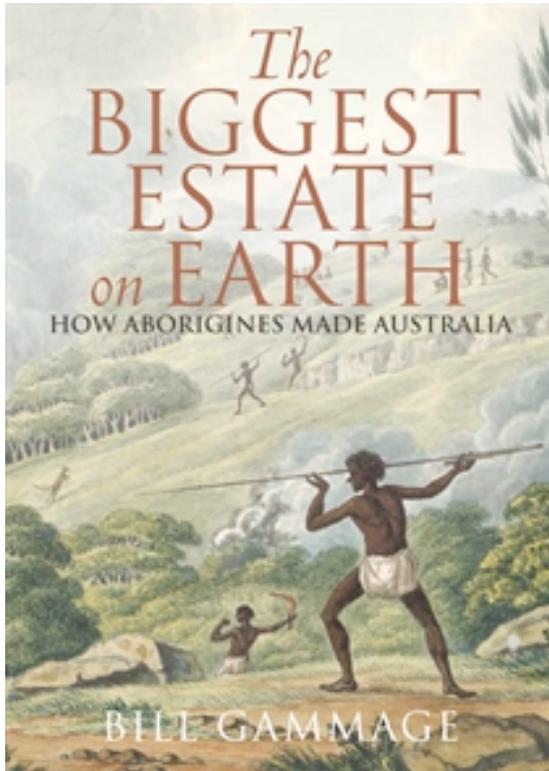


***The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia.*
Bill Gammage. Allen & Unwin, 2011. 434 pp. Paperback \$AUS39.99**



2012 Winner

- Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History
- Victorian Prize for Literature, and Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (Prize for Non-Fiction)
- ACT Book of the Year Award
- Queensland Literary Awards (History Book Award)
- Canberra Critics' Circle Award
- Manning Clark House National Cultural Awards (Individual Category)

'Field Guide for 1788'

Review: Charles Dawson, NZ

I'm walking in Davies Creek National Park, Far North Queensland. To my untrained eye this seems like classic Australian upland savannah country, replete with eucalyptus and grass trees.

What made my experience unusual was the fact I was walking with Andrew Dennis, an expert on the ecology and management of the northern bettong. Andrew explained how in this spot, Aboriginal people watched for conditions when, every four or five years, fire could be managed and used to slowly supplant rainforest with eucalypts and other trees favoured by bettongs, which fed off the fungal truffles encouraged by those trees. Today, this patch of managed partial eucalypts is slowly reverting to rainforest. There are no regular burns as practiced by Aborigines, while Parks & Wildlife staff are less able to conduct large burns, given property infrastructure nearby. So the bettong is at risk as older biodiversity replaces the area of modified land formerly managed by fire. Today, tribal presence is excluded or recalibrates towards towns, while park agencies are hemmed in by introduced infrastructure and slashed state funding. The 'wilderness' is returning for the first time in tens of thousands of years. Ironically, that return is a harbinger of loss: lost firing, lost funding, lost or fragile knowledge, particularly the ecological / Aboriginal knowledge that historian Bill Gammage describes as 'so sacred a weaving of country and soul' (154). In its presentation of abundance of species, knowledges and stories, the book under review is a form of honouring; and because the book succeeds in conveying another world, it is both an elegy and a spur to really learn the country.

In *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Bill Gammage assembles and synthesises decades of research to argue that collectively, Aborigines 'managed an Australian state they thought of as single and universal' (1). Every landscape type on the continent was managed. With the Davies Creek National Park area in mind, I read Gammage learnt that Aboriginal management drew in the northern bettong; the bettong in turn were 'crucial "landscape engineers"; in their digging and seed storing bettong promoted and extended the growth of palatable perennial grasses,

which attract larger marsupials, which were hunted as food' (114). 'Eucalypts topping rainforest indicate land people once went to great trouble, working against the country, to clear and keep clear.' (13).

Gammage opens with the idea of working with and understanding indigenous peoples as a key to truly belonging. This is reiterated by Henry Reynolds in the Foreword:

Bill's evidence must be the final blow to the comforting colonial conceit that the Aborigines made no use of their land. But his message is not only one of deep regret for what was lost but also a call to his contemporaries to continue the task of 'learning' the continent. His final sentence is both challenge and exhortation: *If we are to survive let alone feel at home, we must begin to understand our country. If we succeed, one day we might become Australian.* (xxiii)

The Biggest Estate on Earth 'rests on three facts about 1788' which are set out by Gammage in the Introduction:

Unlike the Britain of most early observers, about 70 per cent of Australia's plants need or tolerate fire (Ch. 3). Knowing which plants welcome fire, and when and how much, was critical to managing land. Plants could then be burnt and not burnt in patterns, so that post-fire regeneration could situate and move grazing animals predictably by selectively locating the feed and shelter they prefer.

Grazing animals could be shepherded in this way because apart from humans they had no serious predators. Only in Australia was this so.

There was no wilderness. The Law—an ecological philosophy enforced by religious sanction—compelled people to care for all their country. People lived and died to ensure this (Ch. 4). (1-2)

The book is divided into four sections: 'Australia in 1788'; 'Why was Aboriginal land management possible?'; 'How was land managed?' and, 'Invasion'.

'Australia in 1788' sets the scene. It draws on many primary English language accounts from early British exploration and settlement to detail the nature of the estate and the many 'park lands' the newcomers encountered. The parks were the large grazing grasslands created and managed by judicious use of fire: 'a planned, precise, fine-grained local caring' (2). Many reviewers have been struck by the range and consistency of these early accounts of large expanses of grassland. Today's spectre of lost biodiversity is presented as a vision of supplanted Aboriginal 'farms without fences', an unmanaged, profuse wildness that encourages fire, tree decay and insect plague; there is urban sprawl and sprawling windblown topsoil. Gammage's prose remains measured though: he contrasts the past and present, but mainly focuses on finding even more settler diaries, explorer journals and official reports to support his position.

The Biggest Estate features dozens of colour reproductions of photographs, maps, survey plans and colonial-era paintings by Lycett, Skipper, Hoddle and others. The images and Gammage's interpretation of them, give the lay reader a remarkable and instructive angle on art, and environmental, history. Gammage generally accepts the verisimilitude of his selection of colonial paintings: 'If a scene was painted before Europeans changed it, as these scenes were, it can be immensely valuable in showing

how Aborigines shaped Australia’ (19)). Most reviews have found the images enlightening and useful. Gammage uses the paintings to demonstrate the return of rainforest in the present, or the ways ‘ends were universal but means adjusted locally’ (92). Caution, context and accuracy are benchmarks for the tribes on the ground and Gammage’s assessment of the documentary record. Gammage’s position recasts earlier interpretations of Lycett such as this one from the 1967 *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: ‘They were obviously engraved to conform to what Lycett regarded as contemporary taste, and they look more like English parkland than antipodean bush scenes’ (Rienits). In labeling the early painting as an overlay of the British imperial eye, whereby parklands are estates, art historians may wish to reconsider earlier interpretations based on what historians like Gammage ferret out. Grass templates, then, are central to Gammage’s argument: ‘Grass templates were farms without fences’ (283).

Near Mt Alexander an area was likened in a journal to Kensington Park. Gammage says:

It might seem a small jump to think them man-made, as in Europe. In fact the leap was so vast that almost no-one made it. Almost all thought no land in Australia private, and parks natural. To think otherwise required them to see Aborigines as gentry, not shiftless wanderers. That seemed preposterous. The parks have gone. Overgrazing had a transforming impact. (17)

Gammage recognises early colonial efforts as massive undertakings. The First Fleet, for example, was ‘a great achievement’ with a substantial logistical and conceptual reach (246). But the colonisers’ conception of the world and the Europeans’ place in it did not permit an understanding of Aboriginal gentry.



Fig. 2 Joseph Lycett, ‘Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos’ c1817.
(Source: National Library of Australia nla.pic-an2962715-s20)

Section two considers ‘The nature of Australia’. Gammage begins with the soil itself. Before millions of hooves compacted it, the soil was referred to as friable, spongy and absorbent. The creeks tended to be ‘distributaries’, gently absorbing water, so that floods on compacted soil were rare. The book attends carefully to the botanical response

to fire ('Fire is drought with legs', 'Eucalypts and fire formed an ancient alliance, which people joined Allying with fire let eucalyptus conquer Australia. (118, 119, 121).

Five features marked 1788 fire. It was planned, it was precise; it could be repeated hence predicted; it was organised locally; and it was universal – like songlines it united Australia. People accepted its price. They must be mobile, constantly attendant, and have few fixed assets. In return they could ration its feed, unleash but never free it, and move it about, sustaining more diversity than any natural fire regime could conceivably maintain. It was scalpel more than sword, taming the most fire-prone country on earth to welcome its periodic refreshing, its kiss of life. Far from today's safe and unsafe fires, campfire and bushfire were one; far from feared enemy, fire was the closest ally. (185)

Fire, population, food – all were controlled to a level where scarcity was rare: 'abundance was thus a precaution, but normal' (151). Fire was the 'main management tool' in 1788. The control of fire, and its attendant ceremonies, were defining in most areas: 'burning every 2-4 years promoted perennial grasslands' (14) and cleared spaces to lure prey. (161). 'Most of Australia was burnt about every 1–5 years depending on local conditions and purposes, and on most days burnt somewhere' (167). As Gammage notes: 'Fire was a life study' (164); 'It was scalpel rather than sword' (185).

Gammage also attends, closely and powerfully, to Aboriginal Dreaming as code, creator and sustainer of lifeway and site:

In its notions of time and soul, its demand to leave the world as found, and its blanketing of land and sea with totem responsibilities, [the Dreaming] is ecological. Aboriginal landscape awareness is rightly seen as drenched in religious sensibility, but equally the Dreaming is saturated with environmental consciousness. Theology and ecology are fused. (132-3)

The Dreaming taught why the world must be maintained; the land taught how. (139)

Aboriginal relationships with place are core: 'Country was heart, mind and soul. Country was not property. If anything it owned' (142). In Chapter five, 'Dreaming', Gammage gathers quotes from scholars such as Deborah Bird Rose and Bill Stanner. The chapter may not present new ideas, but it coalesces a great deal of primary and secondary material. Gammage weaves all these in service of a deeper understanding of one of the world's most profound, intricate and extensive knowledge systems, 'inextricably continent-wide, and cradled in knowing the continent'. (148). Describing songlines stretching from the Kimberley, to Uluru and on to the Cairns coast, Gammage maps a twined system of song and land management that is in peril today.

I found the chapters on 'The Dreaming' some of the most focused and striking in the book. Earlier anthropologists such as Berndt, Stanner, and Strehlow are cited, along with Latz and Rose. Here, Gammage has synthesised published material. Launching the book, John Mulvaney argued 'few historians, even anthropologists, have appreciated the spiritual ethos of Aboriginal society so deeply and its relationship with Country' (Mulvaney 110). Not all reviews have been so kind. Timothy Neale for instance accuses

Gammage of ‘totalising mythopoeic confluents’ (*Arena* 52). Neale’s review criticises Gammage for a view of Aboriginal life stuck in the anthropology of decades past and an ‘uncomplicated’ use of images. Has critical theory ignored the historical material? Have too many historians ignored critical theory? Some theory seems both a limitation and spur in the face of the evidence. Scholars will continue the conversation in work Gammage did not have space to take on. Neale rejects holism and any larger reconstruction of a ‘Noble Savage’ with a nationalist focus aimed at persuading a disbelieving white public, rather than engaging with Aboriginal communities today (*Arena* 51). In part, Neale responds to Gammage’s upfront admission:

Few sources here come directly from Aboriginal people. Over the years Aboriginal friends and acquaintances in Narrandera, Alice Springs, the Coorong and northern Tasmania have taught me, but this book discusses all of Australia, and I had neither the time not the presumption to interrogate people over so great an area on matters they value so centrally. (xv)

Neale critiques notions of the ‘wild’ and ‘authenticity’ as tropes that restrict Aboriginal identity, all the while nourishing the (unearned) notion of settler-colonial belonging. The net result is a reverence of the pre-colonial that airbrushes ecological loss, whilst trapping contemporary Aboriginal peoples in contested, imposed definitions. (‘Duplicity of Meaning’ 316)

While Gammage may not necessarily engage with post-humanist theory (and feel none the worse for that), I find his evocation of holism compelling, evanescent and challenging. But Neale makes an important point: ‘no real connection is made here with contemporary Aboriginal attempts to reclaim land precisely through the identification of a deep history of inhabitation’ (*Arena* 52). Gammage does not set out to create a qualitative, interview-based anthropological study. What value ‘authenticity’ here? Is recourse to text a cop-out, or a practical reaction to the author’s knowledge of his Aboriginal friends, and the blunt reality of lost traditions? Gammage is willing to detail innovations in farming and land care practice; it would have been good to hear from one of his Aboriginal friends in Alice Spring or Narrandera about contemporary realities from their perspective. In saying this, I acknowledge Gammage makes clear he does not wish to inflict his own questions, or unwanted public scrutiny, on his contacts. There are further queries, such as from US environmental historian Tom Isern:

There may have been a variety of approaches, because no matter how many descriptive passages Gammage quotes, his verbal evidence cannot cover the whole continent. Neither, necessarily, did aboriginal management cover every bit of the continent, as Gammage would have us believe. There certainly is evidence of evidence of extensive management of landscapes. This does not prove complete management of every acre of every landscape. The degree of comprehensiveness and of coordination across Australia simply cannot be proven. (*goodreads* 2012)

Isern’s and Neale’s points, and others, will be tested and recirculated as responses eddy and accrue in the wake of such a major book. Gammage is aware that the book that tries to do many things and will not satisfy all readers.

Gammage's gathering and interpretation of the vast range of primary documents consolidates the appreciation of Aboriginal management and influence: 'People prized knowledge as Europeans prized wealth' (133). Again, here is another pithy sentence that is both challenge and lament. 'No land or sea could be vacant, all must have its care and ceremonies or it would vanish, fragmenting the world' (137).

Gammage's focus is 1788; there have been extinctions before and since, but he remains transfixed by the layered complexities of Aboriginal land management. Important conclusions from Gammage include the following: there may be more trees in the country now than there were in 1788, and that Aboriginal burning tended to suppress insect plagues and regulate kangaroo populations. After 1788, kangaroo populations boomed as they 'ran wild' (287). (Mark Spence has made similar observations about Yellowstone and other America national parks). Notions of balance, abundance, conservation, and wilderness are all recast by Gammage and the scholars he relies on: 'A rich and time-eating spiritual life builds on abundance, not poverty. In the driest and most fire-prone continent on earth, abundance was not natural. It was made by skilled, detailed and provident management of country' (139).

Gammage groups and re-gifts swathes of research while explicating his central argument: under Aboriginal land management 'Australia becomes a single estate, varied in means but not ends' (162). For the scholar in this area the insights may not be new. After all, Gammage is explicit about his debt to authors such as Rhys Jones, Eric Rolls, Tim Flannery, Deborah Bird Rose and Peter Latz, (although Chris Johnson's work on mammalian extinctions is absent from his 36-page bibliography).

The book's final chapter, 'Invasion' is relatively short but has great resonance because Gammage presents the terrain of 1788 in such detail. He refers to the ways Tasmanian Aboriginals continued major burning rituals in the face of armed pursuit; he does so quietly, briefly, but his small mention holds great force because of the work he has put in beforehand. He reflects on the sad irony of careful Aboriginal management rendering the land nearly ready for occupation: 'The more carefully [Aboriginals] made the land, the more likely settlers were to take it' (95). Where Aboriginal management favoured careful micro-level firing and holistic calibration of variables, the pastoral economy cut across that level of understanding: 'What people in 1788 prized most, the newcomers prized least. Sometimes deliberately, sometimes not, as soon as they landed they began to destroy' (239).

In closing, Gammage assesses the present with a calculating eye. He's aware of how the nation got here and what might be ahead:

There is no return to 1788. Non-Aborigines are too many, too centralised, too stratified, too comfortable, too conservative, too successful, too ignorant. We are still newcomers, still in wilderness, still exporting goods and importing people and values. ... We use land care to mitigate land misuse. When the time comes to choose between parks and people, species and space, food and freedom, 1788's values will be obliterated. ... Yet across the shattered centuries 1788 can still teach, and some have begun to learn. (321)

Gammage goes on to cite progressive examples where people are beginning to learn from the land and Aboriginal tradition, such as wetland restoration. Farmer Bob Purvis

at Woodgreen Station near Alice Springs (whose cattle stocking rate is about a third less than average, but more sustainable and viable in the long-term), and improved firing (the mean burn size in the western desert of 1788 was perhaps 30 hectares, with most less than 5 hectares. Today, many are about 35,000 ha, with the largest being over 500,00 ha). To this list one could add initiatives like the November 2012 inclusion of indigenous cultural heritage within the World Heritage protocols of Far North Queensland's Wet Tropics (Department of Sustainability).

For Gammage, 'context is vital. You must get inside a source's head, steadily building a subjective impression not of what you think was meant but what he or she thought was meant' (335-6). Gammage's work will reverberate through art history, environmental history, post-colonial studies and the sociology of scientific assessment for some time before some sort of consilience might eventuate. Inter-disciplinary work is very hard to do well, and Gammage lays down some real challenges to scientists and others in the use and explication of historical sources at the end of his book. He is critical of unquestioned adherence to notions of objectivity: 'Objectivity is a research method, not a philosophy' (328):

Few historians ask how Australia became as it was, whereas many scientists do. I urge them to see historical sources not as bones to be picked but as bodies to be studied, and to consider that history's 'impressions' and science's 'objectivity' alike stem from assumptions. Of course sources can be wrong, but to think them inherently wrong brings flat-earthers frighteningly close. (341-2)

A similar, humorous (but no less provocative) take is by Tom Isern:

Gammage, too, gets a little chippy when he recounts the obstinate attachment of scientists to natural causes, rejecting human causes in landscape formation. He seems somehow surprised that scientists should be so thickheaded. In my experience the response of most scientists, when confronted by historians and their evidence, is, 'Yeah, well, we're scientists, and we're smarter than you, so you have to believe what we say'. There is no arguing with this. The only answer is to find better scientists. As John Lewis Gaddis has observed, the best scientists and the best historians pretty much think the same way. (*goodreads* 2012)

Gammage has to work on a continental scale, bringing together over thirty years of research, along with responses from numerous talks and seminars he has conducted. After that feedback Gammage felt no option but to be broad, thorough, sprawling, exhaustive. In a special appendix, Gammage describes his motivation for his approach, unified, as it is, by the twined forces of fire and songline. The appendix, 'Science, history, and landscape', takes on perceived limitations in some scientists' approaches to environmental history; it's his last blow to the deniers of Aboriginal management. The appendix is a very public rebuttal of queries, questions and criticisms he has received over the decades. Scientists have sometimes disagreed outright with his thesis of adaptive Aboriginal management and farming of the continent. One told Gammage that he 'must assume natural features have natural causes', whereas Gammage insists the landscapes of 1788 'were made'. Gammage recalls rebuttals from scientists: 'Their condescension has forced this book into more detail than a general reader might prefer, perhaps still without satisfying the specialist' (325). So here is one explanation for the large number of quotes from primary sources such as letters, diaries and journals. The

quotes are important and often illuminating; while there is a risk of repetition, Gammage has unearthed gems from the archives of the nation, and presented us with insights into the continent before cattle, before concrete.

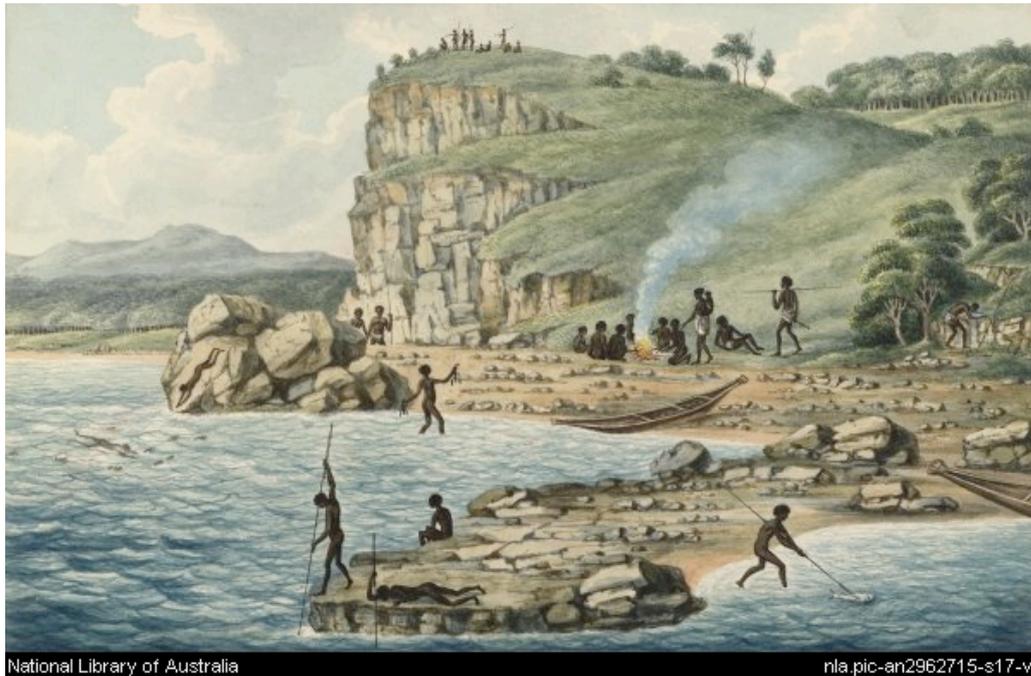


Fig. 3 Joseph Lycett, ca.1775-1828. 'Aborigines spearing fish, others diving for crayfish, a party seated beside a fire cooking fish.' [ca. 1817] 1 watercolour ; 17.7 x 28 cm. (Source: National Library of Australia, PIC R5686)

The praises and prizes *Estate* has garnered are widespread; quibbling seems churlish. Yet there were moments in chapters six to eight where I felt the book could have benefited from a little more of Gammage on the ground, walking the land and taking a more explanatory, filtered tour. The one time we see *him* on the land is in his tale of planting a Mugga Ironbark and watching it spring back to life despite his neighbour's increasingly vigorous attempts to kill it off. I can see the distinction between the position of the historian, as opposed to lyricists of the experiential moment, but Gammage's own experience of some of these places is oblique; and yet he must have many a wandering story to tell. Perhaps that's another book.

For Sylvia Hallam, a noted scholar of Aboriginal lifeways and history (and, along with Eric Rolls, an important influence on Gammage), the sheer bulk of primary quotations, the range of geographic sites and the sudden shifts between different sites make for demanding reading. The layering of source information is at once persuasive and distracting. Thomas Isern even described the cumulative effect as 'deadening'. Yet ultimately Hallam regards the book as 'important and amazing Stunning' (Hallam 123, 126). So readers will be pleased that chapter nine delivers a revealing and absorbing tour of Australia's capital cities sites at 1788. Anyone who knows these places will be intrigued to revisit them. Here, Gammage 'only' has a city to traverse rather than a continent, in those brief moments where Gammage walks the reader through a specific (now urban and well-known) site, pointing out details.

The Biggest Estate is a seedbed; its comprehensive scope seeks to burn off older theories, create a slow, controlled conflagration of perspective that will allow Australians to learn their continent, to renew, and revisit old sites, old texts, old assumptions. It may be as influential in Australia as Geoff Park's *Nga Uruora: The Groves of Life. History and Ecology in a New Zealand Landscape* (1995) was in New Zealand. Park's book, an account of the remnant ecosystems of the New Zealand's lowland rainforest and the Māori and Pākehā histories therein, journeyed to key sites in the country, tracing ecological and historical remnants, and using oral history (and a Gary Snyder-informed lyricism Gammage might eschew, but readers of this journal might welcome) to bring home the extent of the loss of plants, birds and Māori presence in New Zealand's supposedly 'wild' places.

In the twenty-first century Australia and New Zealand are oddly reversed from the position Thomas Mitchell observed in 1847 (and which opens *The Biggest Estate*). Mitchell argued fire was essential to Aboriginal life: 'But for this simple process, the Australian woods had probably continued as thick a jungle as those of New Zealand or America' ('Of the Aborigines' Ch.10). Today, Australia's 'woods' tend to be overstocked with undergrowth, while New Zealand's forests, the nation's environmental watchdog has found, are dying on their feet, with bird nests and plant understory and new leaf-shoots ransacked nightly by possums, rats, stoats, cats, and deer (New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment).

Gammage and Park re-present their countries to the reader: it's a tale of remnants of indigenous biodiversity and cultural memory, those traditions that make both countries unique. Both authors track colonial administration and action as a willful misapprehension of indigenous tradition. This found expression, for example, in statutes that legitimised the acquisition of supposedly 'waste' lands and in the doctrine of *terra nullius*, which was essential to the practice of colonial violence, appropriation, and subsequent amnesia. Gammage observes:

Important books wait on pre-contact management in other lands but only in Australia did a mobile people organise a continent with such precision. In some past time, probably distant, their focus tipped from land use to land care. They sanctioned key principles: think long term; leave the world as it is; think globally, act locally; ally with fire; control population. They were active, not passive, striving for balance and continuity to make all life abundant, convenient and predictable. They put the mark of humility firmly on every place. They kept the faith. The land lived. Its face spoke. 'Here are managers', it said, 'caring, provident, hard-working.' This is possession in its most fundamental sense. If *terra nullius* exists anywhere in our country, it was made by Europeans. (323)

Gammage speaks of a time when lived experience of place worked its way deeper into indigenous relationships with Australia, a transition over time 'from land use to land care'.

What of the Aboriginal presence in conservation management? One hopes further collaboration builds, given the acclaim the book has received. The collaborative innovations Gammage points to are of long standing, and of course there are others. Stanley Breeden refers to Graham Griffin's work with Anangu on fire management at Uluru, while Peter Latz's work in Central Australia is well known (Breeden 1994: 110-119). Aboriginal landowners – who still hold some 20 per cent of the nation, and are

managing 36 million hectares of Indigenous Protected Areas, have remarked on the need for Aboriginal management tools within land management plans and park regimes. Yet as Gammage concludes, 'we have a continent to learn' (323). There is much to be done. Joe Morrison, CEO of the North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance, welcomes the book; he hopes it leads to a stronger integration of Aboriginal methods in land care:

Indigenous land and sea management should be viewed as a 'movement' or 'renaissance', that had humble beginnings in the Top End of the NT, but has now grown to become a 'national movement' with profound potential to build resilience in our communities into the 21st century.

It is perhaps the most significant opportunity for northern Australia to be more than a place where resource extraction takes place, or a place where the water could be transported south or where Indigenous people's lives are intervened with from afar. (OCEANIA 2012)

In a press release about the book, Morrison observes:

Bill Gammage's book shows that Indigenous knowledge is contemporary natural resource management. The discussions also underpinned the urgent need to strengthen and support Indigenous leadership and knowledge to ensure that Indigenous people fully participate in crucial decision making processes about their country. (NAILSMA 2012)

The Biggest Estate on Earth will appeal to a wide audience. Winning the 2012 Prime Minister's for non-fiction, and the top Victorian Premier's and Queensland Literary Awards, will no doubt spread this gift of scholarship. The book deserves a place on course reading lists and book shelves or tablets. It is an exhaustive consolidation and extension of previous work, and a landmark work of environmental history in its own right. For the general reader, the book is a thorough primer to a range of disciplinary approaches to Country, anthropological, historical or natural history. One can move on from there to explore the disciplines in more depth, to venture into the long-running debates on human agency in Australia, or follow up on a branch of theory or science. The book addresses (and often completely upends) interpretive and scholarly approaches to the influence of Romanticism or landscape on early colonial art. It takes a strong stand against scientific assumptions and against those who deploy historical sources without careful reflection. Gammage also attempts to bring holism back into discussions of indigenous cultural practice, not as a form of salvage ethnography but as a marker of what has been lost and what remains; of what should be given unstinting recognition and support, and of the space and means needed to thrive as practitioners dictate. Facing the prospect of such relearning, one is left wondering: has this turn taken too long? Gammage and others have put a new generation on the path.

.... *O, my country men,
Success is an uncle leaving you his fruit farm.
The end of the world with deep-freezes, what if
Your memories are only made of silence?*

Peter Porter, 'In the New World Happiness is Allowed'

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