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Abstract

Helen Tiffin has worked consistently around the possibilities of dismantling the structures and habits of thought of colonialism. In doing so, she has investigated possibilities of counter-formations: to literary canons, to the assumptions underlying canons (1993), to history and its narrative modes (1983), and to colonialist discourse (1987). As her work has progressed, the demolition job on prejudicial boundaries between self and other has shifted direction from place to race to gender and thence to examining the boundaries between humans and nature, people and animals (2001). Throughout, her literary focus has been consistently on the Caribbean, but she has also analysed aspects of the Australian writer, Randolph Stow, notably *Tourmaline* (1978) and *Visitants* (1981). Her interest at the time was in texts that worked to undo Eurocentric colonialism, but if she revisited his work now, she might well look at how Stow's work shows connections between post/colonial cultures and problematic relations between humans and nature. What follows is a sketch of a reading.

PAUL SHARRAD

The Sorrows of Young Randolph: Nature/Culture and Colonialism in Stow's Fiction

Helen Tiffin has worked consistently around the possibilities of dismantling the structures and habits of thought of colonialism. In doing so, she has investigated possibilities of counter-formations: to literary canons, to the assumptions underlying canons (1993), to history and its narrative modes (1983), and to colonialist discourse (1987). As her work has progressed, the demolition job on prejudicial boundaries between self and other has shifted direction from place to race to gender and thence to examining the boundaries between humans and nature, people and animals (2001). Throughout, her literary focus has been consistently on the Caribbean, but she has also analysed aspects of the Australian writer, Randolph Stow, notably *Tourmaline* (1978) and *Visitants* (1981). Her interest at the time was in texts that worked to undo Eurocentric colonialism, but if she revisited his work now, she might well look at how Stow's work shows connections between post/colonial cultures and problematic relations between humans and nature. What follows is a sketch of a reading.

Stow gave a paper called 'Wilderness and Garden' at a Commonwealth Literature conference in Gothenburg in 1982. It tracks European perceptions of Australia as a harsh and hostile land in which 'Drought, fire, solitude and gloom become the poet's themes' (22), and cattle and sheep destroy a fragile ecology. The indigenous population, however, practised fire-stick farming to improve pasture and Stow looks for hints in some colonists (the painter John Glover and the politician William Charles Wentworth) of a possible settler accommodation to a more harmonious relationship with the earth (24). It is this dream of harmony with the land that I want to explore. Critical responses to Stow have tended to move with Commonwealth/ Postcolonial interests to focus on landscape as national identity (Clunies-Ross), on exile (King), on selfhood and alienation (Senn), on cultural difference (Dommergues), on race (Cotter), and on literary intertexts (Beston), but only recently (Fonteyn) has attention turned to how his work engages with nature as both an Other and a habitat.¹

Nature is certainly there in his work, the seasons and flora of Western Australia picked out in early novels as landscape:

Heath grew up the hill, pink and matted, and the smell of it was hot and rough in the strong sunlight. Above the heath little low bushes grew out of the gravel, some bright with yellow flowers, others (the poison bush) the colour of rust. (*A Haunted Land* 49)

The warbling of the birds, sweet and husky, in the coolness of the late-summer morning; the softened light of April, the play of leaf-shadows on a white wall...

The sun was resting on the flat hills to the east and its slanting light lay across the garden, marking with distinctness every leaf and line. As she watched, two parrots skimmed away from the fig-tree towards the north, and the light on their plumage showed green fire hurtling through the air... (*The Bystander* 39)

Such lyric realism usually functions as a dramatic screen against which human dramas are enacted. The land as nature, and nature as something one might belong to this side of death is rarely considered, and yet it is infused with an existential longing that is both born of and fuelled by a deeply Romantic sensibility. Nature is read through the eyes of a literary mind. Stow declared that he saw Australia as 'an enormous symbol' (Lynch 42) and mapped out his novels as stage productions (Leves 1), so regardless of their descriptive realism, they were always going to be allegories in which nature was never entirely itself.² Nonetheless, his fiction consistently evinces a longing to break from such cultural constraints. Caught within Romantic extremes, however, unity with the natural world seems only possible through egotistical domination or nihilistic self-dissolution.

Helen Tiffin notes the colonialist rhetoric of tropical medicine, in which the European body (physical and moral) is threatened with contamination by foreign fevers (Tiffin 1993). She tracks this into Conrad and Stow's *Visitants* (as does Diana Brydon), but the ideas are to be found as well in the very early works. Summer and fever, cows, dogs, mosquitoes (83), snakes (96) and the sun, can all infect us, reducing us to our bodies, and our bodies to the dictates of the microbe. In the first novel, *The Haunted Land*, the Irish patriarch Maguire torments his angrily devoted children because he fears a legacy of family madness (176), and this is displaced into irrational hostility towards the idiot child of his station housekeeper. In full gothic mode, Stow presents this figure as a threat requiring radical control to maintain the difference between the animal world and the humans who work in it:

in that enclosure Adelaide saw something move.

It was a man and animal, a creature lying on its side on the floor and scratching itself with long fingernails. Its hair was long, but combed, its face was covered with a thick black down; its hands and arms were those of an ape, thick and strong, covered with tough black hair. Lying on the floor, it scratched itself — dressed in a clean shirt and bright blue overalls.

She could not move. For a long time she could not speak for the horror of this thing on the floor...

The creature on the floor stirred like a wakened cat and jumped up on all fours, stared at them with the narrow slanting eyes of a wolf. (55)

When the tormented boy escapes his cage, he kills Maguire's pet dog, and, wrestling with the station-owner's son, is shot dead (211–12). The attempt to separate nature from culture fails, however, as the educated son is also killed in the mêlée.

Maguire's daughter, Anne, goes alone to Malin Pool in the heat of summer and, luxuriating in the cool water, infused with sentimentality absorbed from romantic literature and the desires of her burgeoning womanhood, she allows one of the station Aborigines to have sex with her. As she does so, her 1901 white conditioning that 'Niggers aren't people' enters her mind, and she is immediately beset with guilt and feelings of being corrupted (73, 78, 161). The crossing of the racial barrier and transgression of codes of virginal gentility in women is linked to crossing from culture to nature. Her brother kills and buries the offending Aboriginal man as though he is one of the station's beasts (80), and Anne's rigorous policing of her secret parallels the incarceration of the human animal, Tommy Cross, and her brother's own later romance and death. She adopts a tough attitude and takes on men's clothing (74, 83), but only when drenched in the natural world of rainstorms or absorbed in picking wildflowers does she feel 'clean' again (99, 179, 235). The strict maintenance of colonial cultural boundaries and taboos is undone by that culture's own romantic investment in nature and its countervailing economic power-base in farming. When they plough the paddocks after the rains, the muddy Maguire men take on the appearance of 'niggers', but even then they carry whips and stamp on centipedes (101).³

The settler can respond to the beauty of nature, but it is Australian nature softened into a European cultivated landscape:

More rain came, weeks of alternate sun and showers. Walking in the paddocks one could see little specks of green in the dead grass, the miniature double leaves of a new plant rising. And presently the green spread, the specks came together, and now the whole earth was covered with life.

Malin hills softened like waves, grew misty with the green softness of early winter... In every corner of the plover-haunted land the earth grew gentle and yielded itself to birth. (103)

In ironic counterpoint to her bookishness, Anne (herself a blend of Jane Eyre and perhaps Lyndall from Olive Schreiner's *Story of a South African Farm*) is more attuned to the uncultivated natural world, but is conscious of her turning it into a cultural gesture, 'rather poetic, almost a rite of spring, to be throwing flowers to primitive spirits' (180), and has to learn through her encounter with a fox cub, that she must leave nature to be nature and not possess it as something in which to find release from her human struggles (182). Stow encounters Anne's problem as his own: he cannot express the other (nature) without recourse to the culture (both European colonial and literary) that distances him from it.

In Andrew Maguire's desperate grieving for his passionate young wife, Elizabeth, there is a clear echo of Heathcliff and Cathy's undying infatuation.⁴ But if the romantic passions of *Wuthering Heights* pull everything down to where closeness to the soil permits positive rebirth, the white settler farming frontier, while yearning for such a romance of union with nature, is constantly frustrated by its very romantic longing, itself a cultural imposition on an unresponsive

environment. It only works when that environment is transformed briefly into a European greenness (Delrez 43).⁵ But green cannot supply a sustaining symbol other than one of natural cycles of change imported from British culture: as Andrew Lynch observes, ‘The lushness of the Green Man evaporates in the parched Australian landscape of Stow’s poem [‘A Fancy for his Death’]’, where, like the self-sacrificial innocent at the end of *The Bystander*, a body merges into the soil under the sign of fire and sun (Lynch 45–46). Culture seems constantly pulled down towards Nature, whether that be the outdoors world of heat and dust, or inner biological nature. And nature seems to provide little hope of rebirth.

The pool at Malin, however, left to itself, is a place of quiet and natural harmony:

the wide water and the white gums, and this was true changelessness... The shade of the gumtrees was cool there and the rushes moved gently in the hot breeze. Somewhere a mullet jumped; a wild duck flapped low across the water. Peacefully the wind ruffled a wild hibiscus, mirroring its pale mauve flowers in the pool. (10)

It is when humans intrude that disharmony occurs. At the start of *A Haunted Land*, Adelaide, now an older woman, revisits the station homestead and her troubled past. As she gets closer to the house, nature becomes illusory and conflicted. By the cemetery eucalypts ‘like some strange exotic fruit trees, heavy with great white flowers’ are stripped as a flock of white cockatoos screams away; around the house gums are mixed with olives and oleanders; the house itself is overrun with climbing rose and surrounded by ‘dead weeds, which in a more fertile season had been white daisies and cosmos’ (10–11). Andrew Maguire, after the death of his wife (who seems an elemental creature of natural energy), leaves the gardens to grow wild and buries himself in drink and ‘the book room’ — the station office-cum-library. Culture provides him no solace, however, and he lashes out at everything. His sensible daughter seeks to understand and exonerate him, but the novel makes him such an isolated powerful personality that there is no explanation or salvation: he is at best a creature of history and genes, something of a force of nature that is also unnatural. Adelaide gives up analysis, preferring to keep her father as a cultic mystery (131) and we are left repeating the same questions of cause and effect that interpreter Osana asks in *Visitants* (182), ending up with ‘who made Andrew Maguire?’ It is a question similar to Blake’s about the tiger, and there is no answer that absolves Maguire of his sins outside of Romantic conceptions of the Byronic devil-hero.

In *The Bystander*, the social world is more central than the natural environment, but the consoling cycles of nature and the conflict with that world continue. Keithy, an intellectually limited young man, is kept in a protective state of childhood innocence that is associated with nature: he keeps a menagerie of animals and wanders through the landscape, puzzling over the strange ways of plants, insects (183) and of the people around him. Keithy is not a total nature-lover: he does see his animals as possessions and regularly traps rabbits, but his natural affections

lead him into conflict with social convention. Culture, in fact, orphans him (his mother takes his father away to Britain; his minder rejects his advances; the movies and marriage deprive him of both his minder and his best friend; his car results in the death of his favourite dog) and he can only find contentment in a self-sacrificial ordeal by fire that reunites him with nature. In that moment, the station-owner protagonist is seized by a sublime vision of the glorious beauty and destruction around him. There is a suggestion (somewhat curtailed by the relentless male bonding of the book) that Keithy's self-sacrificial proof of his love will prompt a new life for others, though without him, they will likely continue to be at odds with each other and their surroundings.

Aboriginal culture is the one site at which nature becomes acculturated, but in his two early works at least, Stow is unable to make much connection to indigenous views. His station owners refer to indigenous people as 'boongs' and 'niggers' when they are mentioned at all. *To The Islands*, therefore, marks a significant step towards finding some accommodation with the environment by setting white characters in closer and more sympathetic contact with Aboriginal people on a northern mission. Here the boundaries between nature and culture, human and animal are blurred: old, thin Aboriginal women walk like cranes (12), other Aboriginals have a bird-like grace (100) and lizards invade the church (18), a flight of ducks is like a stringed instrument (113).

The temptations and delusions of romantic sympathy are depicted in nurse Helen. She expresses disgust at her white skin and wants to be brown like the old Aboriginal people she is sentimentally attached to. Heriot, another of Stow's crusty old patriarchs, goes a step further, lamenting his human nature and seeking to lose himself in the wilderness. But the natural wilderness is either already enculturated with Aboriginal dreaming presences alien to him, or it is completely other to all human attempts at connection. In either case, self-loathing and misanthropy are no basis for realising oneness. At best, they lead to self-emptying. Heriot, has spent years literally whipping the mission into shape, and has no illusions about the shortcomings of those around him, black or white. Nonetheless, on the point of retirement and exhausted by his labours, he still yearns for some greater sense of fulfilment. He sees himself as a great red cliff (13) a crumbling ruinous edifice, eroded by age (68), a falling tree (79), and dreams of climbing a cliff to reach an apotheosis of light (132). But he too is kept apart from nature and whatever romantic promise it might hold. If he wants, in moments of sympathy, to preserve the unspoilt beauty of wildlife, his Aboriginal companion wants to shoot it for food (170); if Justin is happy to let hawks hang around until they go off to their own country, Heriot wants him to shoot them for pursuing him (117). Heriot's anguish is born from 'the misery of the mind' (61), from Cartesian splitting of the mind from the body and both from the natural world, so that when the old man comes upon the blessing of a waterhole, he can only respond with a quotation from a Marvell poem (64).

Gradually he learns to submit to ‘the justice of the sky’s occasion’ (73) and to give himself to the country, which confers ‘stillness of mind’ (102), but from an Aboriginal perspective, Heriot is a wind of destruction, mentioning the dead and disturbing the living. Even the land that promises release is itself disturbed by his presence in so far as he represents white intrusion and calls forth memories of the massacre of Aboriginal people by white settlers (105). As a purely natural force, the land is also threatening. It drives all humanity to hunger (118); it hates humans, demanding that they prey on nature and each other (173, 195). Finally the only solution is renunciation and death (153). Short of that end, the ‘mouthless god’ of Aboriginal cave painting (197) or becoming a simple plant (204) seem to be the only saving options, and for the white mind loaded with literary learning these are impossible.

In the remote mining town of Tourmaline, the most positive characters are an old white fossicker and his Aboriginal mate who mostly disappear into the land, digging into it and losing themselves in it. Dave Speed once wanted to become a tree; now he wants to be a rock (86). The rest, with but one (Aboriginal) exception, live on an uncertain faultline between human society and their arid surroundings. Tourmaline, is a town described as existing in a coma, and like the Maguire homestead in *A Haunted Land*, it is isolated and laden with festering tensions as a result.⁶

The narrator is a superannuated policeman who speaks of ‘our wild garden’ and has intimations of tough wild lilies breaking through the ground before the earliest rains (34). He, however, is a weak shell of former power and unable to bring about new life. The diviner, who inspires a charismatic cult but succeeds only in divining minerals and not the water the town really needs, is another visitant, an ‘obscure, alien’ (45). Like Heriot, and then Cawdor in *Visitants*, he has suicidal tendencies. Self-emptying is also advocated by Tom Spring, the town’s storekeeper, but in a more positive way. He talks of becoming a stream, a rock, but as part of a flow of energies that can change the limits of circumstance (187). Water carves rock, makes soil, and causes the garden to grow; it also sustains human life. Water is neutral, an agent only by being a vehicle for cosmic forces: it can create, but can also destroy. Tourmaline, however, appears to be disconnected from any kind of water supply apart from imported beer. Its relationship to rock is one of material exploitation. Only Agnes, an old Aboriginal woman links rock and rain, Aboriginal lore and Christian ritual, human and plant (by watering the oleander with her urine), and plant and culture (by arranging the oleander flowers on the church altar alongside magic rain stones).

Kerry Leves makes much of the pharmakon (poison-cure) ambivalence of the oleander, a bush that figures in both *A Haunted Land* and *Tourmaline*. Its toxic qualities are not dwelt on in the novels, but its invasive potential is. Malin station lines its driveway with oleanders and olives marking off orderly white cultivation, but two generations later, the homestead is collapsing and the

avenue trees have run wild and almost block the road (*The Bystander* 38, 51). The homestead, too, is under attack from the very plants that once indicated domestic order. Climbing roses have overrun one side of the house and threaten to pull it down (11). The abandoned original home at Old Malin is crumbling under a cover of bougainvillea (50). The European dynastic family collapses under the weight of its own introduced plants, its own culture of domination, leaving only nostalgia and unease (50). For Adelaide in *The Haunted Land*, the oleander marks ‘the death season’ (219); only old Agnes in *Tourmaline* can conceive of some syncretic harmony in which colonial and native, human and plant can coexist productively.⁷ Stow’s problem is that, like Heriot, he cannot relate Christianity to the land and has no access to Aboriginal understanding, or refuses to romanticise their connection to the land because they too are human. Unable to see the land for what it is of itself, he has to resort in *Tourmaline* to another cultural system and import Taoist symbolism, another kind of ‘oleander’ of ambiguous effect.

Russell McDougall considers that in the end ‘the town — and the text — appear to unravel into cultural absence, into wordlessness, decomposition, in the direction of Nature rather than Culture. On the other hand, at the end, we are in a very literal sense back at the beginning ... so that the paradigmatic opposition of Nature and Culture seems itself called into question’ (425). Here, perhaps, is the point of connection to the later emergence of an ecocritical vision: ‘the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term “human” itself’ (Garrard 5).

Like the first two novels, *The Merry-go-round in the Sea* recreates nineteen forties and fifties (Western) Australian consciousness of life still being elsewhere.⁸ There can be a love of the land amongst rural settlers, but once one has any cultural aspirations, the land itself cannot supply intellectual/emotional attachment. Rob Coram as a child perhaps offers better promise of harmony with his world than the disillusioned Heriot or the fallen adults of *Tourmaline*, but Rob is a young Werther, another bystander looking on at the land and the world.⁹ Except for moments of childhood when the unreflective mind allows animal physicality a sensory rapture of sounds and smells and textures, his romantic sensibility languishes or rages in its sense of exile (124–25) or is suspended in an equally animal-like brutality: as Rob says to one of his rural playmates, ‘Were’ always killing things’ (232). The land is there as resource or backdrop, not as soul: giving oneself to it results in brutish bare life, violence and death. There is a longing for connection to the land, but the nature-culture divide cannot be genuinely crossed because again it is always read either as tragedy or gothic through a veil of cultural text (Shakespeare, Jacobean revenge plays, medieval folklore, Dante, Villon, the Bible, Alcuin, Xenophon, Baudelaire, Poe), and meaning can only be invested in it via artifice (Tiffin 1978; Riem; Beston).

Stow, like Heriot wryly boasting and lamenting his erudition (Beston 169, 175–76), makes this into a bleak vision of human exile akin to Coetzee’s early work, where we are alienated from the world (in particular the Australian natural world) by language (Riem 517), by the mind, and — historically deprived of Derrida’s more worldly acceptance of this — only mysticism can supply transcendental union. In the end, Stow goes to England where nature is culture — green men, winter solstice, natural magic, landscape painting, family history — (Delrez 42–43); Australia is abandoned as unapproachable or consuming, and, to the romantic ego of the Australian colonialist, so is Papua New Guinea.

Visitants is fundamentally a social, human centred, story, but it continues the theme of alienation. In a different, tropical island setting, it reproduces the ghost towns and ruined homesteads of the previous novels, bringing into full relief apocalypse and sterility in ‘the wastelands of the imperial imagination’ (Delrez 36). In *To the Islands* Heriot opts to ‘pull down the world’ of mission culture and flee into the bush — it’s another cargo cult cleansing that tries to ‘forestall ruin by embracing ruin’ (*To the Islands* 43). Here again is the pharmakon motif, the Taoist paradox, but still in its negative aspect. In *Visitants*, Cawdor imagines his own body dissolving into atoms that mingle with the star matter of the cosmos (179), and culture, in the form of a musical composition devolving back into nature under the force of its own ‘troppo agitato’ momentum (46). The internal combustion engine of empire, the machinery of romantic egotism, grinds itself into dust; it is a despairing redemptive kenosis that might be aligned with some Gaia view of the dispensability of the human race in the greater scheme of things, but which, in literary terms appears to be a bleaker vision of our inability to get beyond our cultural and biological prisons — in particular, to get beyond the yearning and self-destructive disillusion of a Werther-like sense of separation from an idealised other.

In something akin to Naipaul’s settling into the English landscape in *The Enigma of Arrival*, Stow wrote his fictive persona out of its colonial frontier-induced crisis and into new surroundings in his ancestral homeland of East England. There he is free to observe nature in close detail and in immediate corporeal sensation, free of symbolic over-load. Consider the opening page of *The Girl Green as Elderflower*:

Through his window to the right the old unpruned apple tree which had gathered wreaths of snow in its mossy twigs was being shocked free of them by the spurts of little dun birds. The two rising fields behind, one pasture and one plough, were today unbroken by any tussock or ridge of conker-coloured earth, and lay so uniformly white and unshadowed that it seemed they must be uniformly level. In the distance, across the river, a line of bare poplars on a ridge was caught in an odd spotlight of sun, and stood out against the heavy sky with an unEnglish sharpness, shining through air from which all moisture had frozen and fallen. (3)

Such direct rendition of belonging in the natural world is made possible by the safe position of the observing outsider, for whom it is landscape, albeit a landscape

he is increasingly part of. It is also framed by the fact that for the anglo-colonial returnee, English nature is experienced as cultural: the reader is reminded that the picturesque nature of the first quotation is ‘Constable country’ (141) and when Clare walks his friend Perry across country to his cottage:

Out of the sky, invisible, a bird was singing. It brought to Clare a memory of Malkin, a chirruping, a lilting a celebration. The English countryside, he reflected, was so insistently literary. As if following this thought, Perry murmured, ‘Hark, hark, the lark’. He twisted about on the stile, and looking at the far bold flag, added: ‘Yes, indeed: happy birthday, Shakespeare’. (72)

The natural world is also the world of folklore, but unlike the Australian outback or the alien Papuan setting of *Visitants*, the uncanny can be countenanced and the violence in nature accommodated. A dog attacks and consumes a pheasant, but Clare is undismayed, accepting it as ‘the way of the green god’ (68), and present reality is infused with past tales of foundlings and sprites and wild men. The nature that previously for Stow had been unnaturally gothic is now less romanticised: not totally under human control, but also not an extreme alien limit to one’s being; the nature god of old Britain is ‘neither cruel nor merciful, but dances for joy at the variousness of everything that is’ (127) and Clare can settle into his new-old world.

Greg Garrard selects the work of John Clare as his focus for explicating ecocritical approaches to literature, showing how he avoids some of the sentimental view of nature of Wordsworth but is nonetheless caught in an ‘artifice of innocence’ that rests in his reliance on language and its play of regional specificity as simulating closeness to the ‘real’ natural world in a move towards being able to ‘think fragility’ (44–48). Stow is certainly good at thinking human fragility, but without Val Plumwood, Garrard and others to supply the concepts, he can only work his own way intuitively towards seeing fragility as something other than falling tragically short of romantic fullness. That is until the world he inhabits is aligned with a cultural history in which the romantic is endemic in the landscape, and only then can he accept fragility as a way forward for humane living in relation to ourselves and nature.

Elizabeth Perkins comments on the struggle between the active and the contemplative in Stow’s work, the former being destructive but necessary and the latter ideal but nihilistic in effect. She concludes, ‘perhaps the greatest aesthetic interest in Stow’s belief in a quiescent and silent yielding to the movement of the cosmos lies in the realization that for creative artists, such passive mergence with nature is almost impossible’ (31). Perhaps, too, for the white Australian generally, such a merging of nature and culture is a dream only to be realised in conflicted action and imposed allegory. Whatever the possibilities, it would seem that renouncing the European inheritance of literary romanticism is a prerequisite for any meaningful ecological vision, at least in Australia.

This takes us back to Helen Tiffin's progression from analyses of textual colonisation to ecocritical endeavours. There is an underlying continuity in such a shift of interest in that at base, the ecocritical problem is the same as the postcolonial one: the inability to deal with difference. Romanticism uses nature to supply human experiences of rapture or terror in a process of othering (as wild) and packaging (as landscape, as picturesque), but it will not let nature be itself. Ecological balance seems to suggest a mutual recognition and set of dialogic interchanges of collective benefit, but at the same time it involves its component parts being more or less part of the same system. The problem for eco/poco criticism arises when the parts of the entire system function within their own machineries that operate as opposed if not mutually exclusive categories (nature-culture/ human-nonhuman). The goal of the ecocritically aware writer, then, might be to envision, as Patrick Murphy does, a dialogic difference in which negotiating a sustainable non-exploitative cohabitation occurs as an exploration of our 'interanimating relationships' in a planetary ecosystem (193–94) that neither co-opts the other into being one's own servant or foil, nor pushes it out into a remote and impossibly space of pure alterity. Jhan Hochman adds to this, suggesting that cultural studies should not only seek to 'know' nature but also grant it its 'privacy' as 'unromanticised difference' (190–92) — something which Stow perhaps was struggling to do.

NOTES

- ¹ Stow himself suggests such an approach: 'it's just the natural world I'm interested in... I'm interested in nature, in botany, geology, and so on' ('Mostly Private Letters' interview with John Beston, 1975, qtd in Hassall 354).
- ² David Fonteyn attempts to make a case for reading *Tourmaline* as a text with ecological import but concedes that it needs to be read allegorically to discover that potential and he has to work with the ambiguities of symbol (fire as destructive ground clearing for new growth 10) to posit a universalist archetype of the cycle of natural life. Kerry Leves also inspects use of nature (flowers) in the early fiction to show ambivalence and breaks in uniformity of meaning/ reading, but again, the flower as part of nature is subsumed by the texts' use of flowers as literary symbols, often located in poetry and song, as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the 'Keys to the Kingdom' nursery rhyme in *A Haunted Land*, with its 'basket of sweet flowers' at its centre figuring the dead Christ awaiting resurrection (Stow 1965 251–52; Leves 3, 7).
- ³ In 'Unjust Relations', Tiffin makes the connection between the way white settlers spoke of and treated Aborigines and their relation to animals and nature (39).
- ⁴ There is even a more civilised if stuffy nearby station, Koolabye, akin to Thrushcross Grange, and Heathcliff is mentioned in an early Stow essay, 'Raw Material' (Hassall 406).
- ⁵ In *The Haunted Land*, Anne goes out in a green riding habit 'life in the death surrounding her' in the dry summer landscape (71). In its sequel, *The Bystander*, a Latvian migrant housekeeper, Diana Ravirs, cleans out the dusty station homestead and determines to install a green carpet and green curtains (149).
- ⁶ Stow knew French so I do not think it beyond probability, perhaps more so because the story came to him as a Lorca-style ballad in a dream (Bennett 59), that the town/

stone encapsulates the name of the setting of his first novel: we are given a (re) tour of Malin(e). And Malin is a malign world.

- ⁷ Leves notes the associations of ‘fleurs du mal’ and their wild, weedy aspect, as well as their link to cemeteries, so that the oleander suggests the malign but ultimately sterile and self-destructive influence of colonial invasion (7).
- ⁸ The popularity of this novel and its more individualised outlook leads me to forego detailed discussion of it here, although its view of violence out there in the wide world connects it to other novels. Stow’s final book, *The Suburbs of Hell*, which again I am not going to include in my analysis here, takes its origins from Western Australia in more recent times, but is a murder mystery based on a medieval morality tale and perhaps the *Decameron*, framed by a range of quotations from Jacobean revenge tragedies and *Titus Andronicus*. It opens and closes with scenes of natural delight (as though nature alone offers any prospect of harmonious pleasure) but otherwise there is no central interest in the nature/culture problematic as there is in Stow’s other books. It is as though he resolved the matter in *The Girl Green as Elderflower*.
- ⁹ This and other aspects of my reading follow some of Martin Leer’s interpretations, both in relation to the Romantic sensibility in Stow’s work and to his recourse to symbols to configure the land.

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