

Ink, Vomit, Blood and Water: The Ripple Effects of Care, Carelessness, and Violence in *The Octopus and I*

CAITLIN MACDONALD

University of Sydney

In an early scene in Erin Hortle's *The Octopus and I* (2020), breast cancer survivor Lucy watches as an octopus emerges from the shallows and scuttles towards the highway. Lucy is compelled to intervene, 'to help [the octopus]. To be able to *do* something. For her. For myself. To just, finally, do *something*' (72, emphasis in original). Earlier, while *octopussing* (fishing for and pickling octopuses), Lucy, stares into the eyes of an octopus, wondering at its capacity for thought. In defence, the octopus propels a jet of ink onto her chest and Lucy beheads the animal. She later reflects on the "inky record of the octopus's violent death" and wonders, '[i]t did look at me, didn't it?' (72). Hours later, Lucy attempts to save another octopus crossing the highway. She steps onto the road and grasps one of the octopus's tentacles. Misjudging the time it would take to complete the manoeuvre, the two are 'caught in the headlights' (73). Hortle graphically depicts the injuries: Lucy's chest is 'shredded. Strips of skin and flesh peeled back to expose the silicone beneath,' while she holds the 'disembodied octopus arm' (74). In this scene, Lucy is motivated by care but the broader carelessness of her reckless conduct, in combination with the existence of the highway, results in violence.

This essay examines Hortle's portrayal of care, carelessness, and violence as interconnected forces shaped by settler-colonialism and patriarchy in Tasmania. Employing Thom van Dooren's articulation of our 'ethical obligation' to 'get involved in some concrete way' and Astrida Neimanis's figuration of distributed 'bodies of water' that are connected within a hydrocommons, I argue that Hortle's focus on hybridity and liquidity reveals the ripple effects of ethical and careless actions (van Dooren 292; Neimanis 67). These ripples cascade across relational and ecological boundaries and highlight their interconnectedness and lasting consequences. Carelessness, as evident in Lucy's highway intervention, her mutton-birding expedition, alongside Jem's oiling of the boat ramp generates consequences for both human and more-than-human lives. Conversely, acts of care, such as Lucy's successful isthmus crossing with an octopus, reveal the potential for ethical transformation. Hortle's use of liquid materiality—ink, vomit and blood—viscerally illustrates the effects of care and carelessness, grounding the novel's exploration of ethics in the material consequences of human actions.

Hortle situates her narrative in Tasmania, a space imbued with colonial violence and ecological destruction. British genocide of Indigenous peoples, the Port Arthur massacre,

and enduring colonial legacies shape how care is enacted. The Arthur Highway becomes a potent symbol of this violence—fragmenting habitats and endangering natural migrations. By positioning carelessness as both personal and structural, Hortle critiques the persistence of colonial histories in contemporary ethical dilemmas. Through Lucy and Jem, Hortle reveals how white belonging and male violence are implicated in settler-colonial contexts and through impoverished ethical frameworks, where careless impulses perpetuate harm.

In the novel, Hortle traces Lucy's identity formation after breast cancer and an infertility diagnosis. The narrative's three-part structure includes animal voices: the octopuses' voices are rendered through first-person stream of consciousness, the seals through free indirect discourse, and the mutton-bird and human characters through third-person omniscient narration. Hortle, a Tasmanian herself, writes the story of a woman in search of connection to place and people. She complicates the idea that Tasmania is a place of promise through Lucy, an Australian mainlander who grew up in Melbourne, graduated from university, and then moved to Tasmania in search of a new life. Hortle's Tasmanian perspective complicates the trope of a white protagonist 'finding themselves' on stolen land. Lucy works in marketing for a Tasmanian Devil conservation site, and her partner Jem is a Tasmanian-born sustainable abalone farmer and environmentalist. 'Octopussing' with two older women, Flo and Poppy, attempting to save the octopus crossing the isthmus, tattooing octopuses on her scarred chest, and mutton-birding are attempts to resolve her ungrounded identity. However, these methods of belonging minimise Indigenous cultural traditions, revealing Hortle's self-awareness of the neo-colonial overtones of the self-discovery trope. This paper explores Hortle's nuanced portrayal of flawed characters navigating the complexities of living on stolen land in a time of climate change.

My analysis centres on how Hortle navigates an ethics of care in the novel. Van Dooren's work on care, which develops the foundational work of Donna Haraway and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, underpins this analysis. Van Dooren asks, '*what* am I really caring for, *why*, and at *what cost* to whom?' (293, emphasis in original). Hortle's novel grapples with these questions and recognises the murkiness of care—'how care for some... translates into suffering and death for others' (292). I make use of the concept of carelessness that Elizabeth DeLoughrey discusses in her response to *The Care Manifesto's* statement that 'our world is one in which carelessness reigns' (813). DeLoughrey discusses how violence is 'ambivalen[t]' and notes that 'carefulness' is tied to a recognition of responsibility (813). By setting her novel in Tasmania, Hortle foregrounds the legacies of settler-colonial violence that shape Tasmania today. Lucy and Jem's actions reflect broader patterns of 'ambivalence' and responsibility-avoidance that Hortle explores in her representation of white belonging and patriarchal violence (813). Hortle subverts stereotypes of femininity as inherently caring and masculinity as violent, instead critiquing carelessness across genders. Ultimately, Hortle illustrates the profound influence of place on ethical conduct, connecting carelessness, white belonging, and patriarchal violence.

The isthmus scene highlights the interplay between care, carelessness, and violence. Set in the south-east Tasmanian town of Teralina/Eaglehawk Neck, the isthmus is described as the 'land-bridge that connects the Tasman Peninsula to mainland Tasmania' (Hortle 14). As the stage for the car collision, the Arthur Highway that runs through the town's isthmus is another platform for violence. While integral to modern transportation systems, the highway perpetuates ecological violence in the form of habitat fragmentation and wildlife mortality and is the visual manifestation of settler theft and reorganisation of land for the purposes of so-called progress. The highway is pivotal in the novel as the location that endangers octopuses' migrations from bay to bay. Prior to both 'octopussing' and the car accident, Lucy learns of the migratory phenomenon where female octopuses make a perilous journey across the isthmus to brood and safeguard their eggs in sea caves before eventually dying in a process called senescence. Connecting her novel to the long history of violence in Tasmania, Hortle depicts the intersection of multiple forms of violence, including colonial and environmental, on the isthmus. Yet the isthmus also becomes a site of care, for Hortle's octopus is both materially and symbolically emblematic of care; an animal who models care through its sacrificial journey across the isthmus to safeguard its eggs and who represents the means through which carelessness *becomes* care.

Hortle frames Eaglehawk Neck as a hydrocommons, invoking Neimanis's concept of interconnected bodies of water. Neimanis describes water as a 'material' connector, fostering shared responsibilities (86). Neimanis' concept of distributed, connected bodies of water within a hydrocommons fosters a politics of care and ethical responsibility, grounded in a New Materialist framework that views all relations—between self, others, and animals—as interconnected through water, transcending metaphor. The isthmus materialises these connections, symbolising interdependence among humans, animals, and ecosystems. The notion of the hydrocommons is guided by the question, '[h]ow might both our difference and commonality as bodies of water help us cultivate more attentive relations to other bodies of water, both connected to and different from us?' (67). Through constructing a narrative hydrocommons, Hortle portrays how the substances of ink, vomit and blood contaminate the space and palpably convey the ripple effects of carelessness.

Ink and Vomit – Problematising White Belonging

Lucy's scarred chest, reshaped by a car collision and mastectomy, becomes a canvas. Rejecting implants, Lucy seeks healing through tattoos, forging a connection between her body and octopuses—creatures with whom she resonates—embracing their fluid, alien forms. Lucy's focus on how the tattooed octopus is '[l]iving her body with her' articulates her deep yearning for relational connections (Hortle 144). Yet, as the tattooed octopus 'still[s]' as her scars heal, Lucy's loneliness persists, emphasising that art alone cannot resolve the deep dissatisfaction that pervades her sense of self (154). This ink, impregnating

her body and marking her transformation, parallels the ink in the novel's print medium. Both forms of ink serve as liquid *commons*—one embodying Lucy's search for relationality and the other extending the hydrocommons to the textual realm, linking humans and more-than-humans through shared communication.

Hortle critiques Lucy's replication of Indigenous cultural practices, exposing the coloniality of her self-discovery. Lucy's participation in mutton-birding exemplifies settler appropriation of Indigenous traditions, reducing them to symbolic markers. This appropriation underscores the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples, as articulated by Patrick Wolfe's work on the complexity of settler subjecthood in settler-colonial states. By thinking through settler-colonialism as a framework rather than an event, Wolfe's logic of elimination sees the continuation of colonial violence and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the maintenance of settler communities. Hortle explores the tensions inherent in settler-colonial societies, highlighting the conflict between white notions of belonging and Indigenous sovereignty. Lucy's limited empathy and appropriation of Indigenous practices reveal care's superficiality without deeper acknowledgment of cultural contexts. Hortle critiques Lucy's self-serving desire to belong, which perpetuates settler-colonial violence. Lucy's mutton-birding highlights the colonialist reduction of Indigenous practices to tools for personal discovery. Mutton-birding is the seasonal practice of harvesting shearwater chicks for food, oil, and feathers. An historic cultural practice for the Palawa and Paredarerme peoples, mutton-birding contributes to the formation of connection to land, sea and people, and shapes a sense of Country and kinship (Tasmanian Government).

After hearing Flo and Harry recount their family's mutton-birding traditions, Lucy requests they do it together 'for old time's sake' (186). Together, they toast, '[t]o fuck with red tape' (187). For Lucy, mutton-birding becomes an opportunity to feel 'alive' rather than an opportunity for meaningful engagement with the practice's cultural and ecological context. Hortle extends Lucy's moral ignorance when Lucy reflects: 'laughing with Flo and Harry; mutton-birding with the Seabornes. She was alive, with her arm thrust in a burrow. She was alive' (223). For Lucy, the result of feeling 'alive' outweighs the ethics of submitting to 'regulations' that respect and protect cultures and animal lives (187). Lucy's overpowering desire is to participate in 'the oldest living culture after all,' and she justifies her actions: '[t]hose baby birds have been plucked from burrows for millennia, and what's tradition if not that?' (210). Through Lucy's appropriation, Hortle critiques the colonialist logic that dismisses Indigenous sovereignty and reduces cultural practices to tools for settler self-discovery. As Philip McKibbin argues in his critique of muttonbirding practices among Kāi Tahu in the South Island of New Zealand, revitalising cultural identities requires a radical reimagining of relationships with animals, including foregoing consumption and prioritising care and environmental protection (*Consider the Titi*). Hortle acknowledges the problematic

aspects of Lucy's methods of grounding herself that fail to engage with the nuances of differing cultural relationships to land.

Hortle amplifies Lucy's carelessness in her act of mutton-birding, particularly in her ambivalence towards Indigenous tradition and the birds themselves. Encouraged by Flo and Harry to "flick it" and break the bird's neck, 'Lucy grins frenziedly from Flo to Harry and then, for some reason, raises the writhing bird above her head and flicks it down like she's a starter at a school athletics carnival' (219). In the chick's 'vomit' that 'sloshes... down... her body' and the crazed way Lucy kills the bird, Hortle harnesses liquid materiality to convey the violence inherent in Lucy's actions (219). The bird's vomit becomes evidence of Lucy's detachment from the ethical weight of her actions. Repulsed, Lucy 'tries to brush it from her clothes, but really, all she's doing is rubbing the orange gunk further into the fabric,' and declares to Flo that she 'can't get the smell off my hands. I kept rubbing and rubbing, but it was all greasy and the water couldn't cut it' (220, 226). Like the ink that stains Lucy when octopus-ing, the bird's vomit is material evidence of violence. Hortle further emphasises the carelessness that informs the decision behind the violence. Lucy wonders, 'why does it feel permissible to kill a baby bird, but not a pregnant octopus?' before later revealing, to the discomfort of readers, 'the narcissistic truth: that the octopuses, with their grossly female and alien bodies, somehow resonate with her and her sense of self in a way that the concept of a baby bird, or even a bird family unit, simply doesn't' (209). Hortle indicates that Lucy's reliance on *feeling* is deficient; for in a robust ethics of care, a comprehensive sense of responsibility is more important than empathy. Hortle critiques Lucy's actions within this framework, portraying her shallow adoption of mutton-birding as emblematic of a broader colonialist logic that appropriates Indigenous practices without engaging with their cultural significance. This logic extends to Lucy's attempt to mitigate her guilt when, after being caught by a local policeman, with Flo taking the fine for their mutton-birding expedition, Lucy seeks to 'make amends,' imploring Flo to 'look back through [her] family tree' to see if she has 'Aboriginal heritage' so she might 'get excused on cultural grounds' (259). Flo makes it clear that she will not lie and refuses Lucy. Flo's statement 'it's not my history' challenges Lucy's self-serving motivations (259). Through Flo's refusal to enable Lucy, Hortle critiques settler appropriation disguised as environmental, cultural or personal engagement.

The interspecies implications of violence surface in the anthropomorphic voice of a mutton-bird father returning to his stolen chick—the chick we assume to have been stolen and killed by Lucy. The mutton-bird father's voice provides an alternate non-human perspective and centres on familial care, challenging anthropocentric notions of responsibility. His distinctly male role in nurturing the chick exemplifies the possibilities for care in human male roles. The bird reveals that '[w]hen [the egg] wasn't beneath him he was hunting the ocean for krill to share and when it wasn't beneath her she was hunting the ocean for krill to share' (241). This vision of shared caregiving contrasts with the solitary

octopus, described earlier as having no ‘familial bonds’ and living ‘predominantly solitary lives’ (68). The father ‘[w]aited to be as flock again... no longer an empty us. Waited to be no longer an I in pain. No bird is only an I’ (68, 243). The bird waiting for his chick that will never return highlights the ripple effects of Lucy’s carelessness. These themes of environmental and cultural harm later converge in Jem’s confrontation with Lucy. Critiquing her actions and the broader implications of ‘white people mutton-birding,’ Jem’s grief is palpable as he asks: ‘How could you do that? They fly all the way from the Bering Sea to have their chicks here. Half of them starve on the way because we’ve fucked the planet up so much there’s not enough food’ (307). Hortle contrasts Lucy’s flawed care with Jem’s sustainable practices and critiques of patriarchal violence.

Yet, Jem’s portrayal is complicated by the novel’s framing, which juxtaposes him with Harry—the ‘salt-of-the-earth’ man Lucy ultimately connects with. While Jem adheres to an ethical code prioritising care towards animals, his character is undermined by his contradictions and careless actions, positioning him as a hypocritical environmentalist. Hortle navigates settler-colonial and environmental complexities by allowing her characters to be flawed and by exposing the deep carelessness that accompanies Lucy’s conduct. In her characterisation of both Lucy and Jem, their demonstration of care as well as their ethical deficiencies, Hortle vividly illustrates the ripple effects of carelessness, particularly through its material imagery of liquid ink, vomit, and blood. These substances traverse boundaries, staining and permeating spaces, symbolising the pervasive and far-reaching consequences of ethical lapses. Lucy’s thoughtless actions initiate ripples of harm that affect not only the bird’s immediate family but also the ecological balance and the cultural practices tied to that species.

Blood and Water – Patriarchy and Settler-Colonial Violence

Hortle extends her exploration of settler-colonial violence to consider its imbrication with patriarchal violence. Hortle contrasts Jem’s capacity for care in his empathy for animals with men who intentionally harm animals. In Jem’s sustainable abalone fishing, ‘humane’ methods of killing, and deeply troubled responses to the men around him who do not subscribe to the same ethical code, Hortle establishes that he adheres to an ethics that prioritises care and carefulness towards animals (127). When reflecting on childhood memories of fishing with his father, Jem remembers his father explaining, “[i]f you’re going to take a life, Jem, then you need to do it quickly. Fast is humane... Never leave an animal to suffer, even if it’s just a fish” (127). Hortle juxtaposes this ethical modelling with Jem’s memories of local boys Shayne, Rob, and Pete, three brothers who would ‘leave fish to drown in air, catching more than they’d need and kicking the bodies, which had turned leathery in the sun, back into the water as they mooched away’ (128). From the same boys, Jem ‘learnt that if you acted like you owned a place, maybe you did,’ and that ‘you needed a plan of attack’ when it came to sexual encounters with girls (129). In the behaviour of these

young boys who exemplify a style of masculinity that involves gratuitous animal cruelty, a colonial attitude towards land ownership, and misogynistic attitudes towards women, both in the form of carelessness and overt violence, Hortle links settler-colonial and patriarchal violence.

From the perspective of Jake, a local boy and the son of Shayne the fisherman, Hortle articulates how patriarchal hyper-masculinity manifests in alcohol abuse, gun violence and an inconsistent ethical code, and connects patriarchal violence to a long history of colonial violence in Tasmania. Jake's initiation into manhood during a fishing trip with his father, Shayne, and uncles, Rob and Pete culminates in violence—the killing of a seal pup—that serves as a rite of passage. Preceding the fishing trip, Hortle depicts the pup's search for food, encounters with other seals, and imagined future of being a 'beta' seal (91). Hortle emphasises the innocence and playfulness of the seal who is 'perplexed' at why the tuna he is hunting is 'trying to race in one direction' but being 'pull[ed]... in the direction of the boat' before abruptly concluding the scene:

he launches himself up into the air at it, breaching his head and shoulders up high enough to reach the dangling fish. He sinks his teeth into its rich, fatty flank. For a brief moment, his eyes meet the eyes of a human-half-pup who is standing in the boat. The human-half-pup's expression of surprise is so distinct, so seal-like, if it weren't for the fish in his mouth he would have barked a laugh. Syrupy blood trickles down his throat. (92)

In viewing Jake's 'expression' as 'seal-like,' Hortle flips an anthropomorphic expectation of animal's having human-like qualities and challenges an anthropocentrism that relies on human comparison (92). By presenting the seal pup's rendition of the encounter first, Hortle augments the cruelty of the fishermen's treatment of the seal after its account abruptly ends. In retrospect, we become darkly aware that the seal's account ends here because he is immediately killed after snatching the tuna. Following the seal's account, Hortle introduces Jake and the prospect of him becoming 'a man' through the exclusively male activity of 'tuna fishing' (115). Hortle positions this rite of passage as one that will test his manhood through violence.

In Jem's childhood memories of these same men who 'acted like [they] owned a place,' Hortle emphasises the imbrication of colonialism and patriarchy as enacted through gun violence (129). After luring the tuna, Jake is gruffly guided by his father to gaff the fish but before he can secure the catch, the seal pup 'grabs hold of the fish's flank,' 'look[s] right at Jake,' and 'begins to tug the tuna back down into the sea, yanking the gaff from Jake's sweaty grasp' (122). Like the octopus who looks directly at Lucy before she kills it, Hortle uses the gaze between humans and animals to emphasise the seal's sentience. Hortle

identifies that without the fish as a commodified trophy, the initiation ritual is incomplete. Jake's uncle, Rob, shoots the seal:

the shock of a bullet rings out. Jake scrambles to his feet and peers out from behind Rob's beefy shoulder. The sleek lump is already floating away from the boat; thick clouds of blood bloom after it... Jake looks at the tuna. It's still dangling from the line. The gaff is still stuck in its cheek. Its eyes have quietened and shrunk back into its head. Blood seeps from its serrated flank into the water, then spirals away in loose tendrils. (122)

In this grisly scene, Hortle emphasises the vulnerability of both animal bodies and the contrasting human responses in Jake's shock and the older men's nonchalance. In the images of the 'sleek lump... floating,' 'thick clouds of blood,' and the tuna with its 'serrated flank,' 'dangling' by its hooked 'cheek,' Hortle underscores the violence with images of base materiality (122). Hortle reminds us of the ripple effects of carelessness in the seal's blood—liquid and material evidence of the violence. Immediately following the gruesome description, Hortle shifts to the completion of Jake's initiation that involves a celebration of the violence. Instructed to hold the fish up and "[s]mile, mate" for a photo as evidence of the catch, 'Jake's dad murmurs, "You're a man now"' (123). The 'grim silence' that follows the memory of the Port Arthur massacre amongst the men is repeated in Jake's incapacity to respond to his father's questions regarding his silence (118).

The men return to shore and are confronted by Jem, the 'eco-warrior,' who enquires after the gunshot and half-dead seals he had seen (129). In Jem's response to the gratuitous killing of the seals, the lack of consequences the killers face, and tension in his relationship with Lucy, Hortle portrays how Jem's ethical code is contradicted by his actions that demonstrate carelessness. Jem is troubled by the 'recreational' aspect of fishing, the fishermen who are 'rolling drunk at the boat ramp' and the 'tuna arriving earlier,' a sign of disrupted environmental patterns (289). While critiquing this male trope, ironically, Jem fails to see his own place within the chaotic performance of hypermasculinity imagined in acts of abandon and violence, himself drunk and recklessly oiling the Eaglehawk Neck boat ramp with Zach. Hortle links drunkenness, domestic violence, boy-to-man initiation, and the recklessness in 'recreational' fishing and suggests that expressions of hypermasculinity are bound up with ecological destruction (289). Hortle deepens the irony of Jem's inability to register his own expressions of hypermasculinity through mirroring Jem's earlier critique of Shayne, Pete, and Rob in his own conduct: '[b]oys will be boys, Jem learnt, and he knows the type of men those coarse, careless, boofhead boys would have grown into. Just having a laugh. Always laughing, never caring' (129). Here, Jem's memory of the boys is replicated as Jem 'laugh[s]' at Zach (290). Hortle highlights the hypocrisy in Jem's carelessness through stream-of-consciousness narration: '[a]nd there's Zach. Look at him as he tests the ramp with his foot, look at him as it slips out and he nearly does the splits;

you can almost hear his groin muscle ripping. Laugh at him. Go on: laugh at him!’ (290). While valuably motivated by a sense of justice for the seals, Hortle exposes Jem’s contrarian ethics by pairing his critique of the violent tendencies in other men with a demonstration of his own carelessness.

The dark irony is that Jem’s actions lead to Shayne’s death. Despite revealing that in his childhood he learnt ‘that if you acted like you owned a place, maybe you did,’ Jem fails to connect his own actions with learned colonial and patriarchal mentalities (129). Confronted by Lucy, Jem justifies: “‘We were high. It wasn’t just me. It was a prank. It wasn’t... it wasn’t my fault—our fault’” (337). Hortle deepens her critique by juxtaposing Jem’s environmental advocacy with his reckless actions. Jem’s oiling of the boat ramp, leading to Shayne’s death, reveals his own carelessness and complicity in cycles of violence. This act exemplifies the ripple effects of carelessness, as Jem’s reckless behaviour not only results in direct harm in the literal and figurative spilling of blood but also perpetuates broader patterns of patriarchal and colonial violence. Hortle exposes the irony of Jem’s critique of hypermasculinity while failing to confront his own flaws. This tension underscores how patriarchal and colonial systems perpetuate harm through both overt violence and carelessness. Jem’s inability to confront his carelessness results in Lucy’s desire to separate from him.

While Hortle effectively critiques patriarchal violence, her framing of Jem and Harry raises questions about how masculinity is valorised or problematised in the novel. Jem’s depiction as a ‘green’ boyfriend who is hypocritical, overly sensitive, and careless with human lives reinforces stereotypes about environmentalists as misanthropes. His eventual downfall—as the architect of both Shayne’s death and his deteriorating relationship with Lucy—seems disingenuous when contrasted with the portrayal of Harry, who, in contrast, is presented as an intuitive and grounded partner who accepts Lucy’s transformed body and lifestyle. This framing risks positioning Lucy’s personal growth as contingent upon her finding a ‘better’ man—one whose masculinity is constructed as more ‘natural’ and in tune with the land. Furthermore, Lucy’s journey is complicated by its reliance on appropriated Indigenous lifeways. Her engagement with mutton-birding, framed as a pathway to self-discovery, raises questions about the ethics of settler identity-making through the adoption of practices tied to Indigenous culture. This, combined with the novel’s implicit suggestion that Lucy ‘finds’ herself by aligning with Harry, risks perpetuating the idea a particular form of masculinised connection to the land is a ‘natural’ resolution to her struggles. Hortle deepens this critique by highlighting how patriarchal and colonial systems are imbricated, yet the resolution of these tensions feels uneasy. While Jem’s hypocrisy is exposed, the narrative appears to forgive Lucy’s appropriation and recklessness more readily. This imbalance reinforces a troubling dynamic where Jem is punished for his failings, while Lucy’s are contextualised and excused. In doing so, Hortle’s exploration of masculinity and care risks reaffirming patriarchal norms rather than dismantling them. The ripple effects of

carelessness extend beyond individual actions to reflect broader systems of harm in the hydrocommons of Eaglehawk Neck. From the seal's death to Shayne's, and Lucy and Jem's fractured relationship, Hortle illustrates how violence reverberates through ecosystems and human connections alike. Yet, the novel's handling of gendered and cultural dynamics leaves unresolved tensions, inviting further interrogation of how settler-colonial and patriarchal frameworks shape narratives of care and harm.

Care

Hortle marks the shift from carelessness to care by contrasting the opening car crash with Lucy and the octopus's successful isthmus-crossing, a rendition that demonstrates a united sense of care for self, others, and animals. Unlike the novel's opening scene, Lucy makes it in time before an oncoming car reaches them. She 'lunges and scoops the octopus into her arms before it can drag itself out onto the bitumen,' the car passes, and the octopus climbs onto her back (342). Hortle materialises Lucy's immersion in the hydrocommons as she releases the octopus into the sea. In seawater, Lucy's desire to belong and desire for *immersion* is finally granted but here it does not rely on cultural appropriation. Furthermore, Lucy's failed and now successful attempt to care for the octopus in its journey across the isthmus, followed by the recognition that the octopus will die' relies on a celebration of life and knowledge of the reality of death (3). Here, Hortle engages ethical value-systems and depicts the complexity of ethical care that acknowledges the octopus' life of sacrifice for its eggs and yet positions Lucy as resolved to uphold the value of this singular animal's life. In the absence of ink, vomit, and blood, Hortle demonstrates Lucy's careful engagement with the octopus that includes a more careful approach to herself.

At the end of the novel, Lucy's identity is fully realised yet Hortle leaves unresolved Jem's act of violence. Jem's acts speak to endless patterns of violence that are born out of personal carelessness and social structures of settler-colonialism and problematic expressions of masculinity that perpetuate harm. Wolfe's conception of colonisation as a structure rather than an event influences this paper's view of Hortle's resolution of Lucy's journey to belong and irresolution of Jem's actions. Hortle acknowledges issues of white belonging and patriarchal violence but does not resolve them, ultimately pointing to the deeply unethical ways settlers exist on this land. Many novels provide polemic responses to these contemporary problems, yet for Hortle, fiction has limits—it can expose ambiguities but cannot offer the solace of resolution to such ethical complexities. In her depiction of ink, vomit, and blood, Hortle emphasises the material consequences of carelessness and its comprehensive effect on the hydrocommons of Eaglehawk Neck. This paper engages with Hortle's depiction of care, carelessness, and violence and how they ripple out to manifest in relations to self, others, and animals. By focusing specifically on the space of Tasmania and the structural carelessness and violence embedded in contemporary colonial relationships

to land, Hortle points to the complexity of ethical care in a context of climate change but ultimately endorses care and *careful* relations to self, others, and animals.

The concept of ‘ripple effects’ offers a compelling analytical framework for examining Hortle’s novel, particularly in the context of care, place, and agency within anti-colonial critiques. Ripple effects function as a metaphor and a material reality, capturing the expansive and interconnected consequences of actions within the hydrocommons. By tracing the ripples of individual and structural acts of carelessness, Hortle’s novel reveals how violence extends beyond immediate perpetrators and victims, encompassing broader ecosystems, social structures, and interspecies relations. The theoretical insights offered by using this frame are manifold. First, ripple effects foreground the relational nature of ethical and unethical actions, emphasising that no act exists in isolation. This lens resonates with theories of care that stress interdependence, as well as anti-colonial frameworks that critique settler-colonialism’s enduring structures of harm. By extending the frame to environmental and non-human agents, the ripple metaphor aligns with place-based ethics and Indigenous epistemologies, which often stress the entanglement of human and non-human worlds. Second, the ripple framework accommodates ambiguities and thwarted outcomes. Ripples may dissipate, intersect, or be interrupted by opposing forces, reflecting the complexities and unpredictability of ethical relations. For example, Hortle’s depiction of Lucy’s eventual embrace of care and carefulness contrasts with Jem’s unresolved trajectory, illustrating how ripples can produce divergent patterns even within shared contexts. This analytical frame also accommodates multiplicity, allowing us to explore how different places, political formations, and historical contexts might produce distinct ripple effects.

Conversely, the novel also explores how care can generate positive ripple effects, albeit more subtly. Lucy’s eventual acts of carefulness—rooted in her recognition of interdependence with the land and its inhabitants—suggest a tentative model for ethical relationality. These moments of care, though small, have the potential to ripple outward, challenging entrenched patterns of violence and fostering regenerative practices. However, Hortle resists idealising care, acknowledging its limits and complexities. The novel also situates ripple effects within the specific geography and history of Tasmania, a space marked by settler-colonial violence and ecological fragility. This setting underscores how certain places and political formations can shape the direction and intensity of ripples. The hydrocommons of Eaglehawk Neck, with its intricate waterways and interdependent species, serves as a metaphor for the entangled relationships that characterise both ecological and social systems. In this context, acts of carelessness are amplified, their ripples extending across species and generations. While Hortle stops short of providing solutions, the novel hints at the potential for reimagining ripple effects through practices of care that prioritise interdependence and mutual respect. Hortle’s unresolved depiction of Jem’s violence and Lucy’s tentative emotional resolution highlights the enduring

complexities of ethical care in a world affected by climate and colonisation. By focusing on the ripple effects of carelessness and care, the novel reveals the interconnected and far-reaching consequences of human actions within the hydrocommons of Tasmania. This analytical frame offers valuable insights for theorists working at the intersections of care, place, and anti-colonial agency, emphasising the relational and often unpredictable nature of ethical and unethical acts. Ultimately, Hortle's work underscores the importance of cultivating careful relations while acknowledging the profound challenges of doing so within the entrenched structures of settler-colonialism and environmental crisis.

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