

THE DISTRIBUTION OF SETTLEMENT

*APPROPRIATION AND REFUSAL IN
AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE*

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INTRODUCTION: REFUSING SETTLER ARTIFACTS

What does it mean to read after refusal?¹ Texts by white settler Australian authors in the twentieth century often made manifest their uniqueness as writings of national import by constructing images of Aboriginal people and of Aboriginality.² Yet these representations of Aboriginality have frequently vexed and troubled a new generation of Aboriginal writers. These writers and scholars refuse the legacy of such representations. They refuse the literary hegemony of whiteness. They refuse a politics of Indigenous emancipation grounded in recognition. This is a book about Aboriginal literary refusal and the legacy of settler misrepresentation that it refuses.

The Distribution of Settlement offers a partial, episodic genealogy of settler Australian texts before turning to their contemporary legacy as it is refracted and refused within Aboriginal writing today. The book explores the process by which Aboriginal writers in Australia restore presence in light of the legacy of settler cultural appropriation that weighs so heavily on the history of Australian literature. This move has consequences for both Australian literary history and for reception and reading in the present: the legacy of white settler appropriation and the restoration of Aboriginality as presence, thought together, could inform an ethics of reading representations of Aboriginality in the living present, in a time of recognition.

The Distribution of Settlement is, in part, concerned with unpacking the legacy of settler literary appropriation of Indigenous culture. As I have suggested, such articulations are not simply literary works in some splendid aesthetic isolation: they are a means by which many Australians come to know Indigenous culture, whether through their own readerly curiosity or (more likely) through institutionalised curricula at secondary and tertiary levels. The genealogy of texts by non-Indigenous literary culture-makers weighs heavily on the history of the present as we apprehend the relation between settler reading and literary culture today. Part one of this book deploys a partial genealogy of twentieth-century Australian literature (with a particularly pertinent legacy) in order to argue for the relation between settler literary history and the preconditions for an ethics around appropriation, agency and refusal today.

Settler melancholia

This section describes settler melancholia, a logic that emerges with racial eugenics in Australia and, I argue, survives it. Melancholia can be defined as a psychic condition predicated on the destruction of that which is also fetishised. I argue that this is precisely the cultural logic of so many Australian representations of Indigenous people in (at least) the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, while government administrations were planning for the elimination of Aboriginal people through absorption or assimilation, cultural nationalists were publishing manifestos for the evolution of Australian nationalism. These manifestos were vested in cultural independence from “alien” elements (meaning both cultural independence from Britain and a white nationalist repudiation of migrants of color), the making of an independent Australian literature and Aboriginal cultural influence (though not, for the most

part, the presence of Aboriginal people). Mid-twentieth century white literary nationalists were, in other words, interested in producing a vision of Australian literature that employed Aboriginal culture in order to construct settler cultural independence. This is a process that has transnational correlation. As Chadwick Allen has suggested, “Aboriginal inhabitants of what are now First World nations have been forced to compete for Indigenous status with European settlers and their descendants eager to construct new identities that separate them from European antecedents.”³ One crucial literary movement of this kind (and the kernel of the account I give in part one of this book) was the Jindyworobak group, which flourished in the 1930s and 1940s and of which the poet Rex Ingamells was a founding exponent.

Part one of *The Distribution of Settlement* tells a partial story about the correlation between this movement and its peripheries and pervasive ideas about the place of Indigenous peoples in the settler nation-state.⁴ The methodology of this part of the book emerges from a fragmentation of projects that saw themselves as epic. Consider these lines from a long 1951 epic poem by Ingamells:

The tribes have gone from Countries that they knew,
gone from the rivers and creeks and waterholes.
Plain and hill and valley know them no more.
Yet I cannot have thought of this Land without them.
for me, this Land remembers the Vanished people.
There can be no gainsaying their rich, warm soul,
Surging so strongly a man may feel it still.
...
all the powers of Nature yet remember
the Land's Own People, mourning them forever,
glorifying their still gentle lives.⁵

Ingamells' pronouncement that Aboriginal people are "the Vanished people", a people whom the speaker is "mourning [] forever", vests itself in the spurious logic of the "doomed race" hypothesis – the pervasive conception that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century that asserted Aboriginal people in Australia (and native peoples elsewhere also) were inevitably to pass away as a people.⁶ Russell McGregor has argued that this pseudo-scientific conception began to recede from Australian government policy around the end of the Second World War.⁷ Yet, appropriation, undergirded by ideologies of Indigenous disappearance, is not merely a government policy and its capacious cultural form does not disappear with the turn from racial absorption to cultural assimilation around the early 1950s. For Ingamells, coupled with this is the idea that the settler writer "cannot have thought of this Land without them." For Ingamells and, as I will argue in part one of this book, for a whole tradition (and later, a kind of residual aftermath) of twentieth-century Australian writing, the ostensible disappearance of living Aboriginal people becomes the basis for white appropriation of Aboriginal culture and the adoption of an idea of Indigenous spirit that is understood to legitimise settler cultural specificity and independence. Indigenous disappearance, for Ingamells and his ilk, is a tragedy, but one that renders possible the appropriation of Indigeneity for settler subjects.

Xavier Herbert was a crucial peripheral to the Jindyworobaks. The celebration of Herbert's *Capricornia* on its 1938 publication by not only this white Australian Aboriginalist collective but also by H. G. Wells marks this text as something of an Australian milestone in putatively liberal humanist expressions of white affect toward Aboriginal people.⁸ A key stake of *The Distribution of Settlement* is the unsettlement of such liberal accounts. Where the Australian public sphere often seeks a balanced celebration of settler

liberalism, this book insists that such an account is blind if it does not acknowledge the genealogy of appropriation that attends it. As late as the 1970s, Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* was celebrated by many Australian progressives (and some conservatives) wishing to align themselves with an interest in Aboriginal land rights. This is a formation that aligns with other constellations. The celebration of Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* and Nicholas Roeg's film *Walkabout* (to cite only two examples) as syllabus texts in the 1990s for high school education aimed at sympathetic (but arguably patronising) representations of Aboriginal people and extends this chronology somewhat.⁹ Such ostensible "celebrations" are also explicitly concerned with "mourning," their object of fetishisation.

This making of settler literatures is also implicated in wider modalities of elimination and replacement. Patrick Wolfe's often cited formulation that "[s]ettler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies," is often not glossed in full. He continues: "the split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonisation. The colonisers come to stay – invasion is a structure and not an event."¹⁰ I want to suggest that structures of dispossession are also and paradoxically structured around eventfulness. Settler colonialism is also predicated on structures of repetition. Wolfe knew this well when he would later insist that, "[s]ettler colonialism destroys to replace."¹¹ One vision of this replacement is of a vanishing and a forgetting, wherein Indigenous culture is covered over by the transplanted motifs and practices of the imported settler culture.

Replacement is often attended by ideologies of innocence and non-culpability. Mark Rifkin's notion of "settler common sense," identifies this as a mode of dispossession that operates in the following way:

[settler] projects of elimination and replacement become geographies of everyday non-Native occupancy that do not understand themselves as predicated on colonial occupation or on a history of settler-Indigenous relation (even though they are).¹²

The interface between elimination and appropriation unfolds where appropriation embraces the Indigenous cultural logics that it is also destroying to replace. What happens, I ask, when replacement also involves fetishism, even apparent celebration? But what does it mean for such modes of replacement to be vested in “mourning” and even “glorifying” Indigenous cultures that they see themselves as replacing? Often, settler common sense depends on a cultural geopolitics not only predicated on the non-presence of Indigenous people, but also on a mode of appropriation that would appear to conjure a false Indigenous presence that is available to colonisers. One might usefully read this notion through what Robert Dixon calls the sense of the appropriative process of “plagiarism.” For Dixon, “[c]olonial texts...are built up by plagiarism, whose Latin root, *plagiarius* or kidnapper, resonates with the history of indentured labour...The plagiarism performed by colonial texts is a theft of cultural materials, another form of blackbirding, a kind of captivity.”¹³ As Patrick Brantlinger has observed, “even positive conceptions of ‘primitive societies’ [are] imperialist and racist forms of othering that entail ideological temptations, at least toward eliminating the primitive altogether. After all, once it is ‘gone,’ it can continue to be mourned and celebrated in both art and ‘salvage ethnography.’”¹⁴ Yet the settler “mourning” for the (imagined) disappearance of the Indigenous other, celebrated as it was by Ingamells, is as much melancholic as it is a matter of working through. Within this corresponding logic,

one can even perceive a perverse dialectic wherein the thesis of the doomed primitive, saved by its antithetical modification, leads to a sublated synthesis to be extolled not by and in Indigenous life but by and through the white men who had appropriated their culture – reproducing a negative image of Indigeneity.

The logic of settler common sense as mourning and appropriation develops simultaneously and, with overlaps in anthropology, literature and native administration. “Curiously enough,” writes Renato Rosaldo, “agents of colonialism – officials, constabulary officers, missionaries, and other figures from whom anthropologists ritually dissociate themselves – often display nostalgia for the colonised culture as it was ‘traditionally.’”¹⁵ While cultural nationalists called upon Aboriginal subjects to act as the seat of their primitivist cathexis and the source for their fetish of national independence, assimilation demanded that Indigenous social life be transformed in forms commensurable to “civilised” settler norms. Simultaneously, literary nationalists would repeat the trope of the death and mourning of Aboriginal characters – a process metonymic of constructive substitution and the mourning for which it stands. From the violence perpetrated on Coonardoo in the novel of that name to the death of Tocky in *Capricornia*, indeed, from the uncritical calls for the mourning of Aboriginal “passing” away espoused by Ingamells to the later Herbert, fantasies of Aboriginal elimination and replacement are tragically lamented but nonetheless pathologically returned to in so many non-Aboriginal representations of Indigeneity in Australia.¹⁶ To narrate the death of Indigenous characters as tragic is nonetheless to narrate elimination – a genocidal cultural imaginary.

This process of appropriation through fantasised death and replacement recalls Rosaldo’s notion of “imperialist nostalgia.” For Rosaldo, many imperialisms display a melancholic desire for

the culture of the colonised that they are nonetheless attempting to destroy. Rosaldo chooses the term “nostalgia” because of its etymological link with homeland: “from the Greek *nostos*, a return home, and *algos* a painful condition.”¹⁷ In the logic of settler common sense, imperialist nostalgia renders the extractive operation in capacious modes – *nostos* and *algos* at once. For Freud, melancholia stands for the appropriation into the ego of the simultaneous love and hatred of a lost loved person. As he put it, with the death of this love object, “the result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement on to a new one,” but rather, “the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego.”¹⁸ The settler subject, in having enacted genocidal fantasies and practices against Indigenous people, comes to a position of self-loathing in so far as the ideal object of Indigeneity was also a fantasised avenue to settler belonging. But this is not a story about settler self-loathing only. Since *nostos* stands for homeland, this melancholic condition also implies the appropriation of Indigenous country in the process of the incorporation of the image of Indigeneity into the settler ego. Settler melancholia becomes the enabling factor in whiteness’s liberal alibi.

That Ingamells’s poetry points to a perpetual and sustained mourning is telling because the logic of imperialist nostalgia, as it shades into a melancholic mode, is its perpetual failure to replace – its insistent fetishisation of a substitute Indigeneity. To be sure, there are events, structures, and practices within settler-colonial histories and cultures that are purely and simply genocidal, with little nostalgia for Indigenous cultures. But, in its frequent mode of fetishistic appropriation, settler common sense is also given to repetition compulsion, with its inability to replace based on

the inadequacy of either its project of elimination (in the face of Indigenous resilience) or its own cathection/fetishisation of Indigeneity.

In this way, settler appropriation is structured around the, at turns, quasi-celebration, appropriation, and fetishisation of Aboriginal culture and country that accompanies and bolsters the lived experience of invasion and theft that has structured the settler colony since contact. Imperialist nostalgia is melancholic and such melancholic nostalgia is the psychic structure of guilt aimed at the exculpation of the settler subject. By imagining appropriation as a tribute to Aboriginality, the melancholic and nostalgic character of this particular form of settler common sense makes fetishism a psychic alibi for theft. Australian settler colonialism, with its literary and cultural nationalisms, is structured around appropriation, exoneration, and replacement. As Jeanine Leane remarks, “[c]ultural appropriation is not empathy. It is stealing someone else’s story, someone else’s voice.”¹⁹ In (spite of) its melancholia – a form of ill feeling directed at the self – appropriation is nonetheless the alibi of theft. Part one of this book tells a necessarily partial story, unpacking this legacy.

Artifactualities

If Herbert, Prichard, and Ingamells are (amongst others) central figures in the partial history told in part one of *The Distribution of Settlement*, it is not only because of their reflection of the cultural aspirations and anxieties of their time; it is because their texts are artifacts that have an afterlife. Herbert, along with Prichard, Ingamells, Vance and Nettie Palmer, and other such liberal writers of the fiction of Aboriginality in their day, distribute a legacy that is far from only passed or past (like the Aboriginal subjects whose

doom their era assumed). Their legacy remains in contemporary texts amidst much else – from Midnight Oil albums to such popular films as Baz Luhrmann’s *Australia*.

Settler colonialism is indeed a structure; which is to say, an ongoing site of elimination. Yet, while Wolfe’s structuralist thesis is apt in this way, there is not one but several competing forms of elimination, and some of these combine in strange modes with fetishisation and celebration. If, as I have suggested, there is an eventfulness to such structures of feeling as settler melancholia, Wolfe’s “split tensing,” conjoining “were” and a parenthetical “(are),” underscores the way logics of disappearance cannot be evacuated by periodisation. There is an eventfulness to structure – even when it aims to eliminate. Settlement, as Wolfe articulates, is “a structure not an event,” particularly where the event is relegated to the past moment of contact and initial colonisation.²⁰ In making this important claim, Wolfe contrasts it with the theorisation of colonialism in Marxist terms as the extraction of surplus value from native labor. Yet, while settler colonies remain predicated on the logic of elimination, the lived experience of settlers is not always given to conscious recognition of the sustained will behind this logic of elimination.²¹

The governmentality that haunts and unsettles the lives of the Indigenous people who endure its legacy demands that difference either disappear or take up its proper place in the ordering of settler states – with their postcolonial aspirations. As such, critique of the return of such haunting modes of citation necessitates an account of the temporal logic of the artifacts producing and produced by them. Artifactuality is a term I adapt from anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli; this term functions to suggest that such classic ethnographic texts, such as those of Spencer and Gillen (her specified exemplum), A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, or A. P. Elkin, possess

juridical authority as texts rendered crucial in the veridiction of descent, identification, and communal recognition required by the juridical apparatus of Native Title.²² Classic ethnographies have “an *artifactuality*” in Native Title discourse, such that: “land commissioners, native title commissioners, anthropologists, writers, and filmmakers, read, refer to and defer to such texts as that which captured ‘unspoilt *Arunta* men.’”²³ Just as such classic ethnographic texts have an artifactuality that solicits the identification and fetishisation of Indigeneity, so I would suggest that literary representations and their paratexts also carry with them an artifactuality.

Artifactuality adjudicates, evaluates, and captures subjects, deciding on the authenticity of identities – in particular, Indigenous ones – on the basis of their comportment to past constructions of Indigeneity generated by settlers.²⁴ Artifactuality is, I suggest, deployed across the virtual space of the settler colonial popular: it is the field against which appropriation of indigeneity by settler subjects was (and continues to be) made possible and it frames the specificity of the multicultural form of the settler colonial literary canon. The trajectory from canonical representation to its contemporary resonances produces inextricably sticky concatenations. Artifactuality doesn’t only relate to the imaginary of Aboriginal tradition and so-called “(un)spoiled” individuations of it, but it also refers to the artifactual inheritance of the colonial archive. Part two of this book exemplifies the relation between the archive of such representations as they weigh heavily on contemporary Indigenous life; part three of this book continues this practice. Indigenous and settler subjects are often compelled to desire and identify with either an impossible object of authenticity or with a normative whiteness that refuses access and precipitates cultural disintegration. The spectre of past essences emergent from

the settler colonial canon and its archive means rendering any authenticity a vanishing impossibility, consistently out of reach of those settler and Indigenous subjects whose identification it nonetheless solicits. And it is important to note: this vanishing image reproduces the double time of settler-colonial melancholia. Just as settler-colonial futures are premised on elimination, so artifactuality attempts to foreclose the possibility of comporting identity to the authenticity that the traces of the archive invents and insists upon. As Povinelli puts it, an “impossible demand” is placed on Indigenous people, “that they desire and identify in a way that just so happens, in an uncanny convergence of interests, to fit the national and legal imaginary of multiculturalism,” and in doing so, they are further called upon to “ghost this being for the nation.”²⁵

Appropriation fetishises a difference that it nonetheless demands stray not too far from the individualism that undergirds late-liberal settler desires for homogeneity as a supposed path to vital and economic prosperity. Such artifactual expectations of Indigeneity are imposed on the imaginaries of Indigenous subjects and on the expectations that settler subjects and settler society has of them. Marcia Langton calls this logic “Aboriginality;” the way Indigenous identity is produced not only by Aboriginal people but in relation to the expectations of non-Indigenous inhabitants of the same settler (post)colony in which they find themselves and the artifactual history of representations from which such expectations emerge.²⁶ As Langton puts it, in the Australian context “[t]he most dense relation is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors.”²⁷ Such an artifact serves not only to produce a field of authenticity in relation to which Indigenous subjects are exhorted to desire and identify; it also produces a repertoire of ideas about

Aboriginality – some of which are apt to be appropriated while others become subject to elimination.

Artificiality, in its relation to Aboriginality, then, describes the role that representations of identity emergent from the canon and from the archive play in determining the field of enunciation within which people can desire and identify in the settler colony today. Artificiality frames the settler demand that Indigenous peoples identify with the nation's liberal normativity, even as they fetishise appropriated forms of Indigenous difference – those made safe for the settler nation. Methodologically, attention to the relation between archives and canonical texts allows us to see how each functions as an artifact and how such artifacts remain and return in the social imaginaries that produce them, often long after the static conception of the other that they conjure has reformed in a process of continuity and change.²⁸

A crucial consequence of thinking Indigeneity and its spectres through the methodology of the artifact is that it brings out the presence of settler imaginaries as they bear upon Indigenous lives and it does so across time and space. Archival artifacts illuminate the eventfulness from which the structure of settler colonialism cites. Certainly, settler colonialism is structured by ongoing dispossession and is not encapsulated by a singular event of colonisation that can be relegated firmly to the past. Yet the structure of dispossession indexed by the archival artifact nonetheless possesses an eventfulness, and this eventfulness (re)structures the mode of dispossession by which settler colonialism manifests itself. In so doing, the eventful potential of the artifact makes possible contradictory capacities in the structure of settlement and the imaginaries of settler discourse that reproduces it.²⁹ Artificiality compels a simultaneous desire for “authentic” Aboriginality alongside the compulsion that Indigenous subjects be assimilated to the norms

of the settler state. Settler-colonial structures of artifactuality provide the reservoir of memory within which certain imaginaries are made eventful and others are disavowed. Some artifacts are taken as proper to the present of liberal multiculturalism even as they are manufactured as wholly distinct from the relics of a more overtly eliminatory logic that can be safely relegated to the past and periodised away.

The Opaque and the Visible

The residues of artifactuality and the Indigenous practice of agentially refusing them are the subject of the third part of this book. Settler melancholia, *The Distribution of Settlement* contends, must be forgotten (to use Chris Healy's term).³⁰ In part three, I argue for a readerly ethic of opacity, revelation, and presence through exemplary readings of Aboriginal writing today. Indigenous scholars such as Glen Coulthard and Audra Simpson have begun to deploy in the North American academic context practices of refusal of settler states that resist any reduction to amelioration, getting along, or subsisting through the reparative mechanisms of the settler state.³¹ Coulthard and, differently, Taiaiake Alfred have shown how gestures of settling (so to speak) with the liberal consensus on Indigenous politics produce striking failures and (in Povinelli's words) even abandonment – in the innocuous form of under-resourcing and a lack of consultation – by the settler state of the very reparative mechanisms it seeks to lay out.³² Aileen Moreton-Robinson has shown how modes of redress through Native Title risk the suspension of sovereignty. Native Title, as a regime of governance, can function to extinguish and re-acquire Indigenous land.³³ How do literary texts by Aboriginal writers also refuse those representations that form the legacy of this liberal

consensus? This question is explored through close reading of Aboriginal literary refusal in part three of this book.

The Jindyworobaks and their coterie vested their literary nationalism in the claim that white settler writers could tap into the culture of Aboriginal people – that they could make visible (and therefore, political) what was not theirs to claim. Visibility, amidst much else, evokes the dialectic between politics and policing that makes and iterates both emancipatory potential and the insistence of settler melancholic appropriation. This tension between the politics of visibility and a certain right to opacity and refusal can be seen to transpire within what Jacques Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible (*partager du sensible*).³⁴ This dialectic presents both emancipatory potential and the possible insistence of adjudication on difference. For Rancière, what is made visible determines the political. When intersubjective worlds of kin and collectivity are not given to political accounting, the demand for visibility of such social worlds can be a political act. As Rancière puts it, limning the concept at length:

The distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, and of noise and speech constitutes what I call the *distribution of the sensible*. Politics consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard.³⁵

The engagement of readers by texts about Indigeneity “introduces into [the common] new subjects and objects” and “render[s] visible

what had not been” perceptible even when identity is evoked indirectly and engagements made covertly with the assumptions of the settler common.

For Rancière, the political emerges through the rendering visible of shared worlds the other does not see.³⁶ Yet, the refusal of such visibility is often as apt as Rancière’s idea of politics within Indigenous social spaces. And this is not only because of the need to shelter the secret and the sacred. Sometimes what Rancière describes as politics (the manifestation of shared worlds that have heretofore been invisible) is the antithesis of the practice that grounds so many Aboriginal claims to sovereignty and autonomy. Sometimes this knowledge is secret and sacred. At other times it is simply sovereign and not to be shared. In the latter case it should not, as Simpson suggests, “structur[e] yet another expectation of a culturally ‘pure’ Indigenous subject.”³⁷ The point, then, is not that Indigenous knowledge is sovereign because it adheres to settler expectations of purity or even that what is withheld is necessarily sacred (though it might be). The point is that sovereign rights to cultural knowledge – or simply the autonomy of relations of kin and community – can be compromised by forced visibility whether they are held to be sacred or not. Indigenous politics in its aesthetic mode, then, need not be purely and simply enabled by either visibility or opacity – each is a right that can serve the interests of Indigenous collectivities in its own way. Refusal moves insistently alongside visibility, equally constitutive of the right to political agency.

The right to refuse visibility (as a politics) is not only a question of a refusal of intrusion; it is also a refusal of the dominance of settler forms of reckoning Indigenous modes of life and community. As Aileen-Moreton Robinson has suggested: “[f]or Indigenous people, white possession is not unnamed, unmarked, or invisible;

it is hypervisible.”³⁸ Politics as manifestation of a shared world (in Rancière’s sense), when it does manifest, enters a distribution of the sensible that is determined by settler institutions and modes of white possession with particular juridical and governmental forms and histories. To be sure, with the Mabo Decision, the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* was overturned in Australia in 1992. Yet, insofar as the Mabo Decision also established the doctrine of *radical title*, it retained the Crown Right to reacquisition of Indigenous lands. As Moreton-Robinson describes it:

Effectively what the High Court did in *Mabo* was invent a rule of extinguishment that did not exist under common law, to allow for inconsistent grants to extinguish native title prior to the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.³⁹

The emergence of the Native Title system with Mabo, then, established functions in the most general of terms by selectively recognizing Indigenous claims to land when they are commensurate to artifactual conditions of recognizability and while reserving the possibility of settler extinguishment witnessed in the 1997 Wik Decision and at such crucial moments of governmentality as the Northern Territory Intervention; the latter similarly involved the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act to allow intervention into communities.⁴⁰

The politics of refusal is instructive here. It could serve to redistribute the relation between Indigenous political assertion as a mode of rendering visible and Indigenous political resistance to visibility. As Simpson suggests, it is not only through rendering visible but also through refusal that Indigenous politics enacts the work of agency. Simpson notes that Indigenous subjects engaged

with settler reception might ask, “what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?”⁴¹ Here Simpson is writing about her engagements with her own, Kahnawà:ke Mohawk people. Aboriginal writers, such as Kim Scott (Noongar) and Alexis Wright (Waanyi), engage with their communities, but also publish widely and are widely read by non-Indigenous readers globally. For these writers, what to reveal is similarly vital. And when texts such as these enter the pedagogical space, refusal is more frequent when it is of non-Indigenous legacies and the readers that fetishise them. But, I suggest, refusal can also be a provocation, a suggestion, an invitation to do more – to be alongside without benefit, to listen hard and read more closely.⁴²

Refusal, then, is a mode of relation that is not reducible to a politics predicated on settler recognition. Texts that function by refusal manifest a framework that calls upon readers – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – to consider anew the conditions by which Indigeneity is known and by whom. In so doing, they challenge the representation of Indigeneity that has been bequeathed by canonical settler depictions. In this way, refusal to conform to this canonical tradition functions as an analysis of settler colonialism and its literary form. Where much Australian literary and popular representation has proffered an appropriated and constructed vision of Indigeneity, texts by authors like Scott and Wright refuse to conform to these artifactual stereotypes and their terms. In doing so, they can challenge readers toward novel realisations. Tarah, one of my most perceptive students, writes of my Indigenous Literatures subject: “It has always been clear that this subject is not for us. The novels, poems, play and other texts that we have studied were written by and for Indigenous peoples.”⁴³ This is the most thoughtful formulation of a concern that I hear often from students and indeed, more widely, from Indigenous readers of

non-Indigenous literature. Readers (students or otherwise), less critical and attentive than Tarah, often posit an essential difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous “cultures,” which come to represent a historicist context for the texts they read and engage with. They, at times, recount essentialised (and contorted) versions of Dreaming stories that elude textual grounding as such – covering over the modernity of Indigenous endurance in the text and beyond. Yet these texts are also public culture. They are published and distributed to wide audiences and written – at least partly – in English. As Bundjalung author Melissa Lucashenko notes, the Indigenous author “can’t [always] make [her]self available to readers,” but is quick to assert that the texts themselves will, at their best, “shift that readership slightly.”⁴⁴ I suggest that often, though not always, this shift in readership comes about because such texts – without reducing to a simple fetishism for difference and authenticity – alter a set of expectations about Indigenous difference that has been set through the artifactual legacy of melancholic misrepresentation.

One concrete mode of visibility arises in the codification of the study of representations of Australian and Indigenous images and things. Currently the Australian Research Council (ARC) divides the study of the literature of this continent into two “Field of Research” (FoR) codes: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literature and Australian Literature (excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literature).⁴⁵ While some might speculate about the effect of this governmentalised heuristic on, say, readership, literacy, or other such national priorities, it is also possible to read the curious reification (segregation, perhaps) that this division or distribution produces. Within this institutional binary, Australian literary studies can risk becoming a national project produced to the exclusion of Aboriginal literary self-representation

even as it provides a space (and arguably a segregated one) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Indigenous scholars challenge, refuse and critique the settler-colonial nationalism of the cultural governmentality embedded within this very bifurcation.⁴⁶ But, if we are to methodologically exceed the terms of this institutional segregation, how should we read across Aboriginal and non-Indigenous representations of Aboriginality? How might settlers improve teaching from a contrapuntal process of reading between these separated “codes.” *The Distribution of Settlement* performs practices of reading that engage the relation between settler appropriation and Indigenous response to this legacy.

While Aboriginal writers often address their own communities (“these books are not for us”), for many settler readers, settler artifacts of Aboriginality stick to and on the work of Indigenous writing, even when refutation or refusal of such artifactual literary legacies is not a text’s main concern.⁴⁷ Waanyi writer Alexis Wright – in scholarly circles, perhaps the most successful Aboriginal writer alongside Kim Scott in the last twenty years – for instance, is careful to refuse suggestions of the influence of Herbert’s *Capricornia*, despite the obvious resonances evoked in the title (as one example to begin with) of her own Miles Franklin – winning epic, *Carpentaria*. Not an anxiety of influence by any measure, Wright’s novel manifests – in Audra Simpson’s sense – a refusal of *Capricornia* and its legacy.⁴⁸ Scott echoes a similar ethos in *Kayang and Me*, when he notes that his own practice as a writer is in some ways a corrective to the kind of representations experienced by previous generations. Again, Herbert figures: “I also remember, not long before he died, seeing a copy of *Poor Fellow My Country* opened beside my father’s empty chair. I’d guess my father could identify with Prindy, but where was the tribal elder to guide him?”⁴⁹ This is not influence on Scott’s part, I would

suggest. This moment in *Kayang and Me* suggests a productive refusal. Scott's texts manifest a robust refusal of the artifactual legacy that emerges from the settler-colonial archive.

Part three of this book explores the way Indigenous writers tactically refuse the problematic tradition of appropriation and misrepresentation that derives from the settler nationalism that produces settler melancholia. So, while it is not my argument that Aboriginal writing (as if one could generalize about it homogeneously) is simply a response to white representation of Indigeneity, it *is*, however, my contention that a whole ethos of thinking Aboriginality emerges from the refusal of this sticky settler artificiality that seeps into the country we walk (indeed, trespass) on today.

Aboriginal literary responses to the history of non-Indigenous representation of Aboriginality must be read in the context of the settler-colonial relation in which they are often caught. Settler melancholia as a structure is, as we have seen, vested in elimination and settler narcissism. It is those processes of representing Aboriginal people that need to be subject to an active forgetting (to again evoke Healy's terms), and this logic of Aboriginal refusal functions, at times, to precipitate such productive forgetting. Yet forgetting is also, in the psychoanalytic sense, repression and repression always retains the trace of the repressed. Wright's active disengagement does not erase Herbert. Rather, it can (and, I think, should) shift how we read both representations of and by Aboriginal people written by non-Aboriginal writers. Particularly, it can and should shift how non-Aboriginal readers engage with the fetishised collective hallucination that is the settler tradition of representation in which settlers are always inevitably mired. Reading Aboriginal literature in light of its tactical engagement and disengagement with white writing on non-Aboriginal

literature has, I think, a decolonizing potential in the sphere of literary representation.

Chapter Descriptions

In chapter one, “Appropriation,” I examine four exemplary case studies of appropriative settler representation from the mid-twentieth century. The artifacts circulate around the cases of anthropologist A. P. Elkin, lay-ethnographer W. E. Harney, literary publisher P. R. Stephensen and, finally, Ingamells himself. The chapter establishes and exemplifies the terms of appropriation and settler melancholia theorised so far. Chapter two, “Bastardy,” provides a partial reading of the writing of Xavier Herbert to the politics of settler liberalism, particularly in the role it envisaged for white males. In his letters, Herbert explicitly connected miscegenation to white literary genius – a logic played out, thwarted and tragically mourned in his literary works. Chapter three turns to the role that settler femininity played in the writing of artifactuality of melancholia and appropriation. Examining Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo* alongside the films of Charles Chauvel, the chapter, “Mumae’s Gaze” seeks to interrogate how white women were symbolically conscripted into the settler project of assimilation and subordination that attended Aboriginal people’s lives.

From chapter four, “The White Gaze and its Artifacts,” analysis turns to the relation between these representational forms and their legacies in the present. There I assemble a reading of the 2009 articles in which conservative journalist Andrew Bolt vilified Aboriginal public figures by connecting the kind of rhetorical gestures he, there, relies on to the legacy of key technologies of the Aborigines Department archive. Chapter five, “Opacity and Refusal,” turns to literary tools of analysis and revisits the vexed question of the intentional fallacy and the “death of the author”

in the context of Aboriginal writing through a reading of a Tara June Winch story, before turning to ideas of refusal. The chapter closes with a reading of a story by Tony Birch that serves to illustrate how some forms of refusal can facilitate a subtle and perhaps more effective form of engagement on the part of non-Indigenous readers. Chapter six, “Refusing *Capricornia*,” turns directly to the artifactual legacy of Herbert’s writing and assembles a reading of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* as a refusal of that legacy. There I argue that, while Wright’s text does not reduce to such a refusal, nonetheless, much can be revealed by contrasting the treatment of figurations of Aboriginal presence, endurance, and belief in either text. Chapter six, “Need I Repeat?” examines the use of the settler-colonial archive in Kim Scott’s *Benang*. There I argue that Scott deconstructs and redeploys certain key tropes from that archive in such a way as to question the artifactual legacy of ideas of Aboriginal mobility and rethink their relation to resistance.

To read with an attentiveness to the artifactual nature of settler representation, against the exceptional project of white influence and Indigenous response, might be to manifest Jacques Derrida’s concept of writing “under erasure” (*sous rature*) – now as a mode of reading unsettlement. For Derrida, to place a term under erasure is to recognise its simultaneously insurmountable necessity alongside its contingent insufficiency. What could emerge from this non-linear practice of reading Australian Literature is ~~Australian Literature~~: in which thinking “Australia” is a necessary but insufficient condition for considering this settler-colonial political, legal, economic, social, and imaginary construct – and thinking it *otherwise*. Australia here, remains legible (one can read the crossed-out text), but it no longer stands for a homogeneous national polity and is, instead, revealed as the ongoing settler project that it has always been, both capacious and partial, occlusive, and able

to be exceeded. *The Distribution of Settlement* aims at contributing to the possible redistribution of unsettlement, which may be to say a way of reading Australian literature and culture with settler Australia under erasure.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of refusal, see Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2014, and “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship,” *Junctures* 9, 2007, pp. 67–80.
- 2 One could cite, for instance, key texts by Katharine Susannah Prichard, Xavier Herbert and Patrick White, to name but a few within a capacious constellation.
- 3 Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 8, 28–36. On this point, see also Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999.
- 4 Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002, p. 6.
- 5 Rex Ingamells, *The Great South Land*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1951, p. 317.
- 6 Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003.
- 7 Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Hypothesis, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1997. I have elsewhere written about the continuities implicit in this idea and policy, taking issue with aspects of McGregor’s argument; see “Interventions: Race, Culture, and Population via the Thought of A. P. Elkin,” in *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, winter, 2016.
- 8 Wells to Herbert, 23 October 1939, Box 32, Fryer Library Mss 83.
- 9 Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Coonardoo*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1929; *Walkabout* (film), Nicholas Roeg (dir.), Madman, Sydney, 1971; Jeanine Leane, “Other People’s Stories: When is Writing Cultural Appropriation?,” *Overland*, no. 225, 2016, pp. 41–45.
- 10 Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, Cassell, London, 1999, p. 2.
- 11 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, p. 388.

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- 12 Mark Rifkin, "Settler Common Sense," *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3–4, 2013, pp. 322–40, 324.
- 13 Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation, and Colonial Governance*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2001, p. 101.
- 14 Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, p.189.
- 15 Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1989, p. 69.
- 16 Prichard, *Coonardoo*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1990; Herbert, *Capricornia*. Publicist Press, Sydney, 1938, Rprt. Angus and Robertson, 1938; Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, Collins, Sydney, 1975; *Walkabout* (film), 1971.
- 17 Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, p. 71.
- 18 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader*, Vintage, London, 1995, p. 586.
- 19 Leane, *Overland*, p. 45.
- 20 Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p. 2.
- 21 Indeed, such is the case also, though differently, with *arrivants*, as Jodi Byrd – borrowing from Kamau Brathwaite – names those migrant subjects, particularly people of colour, who experience arrival in the settler colony otherwise than is evinced in the arrogant claims of white settlers. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011, p. xix.
- 22 Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*, p. 109.
- 23 Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*, p. 109.
- 24 Elizabeth Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011, pp. 47–74; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "7000 B. C.: Apparatus of Capture," in Brian Massumi (trans.), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, pp. 424–73.
- 25 Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*, p. 8.
- 26 A related concept is what Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra call "Aboriginalism." For them, this concept is a white invention, comparable to Said's notion of orientalism, in so far as it generates a series of stereotypes and expectations and imposes them on their unsuspecting objects. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1990. pp. 35–7.
- 27 Marcia Langton, "Well I heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things," Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1993, p. 33.

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- 28 W. E. H. Stanner, "Continuity and Change Among the Australian Aborigines," *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Black Inc, Collingwood, 2010, pp. 146–171.
- 29 I have in mind here a settler colonial form of what Louis Althusser calls the "reproduction of the conditions of production," which we might limn as the "reproduction of the conditions of dispossession" and, indeed, elimination. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy*, (trans) Ben Brewster, *Monthly Review Press*, New York, 1971, pp. 127–89.
- 30 Chris Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008.
- 31 Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2014.
- 32 For Alfred's critique of settler liberalism, see his *Peace, Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
- 33 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2015.
- 34 See, for instance, Jacques Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics,' *Theory and Event*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2001; "The Politics of Literature," in *The Politics of Literature*, Polity, Cambridge, 2011.
- 35 Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetics as Politics," *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Polity, New York, 2009, pp. 24–25.
- 36 Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event*, p. 10.
- 37 Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, p.105.
- 38 Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, p. xiii.
- 39 Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, p. 68.
- 40 For a detailed account of this development, see, for instance, Elizabeth Strakosch, *Neoliberal Indigenous Policy: Settler Colonialism and the 'Post-Welfare' State*, Palgrave, Hampshire, 2015.
- 41 Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal," p. 78.
- 42 Tanja Dreher, "Eavesdropping with Permission: the Politics of Listening for Safer Speaking Spaces," *borderlands*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1–21.
- 43 Tarah Arevalo, Email, 24 June 2016. Tarah expressed her wishes to allow me to cite her work. She was shown a draft of this work prior to any public communication.
- 44 Melissa Lucashenko, "Interview," in Anne Brewster, *Giving this Country a Memory*, Cambria, Amherst, 2015, p. 127.

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- 45 The FoR Codes were as follows: Australian Literature excl. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literature (200502) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literature (200501). These codes are set by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and taken up by the Australian Research Council.
- 46 In Australia alone, one could point, for instance, to the powerful work of scholars such as Jeanine Leane and Victoria Grieves, who traverse Indigenous studies and the history of literary representations of Aboriginality by settler writers. Jeanine Leane, “Tracking Our Country in Settler Literature,” *JASAL*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2014, pp. 1–17. See for instance Grieves, “A True Child of Terra Nullius?: Reflections on Patrick White, ‘Belltrees’, History and the ‘Station Complex’ in Australia”, in Ashcroft, B. and Vanden Driesen, C. (eds), *Patrick White Centenary: The Legacy of a Prodigal Son*, Cambridge Publishers, London, 2014.
- 47 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Routledge, London, 2013.
- 48 Audra Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal; Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.
- 49 Kim Scott, “Wilomin Noongar,” in Scott and Hazel Brown, *Kayang and Me*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2005, p. 13.