

## *Toward a Bioregional “Poethics”: An Archipelagic Survey of Australian Longform*

### *Ecopoetics*

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Ecopoetry is often praised for its ability to creatively reckon with humanity’s place in the greater nonhuman biosphere. However, recent research has argued that the genre risks perpetuating neocolonial ways of writing about the environment. This is particularly the case in colonial contexts such as Australia, where contemporary settler conceptions of ecology remain deeply entangled with the ongoing history of First Nations dispossession and genocide, as well as acts of ecocide. To address this ethically-fraught bind—what I term “the settler problem” of Australian ecopoetics—for my time as an RCC fellow, I will continue work on a bioregional and anti-canonical survey of First Nations and settler poets who, either individually or collaboratively, have created expansive, place-based long ecopoems that prioritize a more open-ended, relational, and ethical approach to writing ecologies in Australia. Though much has been written on longform or epic poetry in the Anglophone world, this project will present the first extensive ecocritical survey of that form or genre in Australia. Some of the key texts I aim to analyze during my time at the fellowship include John Blight’s *A Beachcomber’s Diary* (1963) and *My Beachcombing Days* (1968), Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella’s *False Claims of Colonial Thieves* (2018), and Louise Crisp’s *Yuiquimbiang* (2019) and *Glide* (2021).

Though the majority of the works to be surveyed in my study are overt examples of an expansive or longform *ecopoem*, many of the texts are also highly experimental (both thematically and formally), and do not fit so easily into the category of a “long poem.” However, it is the sheer diversity of such texts that reflects another central interest of this study, to break out from strict categorizations that continue to govern discourse surrounding the long or epic poem in Western literary studies. A categorization which long-poem scholar Lynn Keller notes, through a feminist reading (or *unreading*) of the long poem, has led to the “exclusion of women from the canon.”<sup>1</sup> For Keller it is essential then to break the mode from any one generic category, such as the epic, to ensure simplified notions of the long poem do not “irresponsibly restrict the pool of poets deemed worthy of serious attention.”<sup>2</sup>

In terms of methodology, this project redeploys Indigenous poet and academic Peter Minter’s archipelagic approach to reading Australian poetry, which he argues is all about keeping “things local, as nodes in constantly evolving networks, rather than trying to universalise a totalising idea about Australian poetry.”<sup>3</sup> For Minter, this archipelagic approach—which draws on Martinican novelist, poet, and philosopher Édouard Glissant’s idea of “archipelagic thought”—has the potential to upset “normative ideas about nation, cultural and ideological homogeneity”<sup>4</sup> by viewing “locations on the surface of the planet [...] as earthly temporal and spatial archipelagos,” or as outcrops “of sensibility amidst oceans of inscrutability.”<sup>5</sup> With Minter’s “archipelagic” conceptualization in mind, my anti-canonical experiment in remapping Australia’s ecopoetic landscape through a reappraisal of a poetic mode which has received little scholarly attention, will thus center on reading works from the “ground up,” i.e., each essay-cum-chapter will center on the unique “ecopoethic” process each poet has developed in dialogical relation to different First Nations Countries and ecologies, as well as the way their respective poetic traditions have thus become somewhat “bastardized” through this attunement to place.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Minter, “Archipelagos of Sense: Thinking about a Decolonised Australian Poetics,” *Southerly* 73, no. 1 (2013): 160–61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

## References

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