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Renegotiating Nature: Writing the Post-Romantic Australian City

Abstract:

Nature writers of the Romantic movement responded to the exploitation of natural resources and loss of untamed nature in an age of technological innovation. This legacy of Romanticism pervades contemporary writings about nature and place. However, ideas advanced through Romantic writings of ‘nature as a redemptive force’ and the ideological separation of nature and culture remain problematic (Adam 1998). If one does not consider this legacy and question inherited conventions, myths about nature are likely to be reinforced. In this paper, I explore some of Romanticism’s legacies for nature writing and how contemporary writers draw on and resist the established conventions. I argue that Australian cities provide sites of resistance, where assumptions of Romanticism might be addressed by writers. Cities are places not traditionally associated with nature writing and places where nature/culture relationships might be re-imagined, complicating notions of place, nature and the urban to arrive at new post-Romantic ways of writing nature.

Biographical note:

Chantelle Bayes has recently completed a creative writing PhD from Griffith University examining literary representations of urban nature. Her research interests include ecocriticism, urban nature, contemporary literature and the legacy of Romanticism.

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Australian writers have long been influenced by nature writing as it was developed during the Romantic movement in Europe. Nature writing as it is broadly understood today – writing which focuses on understanding and connecting with the non-human – began with Romanticism and was originally constructed according to eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of nature and culture. Contemporary nature writers both draw on and resist this Romantic inheritance but all of them must to some extent navigate Romantic notions of nature, imagination and place. Many writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries responded to the exploitation of natural resources and loss of untamed nature in an age of technological innovation but ideas that emerged of ‘nature as a redemptive force’, idealised forms of nature and the ideological separation of nature and culture remain problematic (Adam 1998: 29). These ideas have been used to reinforce the exploitation of natural resources as often as they have been used to reconcile with nature and resist destructive attitudes.

In this paper, I discuss the way contemporary nature writing is able to renegotiate ideas of place and nature that emerged in eighteenth and nineteenth century writing. Contemporary nature writing seeks to reconnect with the non-human in ways that go beyond Romantic ideals. To address the way writers might renegotiate the tradition, I will use the concept of reaffiliation with nature, an important aspect in many Romantic texts and one of the keys to understanding new nature writing. Some of the strengths of Romanticism, such as valuing and seeking to protect wild nature, have limitations in an increasingly urban world where urban nature, in particular, is seen as expendable. I argue that Australian cities provide sites of resistance for writers, where they might address some of the limitations of Romantic thought that legitimise resource exploitation, particularly in urban areas.

Cities are places not traditionally associated with nature writing. They are places where nature/culture relationships might be re-imagined, complicating notions of place, nature and the urban. I propose that by bringing nature writing into the city, writers can reimagine nature writing, and the antecedent Romantic tradition. Nature writers can explore and question conceptions of wilderness, cities and nature while drawing from aspects of Romanticism that accord value to presenting nature as a subject, question the destructive force of human development and imagine more symbiotic ways of living with nature.

Romantic Renegotiations of Nature

Donald Worster (1994) argues that two conceptions of nature/ecology dominated in European writing of the nineteenth century – a development of the Arcadian idea of nature through the pastoral essay, and an ‘imperial’ idea of nature developed through scientific texts of discovery, collection and classification. The scientifically-based imperial view of nature saw the non-human world as something to control, improve and hold dominion over. In the seventeenth century, non-human nature was largely imagined as infinitely available and valuable for economic production, with technology providing the means to break free from natural constraints and pressures (Worster 1994). Neither the Arcadian nor the imperial conception of nature was new but each was reformed through Romantic notions of identity, nature and imagination.

Michael Ferber (2010) describes some of the features of Romantic writing:

Romanticism was a European cultural movement, or set of movements, which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one’s self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world, which ‘detranscendentalized’ religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in

nature or in the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honoured poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favour of values more individual, inward and emotional (10).

As Ferber suggests, writers in the Romantic tradition seek to renegotiate their relationship with nature through imagination and experience. Some texts present a transcendental experience of nature as in *Frankenstein*:

Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from Earth (Shelley 1918: 18).

Others found expression for their own emotions through descriptions of the landscape as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836) demonstrates:

Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man labouring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost, by death, a dear friend (4).

Often in describing place, nature writers of the Romantic movement privileged the visual, linking nature with beauty, the disembodied gaze with an emotional inner self, and valuing aspects such as order, symmetry, harmony and composition (Soper 1995; Adam 1998). These rather passive approaches to nature's visual grandeur and significance are no longer privileged by nature writers in the same way, but Romantic ideas emphasising the aesthetic value of nature continue to influence much of Western literature, including the way writers depict Australian places. Gina Mercer (2015: 75) shows how contemporary poetry is building from but also re-inflecting Romantic conventions in poems such as 'After, there are the birds':

He sends me photos
of the singular crimson rosella
who observes him through the kitchen window
as he cooks dinner for one.

He sends me boxes of her best clothes:
designer jackets, silk shirts, tailored trousers.
Asks me to share them among family
even though she was the size of a wren
and we're all currawongs ...

After my sister dies,
her husband says, *Now,*
there is the company of birds.

In this poem, birds are companions rather than symbols of human emotion or the means to transcendence. Further, as Mercer acknowledges the presence of nature in places we inhabit, she conveys a sense of the individual, and the individual's desire to connect with the non-human, but this is a different kind of connection from the one espoused by the Romantics. Nature doesn't provide exemplars of beauty or morality to the narrator's brother-in-law but a way of affirming a connection with another being.

While the imperial conception of nature was easily the most dominant in the period before Romanticism, the Arcadian sense of nature presented by Gilbert White in the eighteenth century also developed into a popular aspect of nature writing (Worster 1994). In Greek mythology, Arcadia was the home of mountain-God Pan, other nature spirits, livestock and herders who lived in harmony with the natural environment. Arcadia was therefore both wilderness and worked land. This pastoral utopia became connected with the garden of Eden during the Renaissance and was further established in popular culture by Romantic poets and essayists (Worster 1994; Van Koppen 2000). The myth of Pan didn't distinguish between the rural and the wild but as pastoral and uninhabited areas became separated, two distinct versions of Arcadia emerged. Arcadian accounts in the Romantic tradition often promoted dual ideals of nature – the rural idyll and the wilderness. These were not necessarily based in real experience but were symbolic versions of nature (Van Koppen 2000). Parson Gilbert White is credited with writing the first pastoral essays and incorporated this utopian imagery into his accounts of Selbourne, in the UK (Worster 1994). His essays differed from earlier works by imagining an Arcadian nature found not in a utopian past but in his rural surroundings. They also hint at the emergence of an ecological understanding of the world:

Earth-worms, though in appearance a small and despicable link in the chain of nature, yet, if lost, would make a lamentable chasm. For, to say nothing of half the birds, and some quadrupeds, which are almost entirely supported by them, worms seem to be the great promoters of vegetation, which would proceed but lamely without them (White 1829: 253).

Through close observation, White depicts a world in which natural entities form a system of relationships. In his writings, he brought together science and mythology and advocated for a more physical connection between self and place. While his writings weren't seen as significant during his lifetime, White's essays would provide writers with a way of countering the dominant idea of nature as human utility and bring attention to the destructive practices impacting natural (and human) environments.

The Arcadian image of nature is often linked with Romanticism while the imperial conception of nature is sometimes presented in opposition. However, these were not mutually exclusive ideas about nature and many writers incorporated aspects of both in their work. Ralph Waldo Emerson celebrated nature in his writing and drew on the Arcadian pastoral in doing so, while also reflecting the imperial conception of nature. Emerson's essay *Nature* (1836) depicts a world that is meant to be consumed by humans, and a symbolic nature that echoes human emotion. Nature, for Emerson is a means of exploring the self. Emerson represents nature as abundant, pleasing and worthy of attention while at the same time encouraging a relationship between nature and culture which relies on notions of ownership, utility and redemption: 'Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man' (Emerson 1836: 5). Emerson captures the contradictions present in Romanticism. At once, an ideal nature might be celebrated while the non-human is also dominated, consumed and damaged.

Because the Arcadian negotiation of nature in literature of the nineteenth century presented the ideal of a pristine and untouched wilderness (Van Koppen 2000), nature was often presented as something to be found away from and in opposition to the city. This set up a notion that the non-human nature present in wild and rural areas was to be valued more than urban nature (Soper 1995; Ross 1993; Adam 1998). Although there may have been places in the past that were largely untouched by human actions, this is no longer the case. Through the historical and global processes of migration, pollution, environmental manipulation and development, the barrier between nature and human culture and activity is no longer clear. By positioning wilderness in opposition to the city

or the presence of human beings – and viewing wilderness as somehow more natural – the nature of the city is rendered somewhat marginal and even expendable. Dixon (2002: xii-xiii) says that while those who live in the city may foster a concern for rural and wild landscapes, often the nature of the city itself is ignored. Environmental destruction within cities has become commonplace, often allowing the expansion and progress of cities to take place at the expense of nature.

A Post-Colonial Australian Nature

Romantic understandings of nature were transported to the Australian landscape in the colonial era with early Australian writings reflecting the movements and fashions prevalent in Europe. In Australia, both Arcadian and imperial conceptions of nature were present in early settler relationships with place, as Aidan Davison (2005) suggests:

Private dreams of Edenic harmony with and social autonomy in domestic nature were not only prominent during the first century of Australian suburbanisation (roughly, 1850 to 1950), they operated as a counterweight to public dreams of technological dominion over raw nature in the creation of Australian modernity (1).

This negotiation of place mirrors the questions about human relations with the natural world being asked in Europe. However, at the time of colonial settlement, Australian nature was often depicted as ugly and in need of improvement. Paul Carter (1987:45) argues that the problem was partly a limitation of the English language with ‘the Australian places fail[ing] to conjure up the proper associations’. For example, an Australian ‘valley’ or ‘glen’ was so unlike the European version that the words failed to describe these places accurately. This miscommunication led writers to describe less than ideal versions of such places for European audiences.

English writers also documented the ways in which calls for environmental protection were dismissed in colonial Australia as sentimental ideas for people with leisure-time, not for the colonies (Bonyhady 2000). Not only did the imperial conception of nature dominate in colonial Australia but Australians were deemed as resistant to or uninterested in their surroundings. This view is so ingrained in historical understandings of Australia that some have questioned whether Australia even has a nature writing tradition. However, many artists, writers and scientists did seek to understand and connect with their new surroundings rather than submit to alienation, attempting to find new ways of understanding Australian landscape – as Tim Bonyhady and Mark Tredinnick have demonstrated (Bonyhady 2000; Tredinnick 2004). Indigenous groups also had an oral storytelling tradition about nature and place that has now also developed into a written tradition.

Mark Tredinnick (2004) shows that from colonisation to now, Australian writers have explored place and nature within their work, although few have used the traditional form of lyric essay popular in contemporary Europe and America. Australian writings about place and nature have often been placed in other genres, such as memoir, travel, news writing, or poetry, and a specific genre called ‘nature writing’ has never been established in Australian book stores (Tredinnick 2004). I would add to Tredinnick’s list the long-established practice of writing fiction that explores some aspect of nature or place. For example, nineteenth century narratives about convict life, bush rangers and Aboriginal communities were also often about connection or disconnection with the natural environment.

While contemporary novelists such as Tim Winton (*Cloudland*, *Dirt Music*) Alexis Wright (*Carpentaria*, *The Swan Book*) and James Bradley (*The Deep Field*, *Clade*) have spent their writing careers exploring place and ecology, many other Australian writers

have produced narratives with ecological themes. Whether consciously or not, these writers draw on, resist and reimagine Romantic ideas in their explorations of nature and ecology. One contemporary Australian writer who has considered this legacy is Tim Winton (Vidussi 2014) and he explains how Romanticism has influenced his work:

My own interests in nature were instinctive, not very educated ... For me it began as a physical, sensual passion that I didn't really have a language for as a boy. Later of course I read the Romantic poets – especially Wordsworth and Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins – who spoke of the natural world as a subject rather than an object and this resonated strongly ... I think it's reasonable to see the influence of nature thinkers [ecophilosophers] in my work. Nature is a subject, not an object, a character, a living thing and not simply backdrop (118).

The impact of Romanticism, as Winton shows, has often been positive. While he's speaking here mainly of his experiences with rural nature, urban nature has not been excluded and this is where Winton's writing redresses some of the limitations of Romanticism. Writers have drawn on ideas of nature as a subject, examined the potentially destructive force of human development and have explored ways to live more symbiotically within the ecosystem.

Influenced by the Romantic explorations of wild and pastoral nature, however, much Australian nature writing focuses on relationships between people and Australian place/nature in remote and rural locations. Since colonial settlement, Australia has been a country of urban development with cities supporting the majority of the population. This means cities are the places where most of us experience, live with and negotiate non-human nature. While the non-human has been damaged (sometimes irreparably) by urban growth the urban is not wholly a place of destruction. Many Australian native and vulnerable species have made their homes in cities, using the resources concentrated there to their advantage (Low 2003). A closer exploration of these complex relationships through literature would allow writers to further question those aspects of Romanticism that locate nature away from human-built environments and serve to rethink nature/culture relationships.

As well as the influence of the Romantic tradition, Australian writers grapple with colonial ideas about Australian nature. These ideas frequently constructed the Australian bushland as 'other' to the idealised natural world of Europe and associated the Australian landscape with tropes of human resilience and endurance in difficult circumstances. While Romantic depictions of Australia were also constructed, the idea of the Australian landscape as difficult or barren has persisted, along with the literary trope of children perishing in the bush. These narratives advanced the concept of an Australian wilderness that was unpeopled, untamed and requiring improvement. This view also led to the introduction of European plants and animals in many cities, causing environmental change and disrupting ecosystems. Yet Australia's landmass requires a new understanding and a different way of living with the non-human. For writers, this presents an opportunity to re-examine Romantic understandings of nature and the relationships Australian writers have with place.

The Australian conservation movement of the 1970s prompted a shift in discourse about the bush. Conservation groups appropriated American connotations of wilderness in an effort to uphold environmental protections at a time of intense development. William Cronon (1996) analyses these connotations in the American tradition:

Without our quite realizing it, wilderness tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others. Most of us, I suspect, still follow the conventions of the romantic sublime in finding the mountaintop more glorious than the plains, the ancient forest nobler than the grasslands, the mighty canyon more inspiring than the humble marsh ... If it isn't hundreds of square miles big, if it doesn't give us God's-eye views or grand

vistas, if it doesn't permit us the illusion that we are alone on the planet, then it really isn't natural. It's too small, too plain, or too crowded to be *authentically* wild (22).

The rise of conservation groups such as The Wilderness Society promoted the value of the Australian bush so that large tracts of land could continue to be protected from proposed intensive logging and new developments (Low 2003). This renewed focus on protecting the environment also coincided with a resurgence of Romanticism, particularly the idea of experiencing spiritual transcendence in sublime nature. In Australia, the historical lack of understanding about the presence and cultures of Indigenous peoples – and particularly the way human-produced fire has shaped the continent – has led to modern-day risks of larger and more devastating bush fires and eco-system change (Low 2003). The key problem with the idea of wilderness is not that it encourages people to value and enjoy less developed areas but that wilderness advances several myths about nature – that real nature is to be found in distant and unpeopled areas and that undeveloped areas are uninhabited, unmanaged, and not impacted by human actions.

For Indigenous Australians, country is never empty but 'alive with cultural presence' (Salleh 1997: 120). The Romantic notion of wilderness, like Terra Nullius, denies the Indigenous presence in country and reinforces the separation of nature from culture. This denial of Indigenous presence has led to violence, dispossession of people from their land and the denial of cultural participation (Kelly 2011; Salleh 1997). Noeline Kelly (2011) argues that nature writers must at least acknowledge the Indigenous history of countries within their work:

For settler Australians, representing the land from a position of knowledge and intimacy in the way that nature writing requires, is clearly problematised when that same land is the site of Indigenous dispossession and ongoing regimes of violence, social marginalisation and economic disadvantage (3).

By drawing on aspects of Romanticism that encourage writers to understand and value place while resisting those that encourage us to seek an ideal, writers might address some of these concerns. Most areas in Australia including cities were built on significant Indigenous sites. An acknowledgement of this history can work to disrupt narratives of Terra Nullius and at the same time contribute to broader and more complex understandings of people and place.

Nature writing can also serve to deepen settler relationships with land and develop an identification with or sense of belonging to place: 'In Australia, where the land has for millennia been invoked through poetic address, been known and communed with through visceral and embodied interaction, nature writing is potentially one access point for settlers' to have a communicative exchange with place (Kelly 2011: 9). The city then becomes one site where writers can disrupt ideas of wilderness and nature and examine how we might live in the company of non-humans. Scientist and nature writer Tim Low (2003) demonstrates why we must examine nature/culture relationships in cities:

In future many more animals will be living in our cities. But the prospect of animals living among us becomes ugly if our response is only to kill them ... We can't just accept wildlife into our cities on our terms. We can't welcome in birds and butterflies and keep out bats and snakes. That's neither realistic nor fair. What we can do instead is find better ways of sharing our spaces with nature, and fairer ways of resolving conflicts (311-312).

While Low acknowledges that many species simply have no alternative but to find homes in cities, he also investigates the ways species manipulate urban spaces to their advantage. This complexity provides a site where nature writers can work to re-consider the urban as a natural/cultural place, re-imagine nature as an agent and consider how we might live more amicably with non-humans.

Re-Writing the Post-Romantic City

Nature writing has gone through a change in recent years, with the emergence of ‘new nature writing’ an attempt to reimagine the tradition. Rather than being defined by a particular genre, contemporary nature writing might be defined by a particular goal. Lydia Peele argues the need for nature writers to connect with nature in ways that go beyond objectivity and observation but may not be limited to the pastoral essay:

The new nature writing ... has got to be couched in stories – whether fiction or non-fiction – where we as humans are present. Not only as observers, but as intrinsic elements. In my thinking, it is the tradition of the false notion of separation that has caused us so many problems and led to so much environmental degradation. I believe that it is our great challenge in the twenty-first century to remake the connection (Cowley 2008, p. 12).

What is clear from Peele’s sentiments is the idea of reaffiliation with nature – and not just in ‘Romantic’ rural and wild areas, but in urban and suburban areas also. She reflects the Romantic aim to resist scientific objectivity but also addresses some of the problematic Romantic ideals like the pastoral utopia, the essay as the ideal form for nature writing and the problematic separation of nature and culture.

Despite some of the limitations of nature writing in the Romantic tradition, Australian writers have the opportunity to contribute new perspectives to international debates on nature writing, an area still often dominated by American and European voices. This is not to dismiss the importance of Australian writers such as Val Plumwood, Kate Rigby and Mark Tredinnick who have already made substantial contributions to the international body of nature writing. Not only are Australian nature writers well positioned to add to a growing body of work that questions ideas of wilderness, nature and the city, but the Australian urban context is well suited to a re-negotiation of relationships between people and place. Following the lead of writers such as Stephen Muecke, Stuart Cooke, Tim Low and Tim Winton, contemporary narratives about Australian cities have the potential to resist the separation of nature and culture, question the valuing of rural/wild nature over urban nature and complicate notions of the wild and wilderness.

Australian nature doesn’t always allow you to stand back and gaze upon it in the Romantic tradition. As Tim Winton says:

Geography definitely leans in on Australians, in a way it doesn’t necessarily for other people in developed nations. You can feel it at any moment if you live in Australia, even if you live in the city. You wind the window down and there it is kind of leaning in, you know like a leering uncle. Always calling in the old favours. It does sort of impinge on us in a way. We forget other people don’t necessarily live in metropolitan areas where a bush fire can sweep through from a rural area the way it did in Sydney. Or the flooding that happens in Brisbane. Or you’ll be in a sort of shiny metropolitan city like Perth and really be thinking about the viability of the city from day to day because of the lack of water. I mean Perth’s been living on sea water for five years now (Adams 2015: np).

The intrusion of nature in this way disturbs the Romantic gaze and forces people into sometimes unwanted yet embodied relationships with nature, reaffirming the presence and agency of nature even in highly built places. Meanwhile, the long-standing connections between the Indigenous community and country disrupt inherited Romantic ideas of wild, pristine or untouched nature and interrogate ideas of nature, culture and the place of humans. By exploring the nature of cities in Australia writers might find sites of resistance to the problematic conceptions of a symbolic and ideal nature, reconsider imperial and destructive attitudes towards non-human nature in the city, and question the notions of landscape and wilderness.

Australian cities have a particularly close relationship with plants and animals as Tim Low discovered while writing his book *The New Nature*. Through the writing process, Low (2001) set out to observe Australian ecologies and was forced to question traditional conceptions of nature:

This book has ended up a surprise to me. It's not quite the one I set out to write. The trail of ideas kept me guessing until I ended up somewhere both familiar and new. I certainly never expected to be criticising wildlife-friendly gardening, or extolling the benefits of sewerage.

It strikes me that our concepts of nature often don't match what we actually see. Native animals are taken to prefer their natural habitats and natural foods when often that's not true. The words 'nature', 'natural' and 'wilderness' end up misleading rather than informing us about the natural world. We shouldn't presume that nature, merely by definition, wants to be natural. This book is an attempt to redefine that difficult word 'nature' by putting people in the picture and taking wilderness out (viv).

Low demonstrates the way writing about urban nature can extend and challenge existing understandings. His book *New Nature* (2001) provides a more complex picture of the city, showing species that thrive in urban environments, attracted by the concentration of resources, and others that are disproportionately damaged by human actions. These species are afforded protections or repudiated based on ascribed literary and cultural values. For example, even though magpies attack during mating season they are local icons allowed to inhabit our cities, while bat populations are seen as diseased or destructive and often dispersed from urban parks and gardens (Low 2001). Through Low's experiences in urban environments, he questions assumptions about the relationship between nature and culture, what it means to live with nature, and the symbolic ideals of rural and wild nature.

In similar ways, Muecke (2003) and Cooke (2011) question ideas of place, nature and landscape through considering Australian Aboriginal notions of country and nomadic experience. Muecke (2003: 282) uses the word landscape to describe 'cultural representations of country'. The term *country* suggests both the way Aboriginal people understand land as well as how these areas contribute to Australia's national identity. According to Muecke, in Aboriginal nomadic thinking the self and landscape are mutually dependant and each contributes to identity formation (287-288). The landscape is changed through the actions of the people who live in it. In return, the people must adapt to the conditions of a landscape, as well as to the climate and seasons, making the best of their challenges and benefits. This understanding of landscape places the human in an ecologically sustainable community where culture and nature are mutually dependant. Further, concepts such as 'country' can be used to re-negotiate the notion of landscape in nature writing, and construct narratives that are sensitive to both cultural and natural changes in urban environments. Muecke (2003: 291) identifies a need to create cultural products that reflect relationships with landscapes by writing circular narratives, involving movement, and encouraging multiple interpretations. In *No Road, Bitumen All the Way* (1997), Muecke works to create this kind of narrative. By juxtaposing multiple voices and types of narrative about his real and imagined travels through Australia, Muecke creates a ficto-critical text which is always questioning itself rather than settling on any one way of knowing the country.

Cooke adds to this discussion with his own interpretation of how nomadic thinking can influence his writing practice. He describes a 'nomadic poetics' as writing that resists definitive understandings and can respond to fluctuations (Cooke 2011: 231). He sees writings that are able to sense, understand and move with the changes occurring around us as *echocoherent*: reflecting the surrounding terrain and returning to the reader fainter than in the mind of the writer (Cooke 2011: 241-242). While Muecke primarily discusses

rural areas, Cooke identifies a need for city dwellers to embrace nomadic thinking. An ability to adapt to new landscapes is important in Australian cities where unexpected changes can occur suddenly. Natural disasters such as floods, fires and drought can devastate cities just as quickly as the rural areas that surround them.

[A] nomadic poetics of Australian places, or a light-footed travel across them, with an ever-present readiness to move on should certain situations demand our departure, can offer some promising alternatives for the ways in which we relate to, write about and manage contested and climactically variable locales (Cooke 2011: 231).

Peter Minter's book *Blue Grass* (2006) is presented by Cooke as an exemplary of nomadic poetics. Minter's use of locales to place his poems, his embodied imagery, and intertextual references create a sense that even urban environments are entangled natural/cultural spaces where the non-human is able to effect and alter place:

El Niño has this habit
Of leaving Sydney in buckets, rain
A paradise in theory, footpath literally conceptual
Like free dope, sunshine in jingles
Pegged right out of it, poems casually invisible
In torrents to the harbour (Minter 2006: L10-14).

This extract from the poem *Garden Estates* describes the experience of the Sydney Writers Walk during an El Nino year, placing the moment ecologically in time and space. For writers, the notion of nomadic poetics presents a possibility for new ways of engaging with nature that move beyond the idea of an ideal pastoral landscape. Nomadic writing remakes the human/non-human relationship, questioning the imperial conception of nature, discouraging an ideological separation between nature and culture, and replacing it with the idea of cities as a network of locales just as ecologically significant as those areas that lie outside the city.

Conclusion

The Australian city provides a context to rethink some of the ways nature has been imagined in writing since the eighteenth century and offers a way to write narratives that go beyond limited conceptions of non-human nature. Nature writers of the Romantic period renegotiated ideas of place, nature and self. Some writers questioned industrialisation, technology, and urbanisation and the ways these processes damaged nature. Others sought to connect or reconcile with nature in rural and wild areas, to understand the relationships between natural entities and ourselves. Nature was represented through ideals like the Arcadian utopia, rural idylls, and wilderness, yet such representations were frequently inflected with imperial aims that sought to dominate, possess and consume nature. Australian places were also negotiated by colonial writers through these imported Eurocentric understandings. Many writers celebrated nature, particularly idealised and European versions of the rural and wild, while also viewing nature as a commodity.

Contemporary nature writers share broadly similar goals to writers of the eighteenth century – to renegotiate conceptions of nature and examine the relationship of human beings to the environment. However, contemporary writers are more aware of damaged ecosystems and nature's fragility. The idea of reaffiliation with nature in new nature writing continues the Romantic tradition of reconnection with the non-human but has been broadened to reimagine both urban and less inhabited areas. Australian cities provide sites where writers might resist conceptions of nature as 'other', question symbolic ideals of nature and disrupt notions of wilderness and landscape. For writers such as Tim

Winton, Stuart Cooke and Tim Low, the city becomes a site to resist and renegotiate problematic conceptions inherited from Romanticism, particularly the idea that nature is other to the city, the concept of wilderness and the pastoral ideal.

Winton draws on Romanticism to construct nature as a subject within his fiction and resist an imperialist idea of nature as object or machine. Low renegotiates ideas of wilderness, domestication and the natural in his non-fiction. Instead he finds unusual relationships between urban and cultural processes, and the non-human others that exploit them. Muecke and Cooke draw on Indigenous notions of country and nomadic writing, and develop a practice that goes beyond observation to capture a subjective and influential nature in their work. In all cases the city acts as counter-point to a tradition of writing the rural idyll and wilderness. In Australian cities, non-human entities and evolving environments interrupt conceptions of urban nature as passive and force writers to renegotiate the relationships between human and non-human, and to modify, challenge or subvert their Romantic inheritance.

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