

Whatever Season Reigns...

Reflection Statement

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In primary school I discovered “Land of the Rainbow Gold”, a collection of Classic Australian Bush Poetry compiled by Mildred M Fowler. As a child growing up in the homogenised landscape of suburban Australia I was captured by the romantic notion of Australia’s bush heritage. It was a national identity seeded in our rural beginnings; and much like Banjo Patterson wistful musings I always rather fancied I’d like to “change with Clancy, like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go”¹; Many seasons later I returned to these poems for inspiration for my major work “Whatever Season Reigns...”²

On revisiting the works of writers such as Paterson and Lawson I was struck with how little I actually shared with these voices that were deemed to have forged Australia’s “literary legend” and our national identity³. The Australian narrative was one shaped by male experiences. There was no room for women. Only the token “drovers wife”⁴ or “army lass”⁵ proved anomalous to the trend but were not afforded the same complexity as their male counterparts. According to Kijas “Despite their invisibility in much nationalist and historical narrative, women in their diversity have been active historical protagonists across outback landscapes.”⁶ My work, appropriating the short

¹ Paterson, AB. “Clancy of *The Overflow*.” Land Of The Rainbow Gold. Ed. Fowler, Mildred M. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1967. Print.

² Moore, JS. (1864) *Spring Life - Lyrics*. Sydney: Reading and Wellbank.

³ Simon, C. (2014). *Banjo Paterson: is he still the bard of the bush?*. [Internet]. theguardian.com. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/australia-culture-blog/2014/jan/30/banjo-paterson-poet-anniversary> [12/06/15]

⁴ Lawson, H. (2015). *The Drovers Wife* [Internet] eastoftheweb.com. Available from: <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/DrovWife.shtml>[05/08/15]

⁵ Lawson, H. (2015) *Send Round The Hat – The Pretty Girl In the Army*. [Internet] words home. Available from: <http://www.telelib.com/authors/L/LawsonHenry/prose/sendroundthehat/prettygirlarmy.html>[05/06/15]

⁶ Dr Kijas, J. (2003). *An Historical Study of Women and Outback Landscapes for the Cultural Heritage Division of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services* [Internet] nsw.gov.au. Available from: www.environment.nsw.gov.au [04/03/15]

story form used by Henry Lawson, aims to subvert the traditional voice of the male protagonist, and explore this silenced female Australian perspective.

Ironically, it is this representation of the Australian male's relationship with the land in Lawson's "His Country After All"⁷ that has particularly influenced the voices in my text. The narrative explores the male relationship with the landscape; displaying alienation and fear of the land, and the notion of being intrinsically tied to it. Thus, creating a constant tension between disjunct of these two factors⁸. The dual narrative highlights the dynamics of the feminine and masculine realms. The central personas demonstrate the juxtaposed relationships with the land. While the male voice becomes increasingly alienated as he loses control over the landscape, the female voice develops a compassionate affinity with her environment. It's a landscape whose complexity of strength and fragility mirrors her own female struggles and is unified in the enduring nature and otherness to the male voice, "*she had faced dry like this before and would no doubt again. So as she survives we do too.*"⁹ This acts as a counterpoint to that of the male voice. Filled with resentment and frustration with his inability to control his environment, "*There is no justice on this land. No humanity. She is swine. She mocks us all.*"¹⁰

As in Lawson's, "His country after all" I chose not to afford my characters Christian names, thus giving a universality to their stories within Australian experience.

⁷ Lawson, H. (2015). *While The Billy Boils – His Country After All*. [Internet] words home. Available from: http://www.telelib.com/authors/L/LawsonHenry/prose/billyboils_1/countryafterall.html [01/07/15]

⁸ Penn, S. (2007) *The Influence of the Bush in European Australian Literature* [Internet] Emerging Voices: The Looking Glass. Available from: Latrobe.edu.au [12/04/15]

⁹ Whatever Season Reigns...., pg.12

¹⁰ Whatever Season Reigns...., pg. 20

However, the surname Harris – a derivation of Henry meaning “home ruler” was purposefully selected to symbolise the patriarchal values associated with colonial Australia and imposed in the national literary narrative. Furthermore, it represents the arbitrary imposition of control and ownership characterised by the tradition of adopting the male surname on marriage – thus silencing the feminine identity. It also emphasises the legal ownership of the land as distinct from the idea of custodianship, “*Three generations of Harris’s tracing the narrow trail down to the water’s edge*”¹¹ ... “*After the old man died, I looked upon the station and all of it was mine*”¹²

In “The Pretty Girl in The Army,” Lawson notes, “in the Australian bush ... every man is more or less sad and every man a ghost – perhaps for other lands that we know nothing of and speaking in a foreign tongue.”¹³ The Australian males’ alienation from the landscape stems from their inability to accept their powerlessness to control the elements – drought, flood and famine. In subverting the traditional Australian literary voice my text asserts the existence of the female presence – her strength, and power, but also her recognition of the “beauty” and “terror”¹⁴ of the Australian landscape. Penn asserts that “the bush shaped women too ... a masculine identity was forged and shaped from the trials and experiences in the bush.”¹⁵ However, Mackellar’s text “My Country” suggests otherwise. The love and acceptance of the environment is far removed from the isolation and sadness of Lawson’s “every man”. The inherent

¹¹ Whatever Season Reigns..., pg. 6

¹² Whatever Season Reigns..., pg. 9

¹³ Lawson, H. (2005). *Send Round The Hat – The Pretty Girl in The Army*. [Internet] Words Home. Available from: telelib.com [03/04/15]

¹⁴ Mackellar, D. (2011). *My Country*. Official Dorothea Mackellar website. Available from: dorotheamackellar.com.au

¹⁵ Penn, S. (2007) *The Influence of the Bush in European Australian Literature* [Internet] Emerging Voices: The Looking Glass. Available from: Latrobe.edu.au [12/04/15]

strength of the female is asserted. Poets like Judith Wright directed my exploration of this female strength. In “Request to a Year” Wright speaks of her great-great grandmother’s “firmness of hand”¹⁶ as she continues to paint eventhough she views danger in the distance - simply accepting what she is unable to control. This strength is represented in the structure of my narrative. The male voice diminishes, being overcome by the landscape, and is eventually silenced altogether leaving only the female voice. In the final passage the sentences are short and to the point, giving a sense of her acceptance and resilience. She refers to his death ambiguously “*he will wait for me. For I go on. The span of my life will be whatever comes,*”¹⁷ demonstrating that she does not dwell on tragedy but shows “firmness of hand,”¹⁸ - her endurance.

This enduring strength and acceptance is further captured in the title of my Major Work “Whatever Season Reigns” which is a quote from J Sheridan Moore’s “Our Australian Land,”

“Then, like the native tree that sheds
Its rugged bark, we’ll try
To cast each year some fault away”...
Perennial let our virtues live,
Whatever Season Reigns”¹⁹

¹⁶ Wright, J. (2015). *Request to a Year*. [Internet] Judith Wright Poems: Poem Hunter. Available from: www.poemhunter.com [06/07/15]

¹⁷ Whatever Season Reigns..., pg. 23

¹⁸ Wright, J. *ibid*

¹⁹ Sheridan Moore, J. (2015). *Whatever Season Reigns* [Internet]. Australian Poetry Library. Available from: poetrylibrary.edu.au

The significance of this quote is that it not only gives insight into the themes of my narrative but places them within the context of Australia's broader literary culture, positioning my work as a critique and exploration of what has come before it.

The Heidelberg School artists²⁰ depict a harsh landscape in which its subjects are dominated and obscured by vast landscapes and raw colours. They proved crucial to creating similar imagery in my work. "*Waiting for a distant speck of dust to return upon the azure sky.*" "*blue-green on canvas faded beneath Australian Summers to yellow-grey.*" "*I watched the green retreat in across the vast paddocks.*"²¹

My study of the Heart of Darkness in the preliminary Extension One challenged cultural assumptions on gender and race and drew my attention to power dynamics, particularly that which exists within patriarchal and colonial power structures. The disconnect that evolves from seeking control and dominance over a foreign hostile land and "the other" not only characterises Marlow's antagonists but strikes a poignant parallel with Australia's own narrative. On women he notes, "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own ..."²² The male persona within my text expresses similar sentiments towards his wife and her understanding of the world, "*but what would she know. She couldn't mend this problem with furniture polish and blind defiance.*"²³

²⁰ Streeton, A. (1889 - 1836). *'Still glides the stream and shal forever..., Fires on.*
Roberts, T. (1885 - 1892). *A break away!*
McCubbin, F. (1879 - 1915). *Lost. Down on his luck.*

²¹ Whatever Season Reigns...., pg. 7, 3, 11

²² Conrad, J. (2006). *Heart of Darkness.* [Ebook #526]: glutenburg.org

²³ Whatever Season Reigns...., pg. 10

Challenging assumptions of culture and identity is central to any literary work. Therefore, it is accepted that my text would have broad audience appeal. However, I feel the current national discourse on “what it means to be Australian”²⁴ would position my work to resonate strongly with a younger adult audience. This age group is also more aware and open to exploring issues of masculine and feminine strength.

Ideally, this major work would be printed in publications such as “The Overland,”²⁵ a magazine that publishes online and in hard print. This medium would make my work accessible to my target audience but the nature of both hard copy and electronic publication means that it would still maintain its appeal to more traditional, older audiences. The publication’s interests are in exploring the nature of Australian culture and also issues such as sexual politics. By intersecting both older and younger views on such topics my major work would have the ability to access a wider cross section of opinions on these topics within the broader Australian society and in doing so address, the changing nature of such themes.

One of the key strengths in my work, that enhances its impact both stylistically and thematically, is its ability to immerse the audience in the landscape. Throughout the process, the creation of distinct voices was difficult. However, as the characters established themselves I was able to fine-tune the traits of each voice to make both more consistent with the theme and purpose they were representing. As my experience with the major work continued, what began as an exploration of gender and cultural identity turned into a personal exploration of my own identity and an individual’s ability to understand, accept and cope with tragedy. Ultimately in my

²⁴ Dumas, D. (2015) *Australian Day: What it means to be Australian*. [Internet] Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: smh.com.au

²⁵ [Internet] Overland. overland.org.au

text, it was the voice of the female that endured. In the end the survival of the female not only illustrated the strength that must have been a characteristic of the early women settlers, it reinforced the premise that the feminine perspective on the land and that existence was not one of domination but rather one of endurance. Much like writing and editing a major work!