

**Michael R. Griffiths. *The Distribution of Settlement: Appropriation and Refusal in Australian Literature and Culture*. Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2018.  
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Early ideas for Griffiths's project were inspired at ASAL 2016, a conference that included a keynote address by Native American scholar, Professor Chadwick Allen. During his address, Allen gave an emotional and empathetic recital of poetry from Oodgeroo Noonuccal's *We are Going*. The conference was an opportunity for much deeper reflection, and it is no surprise that Griffiths cites Allen's work within the opening pages of his own book (3): *The Distribution of Settlement* (2018). Griffiths's own work in Australian literary history renders a transnational impact, much like Allen's, and addresses global issues of appropriation in literature as colonial violence.

Griffiths's main literary case in point is Australian author Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* and *Poor Fellow My Country*, and his comprehension and analysis of these texts is impressive, aligning rigorous research to unpack the full range of settlement, and its distribution, in a three-part monograph. The complex double bind between elimination and appropriation that Griffiths so clearly articulates, is highly relevant across nations where non-Indigenous scholars theorise about Others.

What is unique about Griffiths's theorising is his intelligent analysis of how work about Indigenous people can fetishise and even replace Indigenous culture with something else that serves white culture and settler identity politics (6). This something else is described by Griffiths as 'events' or 'artifacts' which lead to capitalising on Indigenous cultural inclusion to benefit white society, rather than to eradicate racism or racial power deficits. For example, he mentions Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* and albums by Midnight Oil as outputs that invoke fetishism and nostalgia to support the settler legacy (10). While the inclusion of more multicultural projects to unpack the place of migrant Australians in Griffiths's analysis would add a deeper understanding of the settler's legacy since globalisation, his inclusion of women's roles in the imperial project are accurately supported with historical evidence in his chapter entitled 'Mumma's Gaze.'

It is not only in archival evidence, but specific contemporary creative outputs, including literature, that Griffiths sees how Indigenous cultures are paradoxically both 'mourned' and 'glorified' (5) in ways that can be identified as somewhat manipulative tactics used by the settler legacy to create cognitive dissonance—a culture that is both mourned and glorified at the same time, and in effect, deflects the settler's blame by minimising the seriousness of invasion and the trauma of genocide through various 'events' and artefacts' that both celebrate and mourn Indigenous history, identity and culture (13).

Interestingly Griffiths mentions 'narcissism' in his Introduction (21): a personality disorder understood to be more common in men and recognised to be the inherent absence of empathy towards others. 'Settler narcissism' as Griffiths shrewdly names it, is an astute observation for

understanding the abusive power structures that are constantly repeated and witnessed in Australian culture. It is a national consciousness or personality that infiltrates so many aspects of nation, from the absence of women and Indigenous people in power, to unfathomable rates of domestic violence on a transnational scale. If non-Indigenous people (both men and women) are to move towards what Griffiths terms ‘the preconditions for an ethics around appropriation, agency and refusal today’ (2), perhaps more work needs to be done on how to dissolve ‘settler narcissism’ as it appears both textually and as cultural manipulation tactics in dominant culture. Griffiths’s work is where such an idea is born, and the publication of his scholarship successfully contributes to the literary history of appropriation, highlighting the settler legacy as a dysfunctional trait that severely impacts race relations and many aspects of healthy national consciousness at a time of Indigenous sovereignty and recognition.

Reading and listening with empathy may be a place to improve race relations, but as Griffiths reminds us when citing Jeanine Leane: ‘cultural appropriation is not empathy. It is stealing someone else’s story, someone else’s voice’ (9). The Greek mythological character Narcissus wanted nothing more than to be seen, and he rejected his love for Echo so he could fall in love with himself. Griffiths informs an ethics of reading in a time of recognition where non-Indigenous people should contribute in ways that will not personally or professionally benefit them: ‘To be alongside without benefit’ (18). This can be done in the same way as Griffiths—by calling out narcissistic violence and abuse that has for a long time been hidden under the guise of a settlement legacy that is clearly self-centred and immature in personality development.

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