

Australian Writing, Deep Ecology and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*

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*'What animal are you?' He indulges the boy.
'Human,' says Bike sullenly.
Oh.
(Julia Leigh, The Hunter 21)*

There was a mixed reaction to the publication of Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* in 1999. Her novel about an agent who goes in search of the thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) to harvest its genetic information received the kind of cautious endorsement reserved for "first" or "young" novelists. Two criticisms recurred in the reviews. The first criticism was that the novel constituted a slight on Tasmania. In her review "Tasmania Appropriated", Elizabeth Dean doubts that Leigh "has ever visited a Tasmanian forest" and is disappointed with the way that Tasmanian people are represented. Christopher Bantick chastises Leigh for "a naive tendency toward stereotyping" and warns that her unbalanced depictions of Tasmanians risk "alienating a portion of her readership". Martin Flanagan's review for *The Age* headlined "The Hunt for Tasmania" also takes an indignant stance, seeing *The Hunter* as an attempt to co-opt his state into global networks: "I'm all for global awareness. What I'm against is clear felling local cultures. We all know where that leads." The second criticism of the novel is that it was flawed on formal grounds because it does not develop the central character "M" nor his relationships with the other characters in the novel. Both Andrew Peek and Martin Flanagan criticise M as lacking "credibility", while Bantick opines: "If there is a nagging problematic aspect – and Leigh it should be remembered, is still learning her craft – it is with her character development."

Those who did respond positively tended to emphasise the book's metaphoric potential, especially in the figure of the thylacine which Tegan Bennett suggested, half-

mockingly, “could shape up a treat as a new metaphor for white Australian culture”. Drusilla Modjeska, whose review did most to engage with the intellectual dimensions of the novel, asks: “What is the tiger? Is it bio-genetic material? Part of ourselves? Hope for the future? Guilt for the past? Imagination? The capacity to live in harmony with nature?” The slippery business of interpreting metaphors is best undertaken from within a reading context in which questions about a narrative can be appropriately framed. How then should *The Hunter* be read? I wish to argue that *The Hunter* needs to be read as an ecological novel, what Ian Saunders has called an “eco-text”¹, which engages with fundamental questions about humanity *as a species* as well as refracting this broader problem through a specifically Australian problematics of loss.

THE AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENTAL NOVEL

There has been some attempt to delineate an environmental tradition in Australian creative expression. Tim Bonyhady has written with erudition on the nineteenth-century dimensions of the subject in his book *The Colonial Earth*. Michael Pollak and Margaret MacNabb have looked at the more contemporary expression of environmentalism in their study, *Hearts and Minds: Creative Australians and the Environment*. There has, however, been little emulation in this country of the various schools of “eco-criticism” that have emerged in North America, although recently moves have been made in this direction.² To this extent literary and cultural criticism have lagged behind history in Australia, for environmental history has been a powerful force in Australian historiography since Keith Hancock. In terms of cultural critique it is worth drawing distinctions about the way Australians have viewed the environment and, in particular, environmental problems. Without discounting the persistence of environmental themes since at least the late 1930s in writers like Judith Wright, Xavier Herbert and Eleanor Dark, it seems that the current form of environmental consciousness had its particular origins in the 1980s. This was the apogee of Green politics in Australia, marked both by the emergence of successful Green parties at state and federal level, and a general professionalisation of environmental campaigning.³ Major protests were mounted against the Franklin Dam, logging in the Daintree and the continued presence of American military bases. Distinctive of this period was a sense of the global character of environmental problems, particularly in terms of climate change and ozone depletion.

The mood is distilled in two works which book-end this period, Peter Carey’s *Bliss* (1981) and Ben Elton’s *Stark* (1989). Each of these popular works (both novels became films) used the spectre of environmental destruction to motivate a moral critique of the characters in the novel and the institutions they represented. Threatened by relativism, the environment emerged as a solid ground for moral judgment, a compass that could point toward a kind of ethical “true north”. The ethical framework in *Bliss* and *Stark*, and related novels, has a number of components, including an understanding of the

environment as unchanging and good, a belief in a social consensus of the “enlightened”, a faith in tradition and heritage, and a narrative commitment to the transformative power of romance. It is a notable feature of both novels that ethical change is associated with falling in love. Instances of this general belief system can be multiplied in the work of writers like Tim Winton, Thea Astley, George Turner and Gabrielle Lord.

My intention is not to denigrate these ethical imperatives. These writers have formulated creative and humane responses to problems which are very real. What I have found disappointing prior to the appearance of *The Hunter*, however, is the absence of writing which has addressed what Verity Burgmann calls “the limits of liberal ecology” (238). Also notably absent has been a measure of reflexivity in Australian novels that deal with environmental themes. *The Hunter* is a work, in the mode of *Madame Bovary*, *The Heart of Darkness* or more recently Bernard Schlink’s *The Reader*, that is self-critical as well as socially critical. The kind of self-implicated writing that features in *The Hunter* is particularly apposite because complicity is a central dilemma in many environmental issues. While there is an expressive value in dramatising conflicts between (good) hippies / families / environmentalists / Indigenous people / farmers and (bad) developers / corporations / governments / farmers, one is troubled by the ease of such a move. There is a name for the literary form which promotes stylized conflicts between the very good and the very evil, and it is melodrama. Australia has had a long-held penchant for melodrama, as Elizabeth Webby and Robert Dixon have shown. It is not surprising then that melodrama has been a popular method for dealing with the morally charged issues of environmentalism. A melodrama, while it may be an “ambivalent” form when viewed historically, is generally coercive in terms of the empathy and emotional investment of its contemporary readership.

INCIDENTAL HERESIES

The Hunter relates the efforts of a figure whom we only know as M to snare a thylacine so that its genetic information can be utilised for an unknown purpose by an un-named biotechnology company. To this end, M poses as a naturalist called Martin David who is doing research on “the devils” in Tasmania’s high country. His prearranged “base camp” is in the house of a family who live at the foot of the mountain plateau. This family consists of a drug-dependent mother and two young children, Sass and Bike, who have been left to their own devices. While the apparatus of the hunt might seem simple, even hackneyed, it forms the basis for a number of powerfully orchestrated subversions that take place in the novel.

The narrative has a number of features which are heretical to the orthodoxy of Australian environmental writing. Firstly, it repudiates the harmonious language of heritage in which the works of Nature and the works of Man should be protected and celebrated as part of the “national estate”. This is particularly notable in a Tasmanian

novel, a state in which economic stagnation is often contrasted with its “richness” in the matter of environmental and historical heritage. Carmel Bird’s *Bluebird Cafe* is a crafty interrogation of the preservation impulses which fuel Tasmania’s heritage industry (see Lowenthal). Leigh follows Bird in choosing a bleak version of contemporary Tasmania. Rather than the old-world charm of the holiday brochures, Leigh depicts a depressed rural hinterland, characterised as a decrepit amalgam of fast-food joints, demountable housing, weeds, and rusted out car wrecks. When the “history” of Tasmania does intrude it is in terms of gauche fakery, contorted topiary follies and the Ye Old Tudor Hotel. This dissonance remains undiminished in the story; no future harmony is indicated, no cyclical redemptive promises of the kind that characterise Richard Flanagan’s best-selling Tasmanian novel *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*.

Another element of the environmental orthodoxy is that a social consensus exists in which the people stand united against another group called the developers. These developers are out to destroy the environment and the people will not have it. Farmers, Aborigines, rural workers, city intellectuals and ordinary decent-minded folk will band together to prevent such an outrage. While this is the unlikely premise in Ben Elton’s *Stark*, Leigh’s novel has it rather differently. The locals that M encounters are anything but charming and harbour a deep suspicion of those who claim to be environmentalists. M’s assumed identity as a naturalist does not buy him credibility with the patrons of the local pub: “Just one thing, mate. We don’t take greenie cunts around here” (63). However “rednecks”, as Les Murray reminds us, are a soft target. The reader, anxious to invest empathy, would not likely have placed it with the regulars at the Ye Old Tudor Hotel. What is relevant here is not that “Leigh’s Tasmania is peopled with the unpleasant, weird and ignorant” (Dean 109), but that the narrative is positing a local community that is destined to remain divided. In doing so, Leigh need not be understood as anti-Tasmanian but as seeking, in order to accentuate the book’s central dilemmas, to deny the solace of an idealised solidarity, just as the sanctuary of heritage was denied.

A third heresy emerging in the novel – to which I will shortly return – is that it refuses to romanticise the act of being-in-nature. Eco-fantasies often revolve around the rather paradoxical idea that as humans become more natural they will also become more humane. This line of thinking transposes the seat of a truer humanity into the non-human. The most outrageous of the novel’s heresies, however, is to leave its central figure unredeemed. Here Leigh plays the game of frustrated narrative expectation. While clearly an environmental novel, the expected melodrama does not emerge because the would-be villain – the biotechnology company – remains frustratingly outside the narrative. In the absence of externalised melodrama, one might expect to see an internalised drama of conscience in which M will undergo a moral epiphany and realise that he is acting for the wrong side. This does not occur either and these (disappointed) expectations emerge in those reviews of the novel that criticised the lack of development in its central character. This, I suggest, is a significant misreading of *The Hunter*. The unredeemed M is not a failing in the novel, it is the point of the novel. In fact, by

parading the means by which wayward heroes in more conventional narratives are redeemed – but not making use of these means – the narrative guarantees the shock of M's non-redemption.

Two forms of experience loom as potentially transformative for M. The first is the hunt itself. The mythic character of M's mission – to go alone into the wilderness and capture the fabled beast – encourages the belief that he will be changed. *Quite probably* (as the orthodox reasoning would have it) *he will develop a sense of awe and reverence once he has returned to nature and then he will understand that his quest is a misguided one.* The second locus of transformation is the house in which M rests between outings. It has become the province of Sass, the “girl-tyrant” who has taken over the household in the wake of her mother's breakdown. Bespangled with glued-on stars and other ritualistic patterning, this infantile fairy-world – with the children's drugged out mother as its “Sleeping Beauty” – is profoundly antithetical to the hyperrational M and he approaches it with as much caution as he does the wilderness. *Still* (we long to believe) *children have strange effects on people, they can soften even the hardest hearts, and then there is the woman who must awake and she too, especially given her own demons, will surely find a way to redeem M.* Indeed, Bantick criticised Leigh's novel on precisely this point: “There is considerable scope here for an examination of the complex relationship between the children and ‘M’ . . . Yet Leigh does not exploit the obvious narrative potential.”

The promise of redemption remains dangled before the reader throughout the novel. It is exceedingly difficult not to believe in it because redemption is the implicit theme not just of Australian environmental novels of the 1980s and 1990s, but a central element of the metaphysics of land – the hostile land, the conquered land, the merciless land, the merciful land – that has run through Australian place-writing since the journals of exploration.⁴ Unlike the heroes and villains in a landscape-narrative (Paterson's Clancy, White's Voss, Mary Durack's Grandfather) there is no sense in which M is pitted against the environment in a battle. There are no spoils and no possibility of martyrdom or redemption. Modjeska evokes the feeling of bewilderment that accompanies the realisation that neither the harshness of the land, the kindness of nature, the innocence of children, nor even romantic love will redeem M: “the sense of desolation is so utter, so complete, that it seems barely believable.” While the denial of redemption is indeed shocking, it is this narrative shock that is used to challenge the myth that, as Leigh puts it, “if only man could find [the thylacine] we would repent and look after it” (qtd in Adamson).

THE POSTNATURAL MAN

In Australia we have invested heavily in the natural man. It is a recurrent masculinist tick within colonial nativism to fetishise a man who has become “as one” with the new country. In North America there is the tradition of the hunter-scout-frontiersman; in

Australia there is a cognate tradition of bushman-drover-tracker. More recently the natural man has become ecologically inflected in television programmes like *The Bush Tucker Man*. The natural man is happily deployed in two Tasmanian novels roughly contemporaneous to *The Hunter*. Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* features as one of its central characters a Slovenian migrant (Bojan) who is twice "naturalised". Bojan is naturalised in the (artificial) sense of being made a citizen, but he is more appealingly (that is, more *naturally*) naturalised by his experiences as a hydro-worker in the rugged Tasmanian forest. Bojan's daughter, who is called upon to articulate the moral logic of Flanagan's novel, emphasises her father's status as natural man through the organic metonym of wood: "He worked wood and he tried to make something of it and in his making make something of them. He worked wood and for her he was wood and she loved him for it, O God, how she loved him for it" (10).

Heather Rose's novel *White Heart*, published in the same year as *The Hunter*, was also a novel involving the thylacine and for this reason the two novels were often reviewed together. Apart from subject the novels have little in common, with Rose's novel taking a broader narrative course through native North American spiritualism. Central to the novel is the narrator's brother Ambrose, an exemplary natural man:

My brother Ambrose is a tiger hunter.

He is a man beyond weather, with his breath in the sky and his heart on the track ahead. He walks the contours of the land wearing a cap sewn by his own hand, a jacket the fur worn bare by rough rocks and hungry trees. (1)

Nature flows into Ambrose and Ambrose flows into nature. The two are symbiotic and make each other. The natural man eradicates any sense of conflict or contradiction existing between the ideas of "nature" and "man". He is deployed in order to patch the seam between the human and the nonhuman.

In order to subvert the figure of the natural man in her novel, Leigh conjures but does not let manifest a character named Jarrah Armstrong. With his woody name, Jarrah is the very type of the contemporary natural man, able to listen as well as talk, comfortable with domesticity as much as with a masculinized wilderness. We learn that he had written a work called *Bioethics for the New Millennium* and lived with his sensitive wife and precocious children in the foothills of Tasmania's wilderness. As a Tasmanian eco-philosopher, the figure of Armstrong alludes to a very real intellectual strength in a state that boasts thinkers like Warwick Fox, Robyn Eckersley, P.R. Hay and B.C. Mollison. It is significant then, that in *The Hunter* the naturalist Jarrah Armstrong has gone missing and is presumed (later confirmed) dead. Armstrong exists only as a phantasm, haunting the memories of the children and mother whose lives have been cast into turmoil by his disappearance. Each member of the family secretly cherishes the hope that M will find their father and M manipulates this hope to secure their loyalty. Armstrong's memory is also preserved by a group of hippies who come to visit Lucy and

the kids. Armstrong was for them a kind of guru and they recite his teachings about biocentrism and his rhetoric of connectedness, attachment, eternity and cyclical transformation. M is unconvinced and voices a question which is at the heart of the novel's problematics of loss: "If everything is transformed then what is extinction?" (107).

With the natural man and natural father missing, M fills the vacuum. M is not a natural man in the mode of Jarrah Armstrong but takes on the contours of the natural man in ways which expose the paradox at the centre of this term. Assuming the role of natural man is a form of social camouflage, that parallels the forms of natural camouflage (including smearing himself with kangaroo droppings) that he uses to hunt in the wilderness. Centring the novel on a simulated subjectivity ensures that the narrative is self-implicated. M's actions are both his own and that of another whose place he has taken for tactical reasons. Evacuated of all interiority, except a minimal instrumental consciousness, M acts "as if" he were a rounded nature-loving person whilst making decisions purely on the basis of the demands of the task he has been set. The ease with which M performs the natural man destabilises the naturalness that is attached to this subject position. Several reviewers noted that they had felt distanced from M and could not identify with him. Andrew Peek, for instance, suggests that M had "come across" as being "assembled". Read in terms of character, the contradictions and ambiguities in M's self-articulation (through the interior monologues) appear as flaws. Yet this seems a rather dated idea of character and not one which fits the method employed in this novel. *The Hunter* begins to make more sense if the idea of character is refigured in terms of indeterminacy rather than roundedness, conflict rather than consistency: the faultlines in M that are used in the narrative to de-naturalise the natural man.

Thus M is not a natural man and nor can he become one through – to use the common organic metaphor – personal growth. The reason for this is that he is not a "character", within the humanist precepts of this idea, but an agent. This is an idea which Leigh enjoys playing with. M approaches his task of capturing the thylacine with the depersonalised efficiency of a professional. As an agent charged with a secret mission, M owes generic debts to the heroes of Chandler and Fleming, and other hard-boiled solitary figures. But these similarities are only really passing, because M is an agent at a much more fundamental level. M is an agent not just in the specific sense of being an emissary of "the company" but in the broader sense of being one who is acted through. A closer analogue is the android-hero that features in *Bladerunner* and the *Alien* and *Terminator* film series. Indeed, M is quite literally a "terminator" which Leigh acknowledges in a conversation M has with Lucy and Bike that echoes the catch phrase of *Terminator II*:

'So you'll be back soon,' says Lucy.

'I'll be back.'

'I'll be back,' mimics Bike in a thick German accent. (126)

M has an android relationship to his world, gathering information, noting anomalies, formulating strategies. His mode is not reflection but process. Even his senses are not felt so much as registered. He administrates himself, constantly attending to data, and managing his needs in terms of the task at hand. Also like the android-hero of Hollywood film he stands outside of moral frameworks, his instrumentalism acting as his “licence to kill”, which he does without remorse.

What certain reviewers felt to be a lack of “credibility” in the figure of M is perhaps more true than they intended. We learn that he has come to hate his parents, and that he sensed that his father had somehow failed him. He yearned for the old days of hunting when boys would follow their fathers into the wilderness and learn how to be men. We know that he felt a repressed guilt about a former girlfriend who had to have an abortion. He was also sexually drawn to Lucy and appeared to develop the beginnings of a bond with the children. These are the cyphers of humanity to which a reader is encouraged to cling. They prompt a belief that future behaviour might be mended if M’s wounds could only be healed. Ultimately, however, it is not the reader but M who fails to be convinced of his own “credibility”: “He comes to think of his fondness for Lucy and the children as an aberration, a monumental lapse in judgement, and his vision of growing old and happy in a bluestone house seems to him near laughable . . .” (147).

Leigh uses the device of a character who is in-credible to interrogate the credibility of the humanist subject that is so forcefully encoded in the familiar figure of the natural man. The readerly instinct to make M human is as visible in those who found him poorly rendered, such as Bantick, as it is in those, like Modjeska, who were desolated by his failure to be redeemed. It is this instinct to round an agent into a character that the novel trips up.

This leads to the most daring of the novel’s conclusions, which is that M’s hyperrationality *is* natural. It is destructive, of course, but many things in nature destroy. M’s singular logic, unimpeded by conscience, is as natural as a virus. In predatory mode, M is not alienated, he is utterly connected to his environment through his task; “he is – once more, once more, ever more – the natural man” (114). He exists entirely in the present and future tenses. Memories are carefully filtered. This is the “natural man” in the ecology of postmodernism. It answers the quandary of alienation in heretical (Nietzschean) fashion. The trauma of loss is consoled not by the hope of redemption, but by de-linking loss from sentiment. This is a turn that is familiar from science fiction, involving the dream of a robot that does not dream. Not so much cyborg as hero, but android as anaesthetic: “[M] now pays attention to such minutiae, once the province of instinct, so that other, less pleasant, thoughts do not cross his mind” (141).

In an important essay, “The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in the Fiction of the 1980s”, Cynthia Deitering traced the emergence of a number of American novels, typified by DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985), that reacted to the implications of actual and potential ecological disasters. These novels were postnatural in that they were predi-

cated “on an ontological rupture in [the] perception of the Real” (197), an ontology in which reality was ultimately grounded in an idea of nature that was uncorruptible and regenerative. Deitering’s point is that to contaminate nature was to contaminate the real, and become complicit in its make-up. Jarrah Armstrong was a character who retained a grounding in a regenerative idea of nature; M on the other hand is defined as “natural” by *modus operandi* alone:

Now M is the natural man, the man who can see and hear and smell what other men cannot; the man of delicate touch and sinuous movement; the man who can find his way through the bush by day and night . . . (58)

This form of natural man is not based on the degree to which he forms a palatable bridge between the human and the non-human, but solely on instrumental grounds, solely in terms of what he can *do*. To this extent M is better understood as “postnatural man”, a man who has become natural not by a rejection of technology and instrumentalism but by their complete internalisation. Postnatural man emerges in the condition of post-nature described by Deitering, where nature itself is stripped of its primeval and unchanging solidity and seen as pure process.

DEEP ECOLOGY

The impasse that the novel exposes is not, ultimately, a psychological one but an ethical one. The nature of M’s guilt is less at issue than the nature of M’s crime. While it may draw some of its psychological bearings from *Moby Dick*, a novel Leigh cites as influential, *The Hunter* takes its ethical dynamics from *Crime and Punishment*. Like Raskolnikov, M dreams of the deeds of Napoleon before he commits his fatal act. Yet the problem of repentance that preoccupies Dostoevsky is short-circuited in *The Hunter* by a preceding problem of ethical worth and, in particular, the problem of ascribing value to the non-human. What, after all, constitutes an ecological crime and how does it fit within other ethical priorities? Would we forgive M for destroying a species if he changed his ways and became a good father? In whose power would M’s absolution rest and in which Siberia might he repent?

M’s status as a postnatural rather than a natural man resonates with the broader issue of ecological value that the novel addresses. While decentred characters are an important feature of postmodern narratives, they are heretical to environmental writing in Australia because the human-centred orthodoxies demand a humanist subject position. Leigh’s dismantling of the humanist subject through M might be disturbing, might indeed seem to undermine the basis of ethical judgments or indicate some deeper nihilism. Alternatively, it might be viewed as an attempt to create a basis for the positing of value in the theoretical terms of “deep ecology” which, like the figure of M,

begins with a radical relativising of humanist values.

Deep ecologists take the view that only by a change of values and thinking of a radical order, one which demotes humans to an equivalence with other organisms, can current destructive trends be reversed.⁵ While M's destructiveness profoundly violates these criteria, his own dehumanisation allows a context in which these values can be taken seriously. It is important to point out, for instance, that human redemption is not an element of the formal theory of deep ecology. Given its full radical effect, rather than its watered-down New-Age or liberal humanist adaptations, deep ecology is devoid of consolation in these terms. The ethical imperative that emerges from the premises of deep ecology is one of deference (indeed disengagement) not preservation, as preservation tends to resituate value in human terms by making the non-human world a resource that should be "sustainably managed" for our enjoyment.

Leigh's novel simultaneously interrogates both the preservationist impulse and the deep ecological response. In the final phase of the "hunt" there is little moral distinction between M who seeks to kill the tiger and harvest its genetic information and the Wildlife service which seeks to preserve the tiger as a cherished emblem of the false hope that species loss is not final. The hippies he had previously met at Lucy's house reciting the teachings of Jarrah Armstrong are now armed with satellite telephones and automated infrared cameras and have become crusaders in the quest to save the tiger. This race creates a fabric of inexorability around the "hunt" that disrupts ready distinctions between those who seek to kill and those who seek to preserve. Perversely, M's personal quest to meet the thylacine, with whom he has entered a kind of fatal dance and dialogue, seems to have a terrible nobility. The effect of these reversals is to cast doubt on anthropocentric ethical systems *per se*. What makes *The Hunter* intriguing is that it uses the humanist machinery of the novel form to expose the limits of human-centred values.

The play between human and non-human can be seen in the tendency of M and the thylacine to interpenetrate at various points within the novel. M projects human qualities onto the animal that he is hunting and speculates upon its "thoughts". Conversely, there is, particularly in the final phase of the novel, a tendency toward M being marked by the qualities of the animal he is hunting. These two boundary figures, the notionally human (M) and the phantasmatically non-human (thylacine), bleed into one another. The boundary jumping that the narrative engages in, echoing similar devices in the writing of Barry Lopez, attempts to both articulate a psychology and designate a non-human subjectivity. It is, necessarily, an ambivalent joining. By humanising the thylacine, M grants a nobility to the non-human and to some extent escapes the instrumentalism of his own task (harvesting) and that of the Wildlife service (preservation). However, the fact that he kills the thylacine in spite of his reverence for it leaves the narrative unresolved. This is entirely appropriate: the cultural narrative of irrevocable loss generated by the consciousness of extinction defies resolution.

The novel concludes with two forms of apocalypse that are both interrelated and incommensurable. The first is the destruction of the family that M has come, at last, to

value. After a trip to the mainland, M returns to Tasmania to find the house abandoned. It transpired that one evening, whilst Lucy lay drugged in her room, her daughter Sass had been consumed by fire and, though she survived, faced long-term hospitalisation and permanent injury. Lucy's fragile psyche collapsed completely following this event and she became institutionalised. Bike, her son, is sent to a foster home. The hope that M would be reformed by domestic and romantic means is thus – in the most brutal terms – disallowed and ensures that M's redemption depends entirely upon the outcome of his quest for the thylacine. M, of course, does kill the thylacine, surgically removing its reproductive organs for use by the biotechnology company and so remains, as it were, beyond redemption. The pairing of the two cataclysms, the demise of a family and the extinction of a species, can be seen as a response to a central problem within the ethical project of deep ecology. This problem relates to the fact that attempts to ascribe non-human values must necessarily be conducted through ethical reasoning – which is inescapably human. Something of this dilemma can be seen in the dual-holocaust of *The Hunter*, in which non-human loss is made emotionally intelligible by a corresponding scenario of human loss. The two forms of desolation are ontologically separate but affectively paired. Consistent with this emotional linkage is the fact that M is identified most fully with the thylacine at the very moment when he learns of the loss of Lucy, Sass and Bike: “M has had his chest scooped out. His skin has been peeled from his body. He can dislocate his jaw and fill the universe with a stone-grey roar” (135).

Endnotes

1. Dr Ian Saunders has been teaching an innovative and popular course “Ecotexts: Nature/Writing/Technology” over the past couple of years in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. My thinking in this paper owes much to my experiences teaching in this course.
2. The Proceedings of the 2000 ASAL Conference publish two useful essays of Australian ecocriticism: C.A. Cranston, “Tasmanian Nature Writing and Ecocriticism” (Mead 59–67) and Louise Thomason, “Women, Nature and Poetic Dwelling: Ecofeminism and the Poetries of Phyllis Webb and Judith Wright” (Mead 210–16).
3. “The period from 1983 to 1990 saw the environment movement maintaining its ability to mobilise in large numbers, often on a national basis, and displaying a higher level of professionalism among its key campaigners to achieve important wilderness protection outcomes” (Hutton and Connors 169).
4. The need for redemption in Australian land stories is compellingly evidenced in Ann Curthoys' wonderful essay “Expulsion, Exodus and Exile”.
5. A useful summary of the tenets of deep ecology is found in the following manifesto produced by Arnae Naess (who coined the expression “deep ecology”) and George Sessions, another seminal figure in the movement (Ness 14; Fox 114–15). I quote only the first 3 of its 8 key statements.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.

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