NARRATIVES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Editors)

Preface by Kirill O. Thompson

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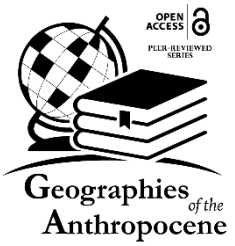
Geographies of the Anthropocene

Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis

Vittorio Valentino

Editors



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Geographies of the Anthropocene

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The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" edited by Scientific International Publisher "Il Sileno Edizioni" will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and

humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences, Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" publishes online volumes, both collective volumes and monographs, which are set in the perspective of providing reflections, work materials and experimentation in the fields of research and education about the new geographies of the Anthropocene.

"Geographies of the Anthropocene" encourages proposals that address one or more themes, including case studies, but welcome all volumes related to the interdisciplinary context of the Anthropocene. Published volumes are subject to a review process (**double blind peer review**) to ensure their scientific rigor.

The volume proposals can be presented in English, Italian, French or Spanish.

The choice of digital Open Access format is coherent with the flexible structure of the series, in order to facilitate the direct accessibility and usability by both authors and readers.

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10. Fire and Form: First Nation Eco-Georgic Pratices in "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" by Lionel Fogarty

Trevor Donovan[1]

Abstract

This article develops the idea of an Eco-Georgic literature based on the use of fire as a tool in the agricultural practices of Australian First Nations. It confronts our preconceived expectation of what constitutes a Georgic Landscape with the reality of the environment. In this regard, the article demonstrates that a phenomenological experience of the georgic is influenced by the literary representation of the Georgic and vice versa. The aim is to show that the use of fire as a tool in agriculture responds not only to the definition of the Eco-Georgic, but its representation in poetry contributes to an ecocritical approach to literature.

Keywords: Fire, Agriculture, Poetry, Representation, Eco-Georgic.

1. Introduction

"'A countryman cleaves earth with his crooked plough. Such is the labour of his life. So he sustains his native land and those who follow in his footsteps [. . .]'" (Fallon, 2015). Didactic in nature, Virgil's *Georgics* announce the indispensable labour required to fructify the farmer's field. Inscribed in time, georgic poetry describes the work achieved in each of the passing seasons, the repetition of which forming what will become known as history.[2] Labouring in the present, the countryman prepares "his native land" for the future, as each harvest adds to the growing history of the land and its people. As an adjective, the term *georgic* describes the agricultural use of the land. When used as a noun, it refers to a poem about rural or agricultural life. Therefore, what is considered to be georgic is as much influenced by a direct phenomenological experience of a modified

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[2] As Heinzelman writes, "[…] georgic writing fully distances itself from pastoral song by firmly positioning *labor*, or the work of men's hands, within the context of history" (Heinzelman, 1991, p. 185. Emphasis in the original)

landscape as it is by its literary representation.[3] If georgic literature describes modified rural landscapes and the labour required to maintain them, an Australian georgic must, in order to institute a more adequate relationship between language and reality, deconstruct preconceived ideas of what constitutes a typical farmed landscape. Accordingly, the following paper considers the specific use of fire as a tool in agriculture.[4] Taken from Lionel Fogarty's collection *Eelahroo (Long Ago) Nyah (Looking) Möbö-Möbö (Future)*, the poem "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" considers ancient indigenous agricultural practices and challenges our perception and understanding of what constitutes the Australian georgic (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111-114). Far from being known as a georgic poet, Lionel Fogarty, a Yugambeh man, has been described as a "Guerilla Poet," one who "uses [the English] language in an effort to tear down the language structures which have been imposed on him and his people" (Johnson, 1986, p. 48). Consequently, the current study will determine the extent to which Lionel Fogarty's poem contributes to a new georgic narrative, one that is capable of representing a typically Australian *Eco-Georgic*. To do so, the notion of the Eco-Georgic, where "each local ecology is attended to", constitutes our starting point (Fairer, 2011, p. 214).[5] Furthermore, the study will demonstrate the manner in which "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" challenges colonial control of language and land, thereby producing an aesthetic response to, and rewriting of, a Western concept of the georgic. Our aim is to provide an example of an Australian Eco-Georgic literature, one that fully considers the place of fire in indigenous agriculture and identity.

2. Poetry, Property and Agency: Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Australian Georgic

In his essay, "'Where Fuming Trees Refresh the Thirsty Air': The World of Eco-Georgic", David Fairer observes that in georgic poetry "[…] 'Nature' repeatedly breaks down into its discrete phenomena; instead of an emphasis on inspirational or mystical effects there is a commitment to the minuter readjustments and qualifications that allow life to continue" (Fairer,

[3] In this regard, "[…] the georgic is particularly vulnerable because it courts that burden of referentiality as no other poetic genre does" (Heinzelman, 1991, p. 192).

[4] "Anthropogenic fire is increasingly recognized as an important constructive force in shaping plant communities around the world, and its impact in Australia has been argued to be particularly significant" (R. Bliege Bird *et al*., 2008, p. 14796).

[5] For David Fairer, an Eco-Georgic literature applies ecocritical theory to Georgic Literature (Fairer, 2011, p. 214).

2011, p. 207). Such "readjustments and qualifications" correspond to the concrete actions undertaken by those concerned about continuous and predictable access to food. In other words, they are rational decisions based on an intimate knowledge of the land. Although the "inspirational or mystical effects" of fire are not absent in Fogarty's "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire", the pragmatic use of fire is equally present.

Therefore, to establish an Australian Eco-Georgic that represents a "local ecology," one must first of all consider the representation of current capital-intensive modes of agriculture. Any romantic views of a supposedly sound agriculture practiced by farmers disappear once the reality of the Australian environment is considered. The antipastoral poetry of John Kinsella notably refutes a pastoral idyll which "is neither obtainable nor desirable because it was never a good thing in itself. It was about control, exclusion, bigotry, cultural determinism, exploitation of animals, as much as vitality, order positivism, pantheism, life celebration" (Kinsella, 2004, p. 363). The poetry of John Kinsella reflects the consequences of inappropriate agricultural practices applied to vast territories, instead of an agriculture that considers the local ecology. No longer able to represent the idyllic nature of the pastoral, Kinsella criticizes "the rapaciousness and insensitivity of culling and hunting and the ruination of land due to over-clearing and salination" (Clark, 2003, p. 16-17). Consequently, what can be transposed onto the Australian context is not some typical rural landscape defended by romantic poets such as Wordsworth or Coleridge, but the suspicion towards "the depredations caused by the incursion of capitalist financial relations into the subsistence economy of a more traditional rural world" (Rigby, 2013). Indeed, it is this "traditional rural world" that needs to be redefined in the Australian context if an Eco-Georgic literature is to see the light of day.

In addition, the supposed idle and inactive nature of Aboriginal people in regards to land management and the subsequent literary representation must be contested.[6] In his article, "Pastoral and Priority, The Aboriginal in Australian Pastoral," Ivor Indyk compares the dispossession of Molibeous in Virgil's *Eclogues* to that of the First Nation's dispossession at the time of colonisation, stating that the "Australian pastoral is haunted by a similar sense of violation, caused by the upheaval of no lesser magnitude – that of the displacement of an indigenous population by the settlers of a colonizing power" (Indyk, 1993, p. 838). Indyk also mentions the supposed absence of Aboriginal agency in Australian Pastoral literature, as they are seen as

[6] Richard A. Gould highlights the importance of fire in Aboriginal communities and the misinterpretation of previous observers who misread the "seemingly lackadaisical attitude towards fire", (Gould cited in Bowman, 1998, p. 389).

"passive, accepting white domination," being at once irrational and representative of a state of ignorance where moral judgement is impossible (Indyk, 1993, p. 845). However, to represent the First Nations as prosperous and privileged in their unproductivity, languishing rather than laborious, denies any influence on the land and any efforts in the organization of their future.[7]

Dispelling the "primitivist rhetoric" of Australian pastoral poetry is the first step in the elaboration of a definition of an indigenous Australian Eco-Georgic (Indyk, 1993, p. 844). In other words, the myth of an unaltered, pristine 'Nature' from the pre-colonial period must be questioned, since "in Australia ecologists cannot retreat to the 'wilderness' to study an archetype of nature because the 'wilderness' has long included people" (Bowman, 1998, p. 405). As William Cronon argues: "[…] everything we know about environmental history suggests that people have been manipulating the natural world on various scales for as long as we have a record of their passing" (Cronon, 1996, p. 17). Moreover, any romantic view of the Australian environment as an untouched wilderness set aside in Western thought as *acultural*, – priviliged sites that forge identity, that induce the metamorphosis of the self, places of spiritual introspection or rites of passages – erroneously respond to a false perception of the Australian environment (Clark, 2012). Such a portrayal of the Australian environment as a "wild nature" ignores the reality of those who, for thousands of years, have modified and exploited it.

However, having obtained a deep knowledge of the relationship between fire and the growth of certain comestible food sources, the colonial presence subsequently denied the First Nations the use of this site-specific tool. This is why "Aboriginal people who have been forbidden to light fire by in their minds, ignorant and irresponsible Europeans, tenaciously hold to the view that fire is an important humanising force in landscapes, and remain distressed by prohibitions on starting landscape fires" (L. Head cited in Bowman, 1998, p. 389). Problems arise when colonial powers, past and present, impose inappropriate environmental land management, incompatible with the Australian context, notably because "the premises underpinning Western reductionist science are deeply rooted in specific cultural ideas, yet rather than acknowledging the cultural specificity of

[7] In response to the description of the unadapted farming practices by settlers in Australian literature, Indyk consequently defines an "ironic georgic – of the relentless, ill-fated work, the consequence of which […], is not the fruitfulness of the country but its transformation into a desolate wasteland, its fertility squandered, its people driven away or destroyed" (Indyk, 1993, p. 845).

Western science, it is heralded, promoted, and protected worldwide as ‘rational’, ‘objective’, ‘universal’, and culturally neutral approach to addressing environmental issues" (Muller *et al*., 2019, p. 400-401).

Acknowledging the cultural specificity of Western science, as well as the notions of property, agency and local ecology, allow us to consider "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" as an example of a poetic response to David Fairer’s Eco-Georgic. Rather than subsuming particuliar world views inherent to First Nations, the aim of transposing a Western cultural notion onto indigenous Australian culture will be to show how specific indigenous agricultural practices and traditions relate to Fairer’s Eco-Georgic definition. As John Charles Ryan observes, "indigenous Australian epistemologies of the environment largely resist the Western categorical distinction between ‘human’, on the one hand, and ‘non-human’, on the other." (Ryan, 2015, p. 939). Nowhere is this more evident than in First Nations relation to Country, since "Country is multi-dimensional – it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air. There is sea country and land country; in some areas people talk about sky country. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time" (Rose, 1996, p. 8).[8] Thereby, Country is not merely the landscape, but "a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life" (Rose, 1996, p. 7). Fogarty’s literature is an act of mediation, it brings together elements of song poetry and written poetry, Western epistemology and First Nation knowledge, revealing another possible worldview in a period of environmental upheavel.[9]

The pragmatic and controlled use of fire allows us to define its agricultural use as Georgic, understood as an intellectual and physical entreprise, as it reflects the idea that "georgic labour is more likely to be uncertain, challenging, and occasionally frustrating, and the ‘nature’ within which it operates usually sets its own agenda. It rarely yields rewards easily without some degree of struggle" (Fairer, 2011, p. 204). Therefore, if David Fairer’s statement that georgic poetry refers to a "challenging context,"

[8] John Charles Ryan highlights that "country and song poetry are crucibles for Aboriginal cultural knowledge. indigenous technological practices also involve environmental and cultural understandings, particularly of country. " (Ryan, 2015, p. 941).

[9] In his study, "Tracing a Trajectory from Songpoetry to Contemporary Aboriginal Poetry," Stuart Cooke demonstrates "how Aboriginal literature can act as a political mediation between indigenous and settler philosophies" (Cooke, 2013, p. 90). According to John Charles Ryan, "Fogarty’s verse is notable for hybridizing the orality of song traditions and the configurations of literary modernism […]" (Ryan, 2015, p. 951).

where "human labour is endless, and the proper tools – well maintained of course – are necessary," then "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" encapsulates that idea in an Australian context (Fairer, 2011, p. 206). It is for this very reason that Virgil's Countryman labours "his native land," as each context, each local ecology requires a specific reponse. Indeed, in this site-specific context the "proper tools" become the instrumental use of fire, the knowledge of which is maintained through practice and transmission. As we will see, Fogarty's poem offers an example of Eco-Georgic literature determined by the particularity of place, one "that really struggles with nature, recognises diversity, tries to understand how an interdependent system can be *sustained* and properly *exploited*" (Fairer, 2011, p. 212. Emphasis in the original). If successful agriculture involves testing certain limits, namely "of how much control, and of what kind, will encourage life to flourish", then it seems possible to consider the use of fire as an essential element of an Australian Eco-Georgic (Fairer, 2011, p. 208).

3. The Role of Fire in an Australian Eco-Georgic Poetry

In a paper originally published in 1969, Rhys Jones suggests the expression 'fire-stick farming' to describe both the deliberate and random use of fire in various Aboriginal groups (Jones, 2012, p. 7).[10] Such a method of farming supposes an intimate knowledge of site-specific ecosystems, and its presence is still averred today, since "Aboriginal people consciously and deliberately use fire to promote the well-being of particular types of ecosystems" (Rose, 1996, p. 63). The use of fire as an agricultural tool in the delibrate alteration of the land requires both discernment and perspicacity over long and short periods of time. The inherent struggle and uncertainty of georgic labour must therefore be recognized as much in the use of the plough as in the use of fire.[11] Research has established "the correlation between Aboriginal presence and landscape-level effects, concluding that […] fire increases nutrient availability and removes 'climax' vegetation (more slowly growing hummock grasses and woody shrubs), enhancing the

[10] See also Bill Gammage, 2011, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia*, Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin.

[11] The nineteenth century explorer Major Thomas Mitchell writes of the "considerable labour" necessary to transform what would have been "thick jungle" into "open forests", while the explorer George Grey refers to the burning of Typha swamps in southwest Western Australia as "a sort of cultivation" (Bowman, 1998, p. 388).

short-term productivity of herbaceous plants and increasing in patch diversity" (Bird *et al*., 2008, p. 14796). In other words, the proper use of fire increases food production as it promotes the development of certain plant and animal species subsequently exploited by Aboriginal communities. Consequently, ignoring fire as an agricultural tool hinders the acceptation of what is considered agricultural land in both literature and reality. This is why any Eco-Georgic literature would need to conciliate the mental construction of an agricultural landscape with the reality of the environment. In other words, in Eco-georgic literature, any representation of agriculture needs to be in closer adequation with the reality it describes.

The controlled use of fire in site-specific agriculture designed to increase certain crops supposes intellectual planning and physical work, both of which find poetic form in "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire." However, rather than a description of fire's properties and characteristics, or even its exploitation in agriculture, the first verse establishes the status of fire based on the Aboriginal people's long established understanding and practical use: "Fire is our right" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). Moreover, such a right precedes settler laws, since later in the poem the poet affirms that "Aboriginal's fires are power over laws." As David Fairer notes, "georgic never underplays the fact that *nature imposes a responsibility*, and in Virgil and his eighteenth century imitators natural forces have a way at getting back at you" (Fairer, 2011, p. 205. Emphasis added). Fogarty claims a right that is also a responsibility incumbent on the First Nations, "These fires are under ground waiting for house / That disrespect man using," where the two verbs in the present continuous aspect demonstrate the situation in which the First Nations find themselves in relation to the current mis(use) of fire (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). However, it must not be forgotten that "settler states have acted to suppress indigenous responsibility to Country, but that does not mean that indigenous nations are not asserting their rights and obligations to place" (Muller *et al*., 2019, p. 399). Placed above and beyond any colonial based laws, fire is in the very nature of the Australian landscape, it is used to care for Country. The importance and role of a physical *and* spiritual Country are subsequently expressed in Fogarty's reference to an ancient history and a contemporary evidence: "Can't stop old fire / Can't stop young fire" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111).

Consequently, the poet reminds the First Nations that "You and we are without age-old fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111).[12] Fogarty employs a language that speaks directly to each individual, made evident through the

[12] In "No More Boomerang," Oodgeroo Noonuccal also regrets the absence of firestick burning and firestick farming (Ryan, 2015, p. 949)

utilization of the second person pronoun *you*, while the first person plural *we* reinforces the sense of community. The absence of fire within the individual and within the community reinforces their requisition to property and agency or, in other words, the restablishment of their right. The exclusion of the white-settler, both past and present, in the pronoun *you* subsequently restores a sense of pride based on the notions of property and agency. Therefore, from the lack of agency ascribed to the First Nations comes the patient anticipation of their acknowledged right to use fire. The recent increase in the amount of massive, destructive bushfires makes Fogarty's poetic reminder that "The fire can kill, when not looked after" all the more relevant (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). However, far from ignoring the potential destructive nature of fire, Fogarty describes an environment that requires the respectful use of fire, as "Much death as fires for a life / Much life as fires for a death" and where the intelligent use of fire is promoted: "Fire on fire to put out fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112-113).

Without doubt, the Original Custodians harnessed an indiscriminate fire that spread across the landcape and, after having closely observed the positive outcomes of natural fires, they learned to shape the distinct ecosystems of each indigenous community's Country. Characteristic of georgic literature, "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" is didactic in nature, it informs and teaches. And yet, fire precedes man, inasmuch as there is a "Fire made not by man but natures" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). Fogarty refers to natural fires, which are both unpredictable and timeless, spreading uncontrolled across the land, allowing indigenous communities to observe the positive consequences of this natural phenomena: "Winds were and are friends to fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). Therefore, despite an evident spiritual conception of fire, whereby "Humanities are fire / My race is fire / The spirit if fire," fire is ultimately grounded in its pratical use (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). For if on the one hand, Virgil states in one of his lessons "The ways to propogate a tree are many" (Fallon, 2015), Fogarty's poem also serves a Georgic didactic agenda when he writes "The future will always say fires will state again for seeds are sprang by fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113). And when Virgil implores the farmer to react accordingly to the meteorological conditions, "From the sun's first tender touch, run your / mighty teams / through fertile fields" (Fallon, 2015), the Georgic nature of Fogarty's poem is made evident in verses such as "The trees never grow without fires," (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111) or "Being in side fire the grass growth" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). Insomuch that Virgil's *Georgics* are the poetic reponse to the vital need to fructify the earth in a geographically delimited context, Fogarty relates fire's capacity to create prosperous and

healthy *local* communities. In much the same way that occidental farming tools increased the prosperity of villages and cities throughout the ages, fire nurtures, since "fire brings sex rest and cares" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111). Fire promotes community, strengthens bonds, it nourishes, so that "safe by fire makes new peoples a unity" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 111).

Furthermore, in keeping with the Georgic apsect of the poem, the difference between rural imagery and rural reality is equally captured in Fogarty's poem. Much like the country lanes that facilitate the exploitation of what has come to exemplify a typical rural landscape, in First Nations' Country, "Our roads when made needs fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). The ephemeral nature of these roads does not contradict the image of what is rural. A phenomenological experience of what is considered rural may be reinforced by a literary experience. Inversely, literature can predetermine our expectations of a rural landscape. In this sense, if the rural relates to the country – areas found far from large cities – then the absence of fire, as much as the absence of the sickle in both its archaic or modern form, defines the city: "The city be nothing without fires / The countries be nothing without fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). Fire is rural, it creates Country. Fire is agriculture, insomuch that it is *not* the city.

The agricultural use of fire therefore responds to current ecocritical theory's need to create new narratives, for "If there's no fire, earth dead and the world will be misunderstood" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). The use of fire as a tool defines a site-specific Eco-Georgic in that it questions " [the] processes of colonisation [which] have meant that colonisers have inscribed new ecologies onto indigenous territories— ecologies that reflect colonising cultural narratives and values in order for colonising cultures to flourish" (Whyte *et al*., cited in Muller *et al*., 2019, p. 402). Any new narrative must in fact be understood as a very ancient one, albiet surpressed or ignored by colonial powers, since "these territories were already inscribed with indigenous ecologies that reflected indigenous sovereignties and cultural narratives for indigenous survival" (Muller *et al*., 2019, p. 402). Indeed, fire promotes the idea of an Eco-Georgic poetry capable of creating an "interconnected environment [that] is at the heart of ecology," all the while "[carrying] a local empirical practicality" (Fairer, 2011, p. 211). It is this "local empirical practicality," that defines fire as an appropriate agricultural tool that is subsequently represented in Eco-Georgic literature.

The use of fire in agriculture leads to a transformation in our perception of what constitutes an agricultural landscape, while its presence in poetry

signals an evolution in the georgic narrative.[13] The Eco-Georgic is born out of the literary representation of direct phenomenological expériences that consider the local ecology. If language determines and influences our acceptance of what constitutes 'Nature,' then the same process applies to Eco-Georgic literature.[14] Any Eco-Georgic literary description must therefore be in adequation with the reality of the land it describes, because our comprehension and acceptance of the Georgic is as much a result of a literary experience as it is the result of a phenomenological one. It is worth considering that in his article, David Fairer refers to the neglect and degradation of the land after years of civil war in Virgil's *Georgics*. After years of colonial misuse of the land and fire, a similar situation in Australia is to be deplored.

4. The Poetic Form of Fire

In his article, "Ecoaesthetics and ecocriticism," Cheng Xiangzhan deplores the absence of sound literary analysis in "ecoliterature," stating that "what is unsatisfying is that most ecocritical studies are more like 'cultural criticism' than a literary´ one" (Xiangzhan 2010, 787). Xiangzhan considers that "from the perspective of ecoaesthetics, ecoliterature is certainly an important type of aesthetic object and ecoliterariness is the sum of the aesthetic qualities of ecoliterature" (Xiangzhan, 2010, p. 787). Fogarty, who sees himself as "a speaker, not a writer", disrupts the expected codified use of language in order to create an aesthetic response to both language and fire, their place and application becoming all the more pertinent in the process (Buchanan cited in Shoemaker, 2004, p. 220). Fogarty's poetic form exploits "the language of the invader in an urge to destroy that imposition and recreate a new language freed of restrictions and erupting a multi-meaning of ambiguity" (Johnson, 1986, p. 53). Any reader of "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" unfamiliar with the importance of fire is simultaneously confronted with an unfamiliar language which has been "purposely externalised from an easy understanding of the text" (Shoemaker, 2004, p. 221). It is this disruption of expected grammar in Fogarty's poetry that

[13] David Fairer writes that "[…] the compromised, and comprising, georgic, whose interest in mixture, alteration, contingency, and various kinds of trial-and-error, hinders it from the big vision, the saving answer", that pastoralism seemed to offer to ecocriticism (Fairer, 2011, p. 209).

[14] William Cronon highlights the influence of the romantic movements language on writers such as Thoreau in their appreciation and description of nature (Cronon, 1996, p. 7).

exemplifies the very nature of fire, being at once destructive and regenerative, promoting new growth in language *and* nature. By deforming the grammar of the English language, Fogarty is able to restore indigenous property, control and agency through the use of the very language that oppressed them. Such a reappropriation of language is also a reappropriation of fire.

Subsequently, fire enters into an aesthetic relationship that reunites language with the environment. This is made apparent by the fact that, for First Nations, "there is a well defined aesthetic – country which has been burned is country which looks cared for and clean" (Rose, 1996, p. 65). In much the same way that traditional agricultural practices are valued in other cultures, the use of fire is equally valued, since "you can see that people are taking care of it" (Rose, 1996, p. 65). Yet, fire precedes its aesthetic form, it comes before language, existing before its intellectualisation and subsequent representation. This is why Fogarty highlights the preexistence of fire and its potential aesthisation, since "Fire gives all written painted artist what we have now animals fire" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112). Fogarty gives fire a literary form, placing a very ancient fire at the centre of a paradoxically new narrative, one that recalls the First Nation's past, and one that continues to recount the present struggle: "Oh he got the fire in his speak let it be of greater peace / If to write be to fight, do it with fire better and right with the good campfires stories" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 114). Indeed, in "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" fire gives voice and forms identity, since "For the stories are kept by these fire stories / Fire now is the book of face fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113). Fire transforms poetic language into one that translates the determination of engaged writing: "No poetry is alive without fire, / Words are fires written for action. / All poet stand as fire, No one is poet without fires" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113). Without question, the use of fire forms Country as much as it forms language and identity. It is this interrelationship between the human and the non-human that creates an aesthetic response corresponding to ecocritical theory.

Accordingly, the extent to which "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" responds to both the aesthetic requirements of literature and the political or ethical viewpoints that eco-literature sets out can be measured by its capacity to postulate a return to concrete and observable indigenous methods of land mangagement, as well as an acceptance of the place of fire within a modified ecosystem.[15] Ecocriticism's inherent urgency demands a literature that sparks collective cultural change. However, fire resists language, it

[15] On the relation between aesthetics, ethics and politics, see Richard Kerridge, "Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre: Urgency, Depth, Provisionality, Temporality".

refuses to be understood uniquely through a scientism that does not take into account the phenomenological experience and its subsequent representation. This is because "the great paradox of the 'scientific world-view' is to have succeeded in *withdrawing historicity* from the world. And with it, of course, the inner narrativity that is part and parcel of being in the world" (Latour, 2014, p. 13. Emphasis in the original). Fogarty's poem acknowledges and asserts the historical importance of fire, one that enters into story and identity, and one which is slowly being recognised as empirically justifiable.

However, if an Australian Eco-Georgic poetry is to be defined, then one must consider fire not only as sacred, but also as profane. The secularization of a sacred fire is the *right* given to the Original Custodians that Fogarty mentions in the first verse of the poem: "Fire is our right". If the sacredness of fire encourages a hermeneutic interpretation, it also has more secular, observable and quantifiable properties. Sacred, fire is at once omnipotent, "We use fires spirits to heal," (Fogarty, 2014, p. 112) and omnipresent: "Waru Borri walk / Waru Borri talks / Waru Borri our eyes / Waru Borri dances us nice / Waru Borri loves the lovers / Waru Borri can hate / Waru Borri can kill / Waru Borri live for death / Waru Borri can rainbow your days / Borri sits even as wits in lit" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113). Secular, Waru Borri is used as a tool: "Let the control off the fires be always man's / Knowing its powers" (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113). It is this double aspect of the sacred and profane that Fogarty's poem captures, where fire provides a spiritual connection to Country and the means to nourish a community. Consequently where fire is used for agricultural purposes an intimate relationship is born between two seemingly hermetic entities: the sacred and the profane.[16] In other words, if fire is applied in a concrete manner by Original Custodians, it remains an abstract entity that retains its spirituality.

Ecoliterature must be wary of creating an aesthetic object diassociated from the reality that it represents. Furthermore, the aesthetization of the environment cannot exclude a human presence and, in particular, the presence of indigenous communities. If the environment is seen as harsh, unforgiving, unrelentless and needing to be modified in order to respond to a preconceived idea of 'Nature,' or in the current case an preconceived image of the georgic, then an Australian Eco-Georgic literature is not yet possible. In other words, the idealisation or management of the environment as seen through Western cultural frameworks distorts the reality of the local ecology. In this regard, "Borri is Fire Waru is Fire" responds to ecocritism's

[16] "It is this sense of the sacred and the intimacy of relationships that enables a 'depth of knowing' that is not available in worldviews separated from an objectified 'nature'", (Whyte *et al.*, cited in Muller *et al.*, 2019, 404)

concerns in the sense that it posits, through the double aspect of the sacred and the profane, a return to more adapted farming techniques that protect rather than destroy fertile soils. If, as Richard Kerridge remarks, "ecocritics must be concerned with whether a concentrated revelatory moment is an isolated moment, itself split off from practical daily life," then Fogarty's poem offers an example of how we can consider fire as something that is at once "split off from" and undeniably part of the quotidian (Kerridge, 2013).

Conclusion

Being that indigenous agricultural methods existed before colonial displacement and oppression, the didactic nature of georgic poetry must be adapted to "the native land", to the "local ecology," if an appropriate Eco-Georgic literature is to grow out of the Australian environment. Therefore, an Australian Eco-Georgic literature needs to be one that not only considers the specificity of the local ecology, but also one that places the human and the non-human within a network of agency that leads to an awareness of responsibility within ecosystems. In what is becoming known as the Anthropocene period, the notion of "indigenous sovereignties," that promote " ways of being in sacred, ethical, and reciprocal relationships with 'nature'" is all the more necessary (Muller *et al*., 2019, p. 408). Finally, any Eco-georgic literature needs to be in adequation with the reality it represents. This can only occur once the object of our perception corresponds to the literary representation of an Australian Eco-Georgic landscape and vice versa. Indeed, if the analogy between the plough and verse has long been established in poetry, the relationship between the agricultural use of fire and its representation in poetry is yet to be fully exploited. As Lionel Fogarty reminds us, "Don't fire out the fire made a Thousand years ago", the past, present and future of fire characterize an Australian Eco-Georgic (Fogarty, 2014, p. 113).

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"The Anthropocene has still the rank of a scientific hypothesis. Yet, it has already sedimented in our imagination with its stories of climate change and mass extinctions, global pandemics and energy crisis, technofossils and oceanic plastic, social justice and new minerals that are changing the face (and the bowels) of the planet. Investigating this imagination from multiple angles, Narratives in the Anthropocene Era, brilliantly edited by Charles Travis and Vittorio Valentino, is an indispensable tool for situating these stories into the conceptual horizon of the environmental humanities".

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