Melissa Lucashenko. *Edenglassie.* University of Queensland Press, 2023.
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Near the beginning of *Edenglassie*, Melissa Lucashenko's most recent novel, the protagonist Mulanyin has the "electric realisation" that everything he consumes is the result of his ancestors' decisions. "Every fish, every mudcrab, every ugari or turtle or vegetable or egg or fruit, they all came to him—to all his people—from generations of nurture" (18). This realisation catalyses Mulanyin's journey into adulthood and responsibility, and unveils a central conceit of the novel: that the decisions we humans make about the more-than-human world, which arise from our ontological and epistemological understandings of relationality, shape the very contours of the lands and states we live in.

Spanning three centuries—and much like Annie Proulx's 2016 *Barkskins*, an epic novel also about the colonisation of the so-called new world—*Edenglassie* conveys its central conceit by unearthing the realities of settler violence. In contrast to Proulx, Lucashenko approaches the vast time periods she covers through compact, tightly woven narrative that emphasises character depth and emotional worlds over virtuosic breadth. The result is a complex work of historical fiction that is both generous and confrontational to the reader. Through clear prose that avoids overdescription, *Edenglassie* challenges the nation-building myths that have been used—and continue to be used—to try to justify the domination and extermination of Indigenous Australians.

The work is set in two periods: the first thirty years of the 19th century colonisation of Magandjin, a place briefly known as Edenglassie and now known as Brisbane; and the year 2024, which depicts colonisation's afterlives—to borrow a term from Saidiya Hartman.

The mid-1800s story centres on the story of the invasion of Kurilpa land by white settlers. A young couple—a Yugambeh man, Mulanyin, and Ngugi woman, Nita—grapple with the increasing speed and violence of settler arrivals in Magandjin as they dream of creating a life together away from the impacts of colonisers. The waves of European settlers bring ecological damage as they seek to recreate the world they have just been sent away from or have fled: clearing forests to make their "strange, pointy houses," the emptying of Woolloongabba Swamp through overfishing and overharvesting, the destruction of renewable resources such as oyster beds on the Warrar / Brisbane riverbanks that have fed millennia of inhabitants. The destruction recalls the clearing of forests in *Barkskins*, where Proulx explores settler psychological viewpoints—initially, those of indentured woodchoppers. As one such character, Réne Sel, chops and clears northeastern North American forest he feels satisfaction, as though the world is returning to order—as in, returning to a shape that is recognisable to him. With each chop, he relishes as "the vast invisible web of filaments that connected human life to animals, trees to flesh and bones to grass shivered as each tree fell and one by one the web strands snapped."

In direct contrast, the Yugambeh world portrayed by Lucashenko through the character of Mulanyin is one that relishes the interconnectedness of all life. When a young Mulanyin contemplates releasing "the Matriarch," a very large, reproductive-age mulloway that he is initially proud of catching, he realises that his children and grandchildren need him to release her so that they might eat her offspring. The idea "consumed him with wonder; it made him feel small, yet at the same time as though he belonged in a universe of meaning; part of a web of ceaseless and sacred connection across thousands of generations" (18). Through the actions of Mulanyin and his kin, Lucashenko interrupts the colonial logics of resource extraction that her settler characters

enact. We see laid out plainly how differing world views about human relations with the more-than-human can reshape land, families, bodies, ecosystems.

Lucashenko does not hold back on the violence the settlers also bring. These span random acts of violence in raids on Goorie villages, and poison attacks on families, as well as the planned, public acts of violence such as the hanging of Dundalli, a warrior and guerilla leader of the resistance against the British. The scene of the hanging shows the full, oppressive weight of British law that seeks to make an "example" of a resistor—and the white, feverish desire to witness and enjoy this lynching. Lucashenko's description of the settler villagers' hunger for the death echoes David Marriott's analysis of the white appetite in the southern US for lynchings of Black men through the long 19th century, where he argues in *On Black Men* (2000) that such events—and importantly for his analysis, the documentation of these events—are reflections of the white psyche more than they are reflections on actions of the Black lynched men. As Lucashenko states, the settlers "were anxious not to miss a moment" (133).

What the 19th century world of Magandjin shows us most clearly is the way the colonisers' disrupted relationality to the world of so-called Australia—the people and the land—allows for the enactment of colonial violence. Just as the earth, swamp, and river are slowly poisoned, so too does colonisation enact the slow, measured extermination of Indigenous Australians. In the world of *Edenglassie*, sometimes this extermination involves using Indigenous Australians against one another, as in the case of the notoriously ruthless "native police," but largely it involves targeting the Indigenous population through shootings, poisonings, biological warfare, and the weaponisation of the colonial "justice" system. Both Mulanyin and Nita experience this slow-moving genocide in very personal ways. As Lucashenko notes, the number of Indigenous Australians killed on the Queensland "frontier" is enormous; about the equivalent of the number of Australian soldiers killed in the First World War (305). *Edenglassie* makes this violence intimate, knowable through the lives of Mulanyin and Nita and their forebears Dalapai, Yerrin, and Dawalbin and descendants.

In the 21st century, Granny Eddie and Winona, descendants of those who lived through Magandjin's colonisation, seek to understand the legacies of colonisation in relation to their present-day challenges with health, housing, and identity in Brisbane. Winona, young and fluent in identity politics discourse, draws on Black Lives Matter movements as well as ancestral knowledge holders to try to navigate the waters of belonging in the 21st century. Lucashenko traces the contours of these questions through the character of Dr Johnny Newman, a light-skinned Goomeroi coming to understand his identity as a "Blackfella," who treats Granny Eddie in hospital while falling more and more in love with her granddaughter Winona. Winona isn't interested in someone who isn't a "real" Blackfella and sees Johnny as a "claimer": one of the thousands "washing up on the shores of the Aboriginal Nations, looking for refuge and belonging" (124). Winona's biting critique goes further, as she sees these claimers as "bringing all their existential woes along with em, for real blackfellas to fix. Cos we don't have any problems of our own, nah. We live to help suffering white people with their identity crises" (124). In these passages, Lucashenko teases out the psychosocial collective and individual repercussions for settlers as well as Indigenous Australians. This exchange between Winona and Johnny broaches the subject with Lucashenko's characteristic humour:

> "Hey, hold up! Ya don't get to be a blackfella just cos your ancestor was," she replied firmly. "If ya got no lived experience or living mob, then ya just another bloody white Aussie holding a vanilla milkshake, mate."

> Johnny's smile vanished. "That's not what I've been told," he protested. "We've identified as Goomeroi for years!" (124)

Lucashenko's generosity towards the reader, and towards those of us navigating the social crisis of belonging that colonisation has precipitated, means that together Winona and Johnny are able to lean on one another to understand their own interconnected identities. For much of the contemporary narrative this navigation is literal, taking place on water, as Johnny teaches Winona to sail the waters of the Yarra while she teaches him about standing strong in himself and his connections to his kin, regardless of his identity.

And it is through this theme of identity that Lucashenko shows the confluence of the novel's two worlds, 18th century and 21st, Magandjin and Brisbane, settler and Indigenous, and how they remain spatially, culturally, economically, legally, and psychosocially intertwined. The Indigenous Federation and Rule of Law upheld by Indigenous societies before Mulanyin's day has been overturned by an English system of rule that endures into the parts of the narrative set in 2024. As Lucashenko leads us through scenes of "Sufferers" (enslaved murri) and "flogging triangles" where Indigenous Australians are subjected to similar tortures as enslaved Black Americans, she demonstrates how this rule of law systematically devalues the lives of Indigenous Australians and others deemed Other to the European idea of the human; the disparate housing conditions and health outcomes we witness in 2024 can then be understood as a intimately related to the abolition of Bora Law and other forms of Indigenous justice.

Throughout *Edenglassie*, Lucashenko's characterisation holds together multiple worlds, dialects, and time periods. Each character is well rendered; Granny Eddie's centenarian confusion is matched by her integrity and insistence in upholding the principles of Bora law. Dartmouth or Darto the journalist with his persistent, "well intentioned" mining of Granny Eddie's personal and collective histories shows the foibles of overly eager settler researchers, still motivated by extraction. But Winona is the most interesting contemporary character, foul-mouthed and refreshingly unafraid to speak and act according to her beliefs, while also realistically naïve, with much to learn from Granny and her other elders.

In the other, mid-1800s world, Mulanyin is a man "of the Nerang Boollun and the great Burragurra which it flows into" (118), defined by his relationship to the more-than-human river of his people. Mulanyin is also a formidable hunter and a nuanced, complex young Yugambeh man battling to maintain a life connected to his land and people. Nita's own conflicted inner worlds could be brought further to the fore as her emotional terrain is largely overshadowed by Mulanyin's. However, the slow-dawning realisation of the extent and scope of the settlers and their violences arrives like a grief for both the reader and Mulanyin and Nita, as we realise alongside them that the waves of arrivees cannot be stopped. Not only that, but many arrivees carry a malicious intent, or an indifference to suffering, which will bring about seemingly endless destruction.

The pain of the narrative and the historical world is metered and uplifted by Lucashenko's richly imagistic writing and poetic resonance. We see at the novel's opening "in the fast-fading light . . . what looked like an entire forest . . . A vast field of smoke plumes [that] rose from the fires of [Yerrin's] people" (12). Again at the end of *Edenglassie* plumes of smoke rise like people for a brief moment from Brisbane, reminding the reader of the ongoing affective, spiritual and spatial presence of the so-called past.

"We're in the midst of a renaissance in First Nations literature," asserted Gomeroi poet Alison Whittaker in 2019; "Blak literature is in a golden age." With Lucashenko's multi-layered

historical novel that combines the fields of decolonial studies, Indigenous studies, Queensland history, and gender and sexuality studies in a work of compelling narrative fiction, she reminds us that she is a key figure in that golden age.

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