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Jam Tree Gully

Abstract: I argue that emphases on personal, felt experiences in John Kinsella’s Jam Tree Gully enact the simultaneous writing of habitat and pained husbandry in the WA landscape; it is a strategy that delimits the ethical grounds from which we can think of our limited pacts with others. This entails observing Kinsella’s relationship between ideas and things, referents in the landscape scene of domesticity and community, before gesturing towards a renewed sense of empathy and pragmatism for the Anthropocene.

Keywords: empathy; habitat; husbandry; John Kinsella; pragmatism

Pastoral in the specific case of Australia is twofold – a construct to recreate European, specifically English, rural power structures, the reconfiguring of ‘home’ in an alien landscape. Such landscape-usage comes out of a politics of oppression and degradation of indigeneity. A new pastoral must come out of this that re-examines what constitutes the rural space and how that is mediated. (Kinsella and Stewart, 2003, p. 12)

The internationally renowned ecological poet, John Kinsella, polarises the academic community and his public. His work is a political project fusing ethics and poetics, drawing reader and critic into heated debates and the emotional terrains of environmental crisis. His works are unrelenting in their pursuit for an honest literary witness of landscape in the aftermath of colonial practices and in the context of neo-colonial policies. To enter into the intellectual terrain of Kinsella’s world, more anarchic than recalcitrant, is to make a commitment to confronting the complexities of writing in our age, simultaneously critiquing and reaching out to the community at large.

*Jam Tree Gully* is the first volume in a trilogy that records the difficulties of ethically settling a piece of land in the fragile bioregion of Western Australia, part of the Southwest Australian savannah ecoregion. The conflict between urban attitudes and bush culture, distilled into the incommensurable values of environmentalism and agrarian development, provides a suitable political backdrop and aesthetic foreground to Kinsella’s exploration of pastoral. The collection invokes a diaristic precision of attention to the micro, but with equal interests in global cultural contexts and an individuated perceiving consciousness, it is warped by a particular paranoia: that of repeating past (European) human practices – literary and agricultural – and of the present impact of our words and deeds in the context of habitats modified by climate change, invasion ecologies and blindness to indigenous cultures.

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1 At the time of writing, *Jam Tree Gully* 2 and 3 were separate volumes emerging as *Firebreaks*; *Jam Tree Gully* 4, a parallel piece to the trilogy (rather than an ending) was in the process of composition. Poems cited in this chapter are from volume 1 unless otherwise stated. References to unpublished material are made with thanks to John Kinsella.