of difference, in all its complexity, is amplified in aspects of Miller’s animal encounters. Miller’s dogs embody certain kinds of suffering and they make certain claims on those who recognise their gaze. The “begging” gaze of the “brindle” and Bo’s intermittent responses to her, resonate with Jacques Derrida’s account of the animal gaze in “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” where to acknowledge

¹⁴ This natural order is rehearsed in the gestures Miller makes to the place the Hearn and frontier pastoralism occupy in dominant narratives of settler nationhood. When the Hearn offer their visitors ‘Anzac’ biscuits, it illustrates both their adherence to station hospitality and a belated attempt at refashioning a heroic ideal, the biscuits metonymically linking their labours with the notion of extraordinary sacrifice embedded in the Anzacs. The contemporary resurgence of the Anzac legend, under the tenancy of John Howard, as *the* moment of national genesis (McKenna), suggests that Australians are heavily investing in a moment that happens over there (Europe), rather than here (Australia). It indicates that ‘here’ (Australia) is no longer an unsullied site for the production of heroic fictions, reiterated in Panya’s resurrection of Gallipoli as *the* site of settler remembrances in opposition to the strategic forgetting of indigenous loss: “You forget and you’re one of them! [. . .] Look at all that Gallipoli stuff they go on about. They don’t forget” (345).

the animal is first of all to grant the possibility of being seen by him or her. Summarising the enabling features of Derrida's account while recognising its universalising tendencies, Wendy Woodward recounts how his animal's gaze "embodies a moral agent who brings the human to consciousness of shame and embarrassment" (293). Thus the gaze bestowed by Derrida's cat, is "the naked truth of every gaze, given that that truth *allows me to see and be seen* through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other" (Derrida, in Woodward, "Postcolonial Ecologies" 293).¹⁵ Bo's affinity with the "brindle" is illustrated in his frustration with the Hearn and their fascination with their deceased neighbours, the Bigges, as exemplars of pastoral success.

In one such moment, Bo, "his feelings of injustice aroused" by the "clearance" of the "old Murriss" ordained by the Bigges, takes refuge in the dog's rapt gaze (233). It is, as if her previous appeals to him are met by his own, so that, impatient with the Hearn, his plea is "to her powers of reasoning and her sense of justice" while "her pale dog eyes clung to him with gratitude and unfathomable understanding" (233). "Unfathomable understanding" invokes Derrida's description of the "bottomless gaze" (381) of the animal; it marks affinity and distance, the triumph of difference and its intractability. The animal offers more sensitivity than the human, but her consolations are temporary, fugitive. Here, the brindle speaks of the victims as well as the progenitors of colonial violence. The continuous foregrounding of the abjectness of her maternity, her burgeoning yet ailing materiality, seems to forewarn the penultimate encounter of the novel with the elderly Panya, the "last stone woman" (334), and the dog that is her sole companion.

The predominance of dogs, their manifold outnumbering of cattle and humans at Zigzag, together with the persistent emphasis on their reproduction, is apparent, as the Hearn's daughter Ellen ponders the recent arrivals, Annabelle, Bo and members of Bo's extended family, Arner and Trace. Here, Ellen's proclamations on the strangeness of Aboriginal visitors to the station markedly interrupt her mother's attempt to dispel the questions raised by the dogs' profligacy, an acknowledged sore point. The excess of dogs is underscored by Ellen's pronouncement on the lack of Aboriginal presence, even as she blankly recites the priority of their claim to place: "The Aborigines were here before we were" (136). In *Disgrace*, the suffering of the dogs that Lurie comes to care for is attributed to human insensitivity, while the suggestion that they are "too many" is deemed by Bev Shaw a product of speciesism¹⁶, "too many by our

¹⁵ For a critical address of the limitations that attend Derrida's account of his animal encounters, see Donna J. Haraway's *When Species Meet* (19-27).

¹⁶ 'Speciesism' as defined in Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) refers to 'a prejudice or attitude of bias towards the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species' (New York: Random House, 1990), 6. At the interface of current debates in philosophy, animal studies and human and animal rights discourses, where it is hotly debated, further discussion of 'speciesism' can be found in Richard Ryder's *Animal Revolution: changing attitudes towards speciesism* (Oxford:

standards, not by theirs” (85). Coupled with intolerance towards their proclivity to “multiply” (85), the dogs, as David Lurie has it, are punished by “their own fertility. There are simply too many of them” (142). However, one could say that in the case of the Hearn, it is not the dogs’ reproductive instincts as such, but the manner of their reproduction that is the “sore point”. It is not pastoralism but the unthinking reproduction of a particular mode of occupation (peculiar to pastoralism on the frontier) that Miller foregrounds in drawing Coetzee’s account of the dogs’ reproduction into his own theatre of concerns, precisely because this mode of occupation has delivered catastrophe: initially the death of indigenous people and latterly the destruction of the biodiversity of the habitat in the pursuit of an instrumental relationship with the land that is unsustainable.¹⁷ This point is reiterated as John Hearn marvels at the “fate” of “the wealthy and cultivated Bigges” of the now abandoned Ranna Station who, despite having “all that good ground and everything,” fail to secure their survival. Hearn’s acknowledgement of the perverse dying out of the Bigges despite prosperous conditions is interspersed with images of his own “snuffing pack” of dogs, “squealing litters of pups under the flooring of the feed shed and the house, their increase a mockery of order and progress. A plague of dogs” (232).

But whose notions of order and progress do the dogs’ increases undermine? We might say imported non-indigenous ideals, not just of “order and progress” but of property, those instruments of Enlightenment rationality that sustained for so long the legal fiction of Australia as “terra nullius” (revoked by Mabo). This order is replicated in the Bigges’ organisation of Ranna Station as a copy of old world ideals. While such unfettered instrumentalism delivers economic gain through aggregation of land as property, it is also unsustainable, Miller confirms, unless it reconciles itself with and adapts to the orders that pre-existed it. Bo argues with Hearn over the fate of the Bigges, bluntly stating that the failure to give due recognition to and accommodate indigenous modes of being in country is the source of the Bigges demise, their uneasiness about “holding” the country measured against “what the score with them Bigges was when they first come into this country and cleaned out the old Murriss” (234).

To be fair, Miller’s account of the Hearn also implies that they represent the possibility of a new kind of tenure, divorced from imported discredited ideals of property. This tenure, evinced by their lack of purchase on the landscape, is still negotiating its own sustainability not to mention its legitimacy. It is rough hewn rather than fully formed and imported wholesale like the Bigges’ library of European culture,

Berg 2000), Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds., *Animal Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), Paola Cavalieri, *The Death of the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ The contemporary mining industry is seen, despite its claims to be clean and green, as continuing the environmental catastrophe propagated by untrammelled pastoralism (34).

occupying the still heart of Ranna station.¹⁸ Thus, on the one hand, the Hearn's failure to care for the dogs, to intervene in their reproduction, might be read as an indictment of their failure to replicate Enlightenment ideals of order and property, peculiar to pastoralism's economic success. On the other hand, it might also signal the productive collapse of those ideals in favour of a more sustainable relationship with the diversely contested terrain on which contemporary pastoralism operates. So the dogs (even in their suffering) might be a more propitious sign: not of decline, but of new kinds of beginning, a different order of relationship to place, still in the making.

Such a move demands some qualified thinking about the weight that discourses of sustainability have in Australian contexts and the uses to which they are put. We might ask, for example, to what extent the question of creating a sustainable relationship with the landscape post-Mabo might reconstitute or secure different forms of legitimacy for settler belongings under the mask of, for example, responsible ecological intervention? Globally, farming practices that have proven unsustainable have often been rescued by forms of agri- or eco-tourism of still questionable ecological impact. Miller reiterates how both the indigenous and non-indigenous manipulate discourses of sustainability that deliver an "economic base" for future generations over care for the land. An uncomfortable truth is staged in Miller's use of Les Marra, the confrontational indigenous activist supporting the project to create a new dam that will flood the valley in which Ranna is located. As "hard as one of them scrubber bulls" that "comes straight at you, head down and snortin" (234), Les illustrates a different feature of the new terrain, with the potential to derail any negotiation of settler belongings that challenge his priorities or that constitute a romantic revival of the heroics of settlement. In drowning the Ranna and with it, the vestiges of early European settlement that Annabelle deems important to her sense of history, Marra hopes to secure economic gains for his community in perpetuity, while meeting the need to secure water for Bowen and Mackay, an act that will inadvertently reconfigure the Hearn's fortunes. As Marra speculates, the Hearn's will eventually be uniquely positioned to recast their ailing station as "The Ranna Lake Hostfarm" catering both to the "tourist buses" and the "Japanese" predilection for a "view over water" (215). While the benefits such a move offers to the Hearn's is accidental, it

¹⁸ Miller offers ambivalent discussion of John Hearn's woodcarving as evidence of the beginnings of a more sustainable approach to the consumption of indigenous natural resources. This faltering enterprise is compromised by its dependence on an outside market—that has a tendency to inflate the value of his "bush tables"—repositioning his craft in an economy that continues to exploit indigenous resources rather than nurture them. This ambivalence is illustrated by the fact John's own table is an uneasy fit; he has to remove the windows to lift it in, an act rendered more questionable by its juxtaposition with the furniture removal undertaken by the Bigges, a century earlier, trekking their furniture overland, against the lay of the land, into the remote and increasingly inaccessible valley in which Ranna is located.

does give them a new kind of purchase on the landscape. Other characters imply that such outcomes won't stretch to the indigenous communities that Marra purports to serve, with both Bo (331) and Susan (87), arguing that his politics secure only continuing Aboriginal dependency, not self-determination. The benefits of such gains are thus levered against the continuing environmental and cultural losses on which they are predicated.

Of bulls and scapegoats

The riotous but disoriented activity of the Hearn's dogs is contrasted in Miller's account of pastoralism's hidden histories with the less visible but more exacting presence of the wild dogs—the dingoes—narrated in Bo's recounting of the hidden perils to settler livestock, particularly the “old scrub bulls,” imported cattle gone wild, who are prey to dingoes:

“They go down in the hindquarters and get themselves snared up among the shattered basalt. [. . .] [T]he wild dogs would be sitting in the shade close by watching him die, taking it in turns to jump in for a quick bite every now and then.” [. . .] They reached for their tea, sipping from their mugs, picturing the doomed bull trapped among the tumbled rocks, the dingoes eating into his quivering flesh while he yet lived and suffered, a transformation scarcely to be imagined, a brutality that must surely leave its ghostly impress on this country, an imprint for them to encounter in their quest to live among these stony ridges and ravines of the escarpment, the history they must adopt if they were to prevail in this place. (137-8)

The scrub cattle pay a price for their uneasy habitation of alien terrain. In their suffering they bear some resemblance both to the Hearn's dogs and to Coetzee's interest in the figure of the suffering animal as scapegoat, examined latterly by Chris Danta. Coetzee queries what it might mean to be the (sacrificial) animal, and to enter into an understanding of the animal (as scapegoat) such that, as Danta argues, “each becoming-animal of the human is also a becoming-sacrificial animal and, as such, a becoming-corpse” (Danta 735). It is hard to imagine Miller as unaware of the potency of the scapegoat figure in the Australian imagination in view of Arthur Boyd's iconic painting, “The Australian Scapegoat” (1987).

In his depiction of the sacrificial animal, Boyd ransacks the iconography of national identity, fashioning an image of a weeping disorientated goat straddled by a composite morphing figure (part Anzac soldier and part indigene), an image that both anticipates and savages the bicentennial nationalism of 1988 as a “multiple rape” (Smith 459). The “desperate impotence” (Smith 459) illustrated in Boyd's painting foregrounds his place in a tradition of radical modernism that, Ian McLean argues, “eventually accepted the failure of redemptive tropes in Australian discourses and picturings of identity, and attempted to rethink what it was to be an Australian from this failure” (95). Such challenges clearly face a post-Mabo generation anew. Miller's dogs, as I have noted, embody a similarly dual function, bespeaking failure while also suggesting the transformative possibilities of starting again, from a point of collapse that

accompanies the exhaustion of unreconstructed modes of occupation. His treatment of the scrub cattle, however, posits an engagement with place that begins, from different coordinates, to recognise the transformed terrain on which future belongings might be negotiated.

I am not arguing that the collective contemplation occasioned by Bo's account of the bull's suffering is a form of entering into the animal's experience that is equivalent to the "becoming animal" or indeed "becoming sacrificial animal" suggested by Herron and Danta in their readings of Lurie's caring for dogs. Nevertheless, the bull's "ghostly impress" is the imprimatur of another reality, one with the potential to transform non-indigenous engagements with alterity, even as Miller's use of the word "prevail" unsettles humility in the face of the suffering other which the encounter clearly has the potential to suggest. Both bull and brindle are immobilised by suffering, but Miller seems to suggest that though "scarcely to be imagined," the "history" the bull offers is not really about the burden that must be adopted to "prevail," an idea that cannot be sustained post-Mabo, but rather reflects the forms of adaptation required for something more circumscribed: survival. It confirms that the scrub cattle have more in common with the dogs than we initially assume, as frontier pastoralism in its dying throes assumes some of the transformative functions of the scapegoat.

At the same time, Miller's continuous focus on the dogs' punctured, weeping skin and their scarified bodies warns of lessons still unlearned. The Hearn's dogs in their suffering are also like the wild bulls under the dingoes' watchful glance: they are "meat". Here the dogs share with the bulls a more familiar instrumental function. For, in Bo's eyes, if the Hearn's do mimic the Bigges' success, by trying to round up the scrub bulls, the bulls will, he warns them, only be useful, "safe" as dog-meat for their flourishing (if suffering) community of dogs. Here the bulls bespeak contamination, danger, and Bo's language animates other residues, of the history of pastoralism on the frontier and the policy of forced removals of the indigenous from the land, where discourses of "safety" mask the desire to render the land free of claim, with the aim of securing occupation and ownership. So, such an attempt to reign in the bulls risks reinstalling in the present, as default, past economies and modes of occupation that are unsustainable, built on the continued suffering of others.

For all Bo's scepticism at the Hearn's ambitions and his chilly account of the trials the bulls face living in the scrubs, he, like Ruth Hearn, finds in them an image of autonomy in some contrast to that represented by the dogs. Ruth Hearn is periodically unsettled by the phantom appearance of a scrub bull in the timber yards: "He just stands there staring at this house *as if* he can't make out what it is. And when I look away and look again he's gone" (139 my italics). For Ruth, the incident documents a crisis of recognition. Here the bull's "staring," his failure or refusal to see her, even as she speculates on the nature of his vision, implies that it is she that is rendered phantom in the encounter. The bull underscores the provisional nature of her claim to place even as Miller's

use of “as if” as subordinating conjunction once again holds the confirmation of such a decision in suspension. When her husband queries how such appearances do not “seem to upset the dogs,” she suggests, rather, that “the dogs don’t seem to see him” (139). In this exchange, Miller elaborates further on the gulf between the blindness of those who cling to an unreconstructed pastoralism and the clarity offered by the recognition of an alternative mode of animation: being in the landscape, adaptive to the changing conditions of the terrain, and perhaps not easily locatable (or visible) within its current economies. This latter suggestion is amplified in Matthew Hearn’s hasty departure from the station with Trace because of Ruth’s disapproval of their relationship, intimating that not just Matthew’s but the family’s survival must take place under new terms of engagement and perhaps on other terrains.

Ruth’s initial capacity to recognise the bulls as something other than dogmeat is what arouses, momentarily, Bo’s interest in her: “They’re not like domestic cattle anymore. This place is their home now. They know how to slip around without drawing too much attention to themselves” (139). His explanatory account of the wild bulls’ existence, borne out of their new conditions of living, is refigured, also suggestively, by Ruth. ““You mean,” she queries, “we only see them if they want us to see them?”” which ascribes the bulls with something more than existence: with agency (139). Bo’s account of the bull’s evasive movements reflects his own peripatetic survival strategies as a biracial man as much as they suggestively reanimate a set of historical relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians (on the frontier). The identification of Bo with this fugitive spirit of survival is also indicated by his name. Bo is a shortening of his full (Scottish) name Iain Ban Rennie, but it is also less well known as the Irish (Gaelic) word for cattle, most famously in the old Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, often translated as ‘the cattleraid of Cooley’ (Kinsella), a possible attempt to deepen the association in the novel between invasion, property and violent bloodletting and to reiterate the notion of extraordinary survival that the (phantom) bull seems to represent.

That the bull animates a particular technique of survival, often associated with indigenous evasion of those systems and forms of surveillance that delivered death on the frontier, is reiterated when Panya reveals the violence that belies Bo’s sentimental account of his youth on Verbena station. The opening of the penultimate sequence, ‘The Last Stone Woman,’ in which Bo seeks Panya’s blessing in bringing Annabelle to the “playgrounds” of the old people, blurs the boundaries between human and non-human animal suffering. Panya and her dog morph into an image of abject indigenous life that represents the culmination of one aspect of Miller’s attempt to address the disfigurements generated by the bloodletting of settlement. History is not just a sore point but a suppurating wound:

An old woman sitting back on a sagged-down settee under the window [. . .] Her eyes set deep in her head . . . flickering in the darkness of her face. The skin of her features jowled and folded down over her cheeks, as if it would slough and leave the naked white bone of her skull. [. . .] A grey dog stood shivering at the old woman's feet. It barked feebly a couple of times then lay down, whining and twisting around, licking and nipping at a deep ulcer on its back, the muscles and sinews of its hindquarters laid bare as a piece of butcher's meat. (335)

This is one moment where Miller's novel treads provocatively between illustrating and repeating the injurious affinities of colonial hierarchies in which the indigene and the animal are collapsed into a singular category of subordinate otherness. But the testimony Panya offers illuminates a perhaps more enabling connection between animal and indigene, human and non-human animal suffering as the unsettled animation and autonomy of the wild bull that periodically graces the Hearn's timber yards is symbolically reconnected with its dead antecedents. Panya reveals that "the hollow carcass of a[n] old scrubber bull" was a refuge for Bo's grandmother and herself amidst the killing:

Me and your grandma was all curled up inside that carcass looking out through the old bull's skullholes watching them men murderin our people in the daylight . . . We stayed in that old bull for three days like we was goannas living there and then we come out and walked the scrubs all the way back to the Suttor. . . I give them the slip and they didn't get me. And they still haven't got me. (341)

At the same time as Panya's story reconnects human and non-human animal suffering, past and present, it offers an alternative model of animation and survival to that Bo attaches to the figure of the wild bulls, one whose relationship with the ground across which it travels, her story suggests, is differently historied and embodied than the one he imagines. If the exact lineaments of the goannas' forms of habitation are not imparted, their prior purchase and power as instrument or totem of living indigenous claims to country and modes of being in place are. As Bo struggles to acknowledge the history that Panya indicates he has suppressed, implicating Annabelle's grandfather in the murder of his own family, she admonishes both for their failure to know the damage alive in the stone country, disclaiming the value of Bo's accounting and arguing that it is Les Marra and Arner who more fully represent indigenous claims. This view distinguishes Panya's narrative from the prevailing action which addresses the challenges in speaking to and connecting with another across difference and is broadly sympathetic to Bo and Annabelle's attempt to compile a shared inventory that lies somewhere between or outside the amnesia of the Hearn's and the warring of Les Marra.

Miller uses the wild bulls to refigure suggestively a history that cannot be discounted, and must be recognised, that necessitates a greater understanding of the changed terms under which future belongings can be negotiated. This demands certain sacrifices of Annabelle as well as Bo, as the interlocutor between indigenous and non-indigenous histories of encounter. It means recognition of the disparities that attend locations

within indigeneity, of the goanna's forms of habitation as the bulls'. It necessitates the ceding of cherished ideals and privileged locations, a reappraisal of the "meagreness of the remains" (357) that the return to Verbena ordains in the last sequence of the novel. In other words, in Panya's testimony comes the recognition that it is the traumatic and pitiful history of Verbena rather than the misplaced Edenic vision of Ranna Station that sets the terms under which future engagements can be meaningfully conducted. To begin again in "Ruins that looked like rubbish tips. Nothing of the European ideal of the picturesque. None of Rose McCauley's magisterial meditation on the pleasure of ruins" (357). Here, as in the culmination of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, such conclusions represent a barely perceptible "lightening" (Herron 487), where Lurie shoulders the responsibility for the young dog, Driepoot. He recognises the limits that inhere in his care for the dog, however ambiguously rendered in the closing statement, "'Yes, I am giving him up'" (220). Similarly, Miller refuses to suture the wounds of his suffering animals. The suffering they endure can neither be diminished nor avoided even as he risks collapsing the suffering of the animal and the indigene. Responsibility is figured in the text rather as the recognition and restoration of indigenous cultural limits and the sacrifice of imported ideals, like the "right to know everything" (363). This is confirmed in Annabelle's ceding ground. She recognises that Arner rather than she should accompany Bo in returning the cyclon, displaced in their journeying, to the stone country, it being part of "their story, not hers" (364).

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