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RADICAL PASTORALISM: JOHN KINSELLA'S GREAT 'PASTORAL TRILOGY'

Liu Pingping and Glen Phillips

Introduction

Our purpose in this paper is to trace the poetic progress of John Kinsella, as an example of an Australian poetic attack on the traditions of the 'pastoral Eden' – the idea that humans are inclined to be more moral and more appealingly human if they are closer to 'Nature', i.e., away from the inherent evil and corrupting influences of cities, or similar urban and industrial situations. This may seem an idea long outdated, certainly since the decline of the so-called Romantic Revolution of the early nineteenth century. Yet as recently as the 1970s the retreat to nature was so fashionable that Kinsella himself fled from the city to the rain forests of south-western Australia to lead a commune style existence. Australian writers as notable as Peter Carey in his novel *Bliss* and Tim Winton in his Vogel Prize winning novel *An Open Swimmer* suggested there was some kind of sublimity (albeit accompanied by risks of violence) to be sought in the new-found arcadias of what, eventually, helped give birth to the Green Movement – in Australia at least.

We have chosen this internationally acclaimed West Australian poet because early in his literary career he selected as an example for his anti-pastoral campaign the vast wheat growing and sheep raising region of the western part of Australia and in particular the Avon Valley region. Actually, he spent many periods of his youth in the area near York, the town serving the first outback farmlands to be settled by British colonialists after they seized this western part of the country from the Indigenous Australians in 1829.

Kinsella's own relatives farmed near York for many years of the twentieth century and he has now gone back to live there himself. For his secondary education he attended Geraldton High School, a regional centre to the northern Wheatbelt. So he is well placed to observe closely these 'wheat and wool' landscapes and to note how they have been sadly affected by generations of exploitative landowners.

This has been the substance of most of Kinsella's enormous poetic output since about 1990. In fact, his final volume of landscape poetry trilogy, *The New Arcadia*, was published in 2005 in America (by the prestigious Norton Books) to great acclaim. The 'Pastoral Trilogy' was initiated by Kinsella with *The Silo* back in 1995, followed by *The Hunt* in 1998. These three books will now be examined in turn to establish the basis for Kinsella's environmentally conscious attacks on the agricultural industry and its abuse of the local landscapes. A brief selection of poems from the three volumes of the trilogy will be looked at in detail from the point of view of recent 'ecocritical theory' as developed in the USA and Britain over the last twenty years or so.

Ecocriticism in the Australian Context

Landscape, normally meaning 'the scenery of an area of land, or a picture showing a view of the countryside, or this type of art'¹, is sometimes discussed in Australia as the

stage or setting on which much of the events of Australian history have unfolded. A history of the Australian landscape is therefore codified in diverse forms: in the work of landscape painters, poets, writers of fiction; in the books and papers of politicians, art historians, historical geographers, and others such as environmental and social historians. Among others, John Kinsella, has been indefatigable in contributing to dismantlement of this pastoral myth in his own way, especially since the emergence of the current international global warming crisis had served to focus attention on the relationship between human beings and the natural world. We will show how he uses the current plight of much of the Australian landscape to arouse our awareness of the importance of the whole world's environmental protection, whether it be in Australia, China or any other continent.

Ecocriticism – the study of literature as if the environment mattered – has only recently come to recognize itself as a distinct critical enterprise. We would like to offer Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of this new critical term in her co-edited book, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996): 'Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts and the world. In most literary theory "the world" is synonymous with society – the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere.'² Obviously, by enlarging the connotation of the world to an ecological one, Glotfelty indicates that, as a critical stance, 'ecocriticism' is also a theory that negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.

The First Book in Kinsella's 'Pastoral Trilogy': An Examination of Anti-Pastoralism in *The Silo*

'A writer doesn't exist in a vacuum,' Kinsella said, when interviewed by Cambridge academic Rod Mengham some years ago. 'We are talking about an invaded space, from a farming perspective, a land that has been ecologically devastated...'³ Evidently, he has already incorporated the concepts of ecology in his writing, increasingly with an awareness of that new branch of literary theory – ecocriticism. *The Silo* is a notable example of what Professor Cheryll Glotfelty has referred to as 'reflecting the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems'⁴. Focused upon the Wheatbelt in Western Australia, *The Silo* reveals, from a farming perspective, irreversible ecological destruction by Australian settlers, commencing with the original native bush.

We would say what has impressed us most is Kinsella's unique 'Trojan Horse' strategy for writing poetry of social and aesthetic criticism – to get inside a poetic mode, framework or subject that needs to be exposed as false, or at least questionable, and dismantle it. By using for the basic form of *The Silo* the five-part structure of Beethoven's romantic Pastoral Symphony, originally set in nineteenth century Europe, Kinsella invites readers to seemingly indulge the same kind of pastoral myth in an Australian setting, and then he dismantles it and smashes the illusions of the readers, revealing the darkness of 'pastoral' in this different continent of Australia. To 'ironise' this great symphony of Beethoven is to challenge one of the mightiest icons of the Western view of Nature, and is intentional iconoclasm, for Kinsella has always looked far

beyond his own country and, indeed, has already won greater acclaim in Europe and America than in his own land.

Referring to selected poems from *The Silo* we go on now to reveal that unusual aspect of Kinsella's 'pastoral' poetry – his ecological consciousness embodied in his landscape description. Professor Leoni Kramer has noted that the most important development in Australian poetry in the last two decades has been the poet's new sense of the past.⁵ John Kinsella is a typical example, we would argue, of a poet who, in *The Silo*, attempts to re-read Australian landscapes. He centres on farming practices still reflecting those of earlier settlers, but from a new perspective – their ecological impact. As a matter of fact, he has frequently mentioned 'eco-destruction', 'ecological devastation' or 'ecological concerns' in his essays and interviews. These most often concentrate on Australian landscape depiction, and we can see that, especially in his own comment in *The Silo*. Thus, we believe, there is a possibility and indeed a necessity to engage in an analysis of his works with the aid of 'ecocriticism', that term which dates only from 1978, when it was coined by William Rueckert.⁶

At the same time that ecological crises are being aggravated worldwide, the poet John Kinsella has achieved a great international reputation by embedding a sense of the urgent need for environmental protection in his poetry, prose fiction, plays and essays. *The Silo* is such a case in point, in which John Kinsella also attempts to re-read Australian landscapes, centering on farming practices of earlier settlers from a new perspective – the ecological impact on the nonhuman (including the flora and fauna) by human beings. To be more exact, *The Silo* tries to show that Western farming practice had brought negative influences on the Australian environment during the earlier colonial period and these have persisted to today. The land and the animals and plants, in particular, are victims of Australian farm work, according to Kinsella in this poetry collection. Firstly, the curse of land salination is repeatedly depicted in *The Silo*, just as Kinsella stated in *Fairly Obsessive* (2000), 'Salt is the most prominent image in my work, ...land ... has been ecologically devastated.'⁷ As a main cause of salination, deforestation (or excessive land clearing) is examined in the poem 'Why They Stripped the Last Trees from the Banks of the Creek', in which the poet leads readers to ponder the severe ecological damage to the landscape caused by clearing the bush to plant crops – a general practice in such farming areas in Australia. As the poem runs:

... We cleared
those banks until the water
ran a stale sort of red.
Until salt crept into
the surrounding soaks.

Furious he was – the salt
left lines on the bath,
the soap wouldn't lather.⁸

Water erosion has been mentioned in 'Collecting Wood', suggesting that even the rainwater has carried away soil and been rendered saline as an indirect result of the daily farm work – cutting and collecting wood for cooking or keeping warm in winter. Another cause of salination is increased run-off of rainwater from ground cleared for building of

dams (for irrigation or watering stock) in some areas of this continent. As shown in the poem ‘Pump/Drought’, an eroded salt affected landscape is now surrounding the pump:

...
and the flow of two
salty streams
feeding the dams from below.

...
An elaborate
wheatbelt tryst – catchments
so delicately sculptured
that erosion is admired,
9
...

Secondly, since animals have become another main source of the farmers’ profit in Australia, or sometimes are seen as an obstacle to their farming profit, animal slaughter for the meat industry has turned out to be an increasingly controversial issue ever since environmental protection became a public issue some eighty years ago. As a poet with ecological concerns, Kinsella uses animal ‘persecution’ in the poetry of *The Silo*, in order to wake up human beings to respect animals – as members of this global ecological community. Yet only recently have sheep farmers agreed to cease the cruel practice of ‘mulesing’ which stripped the skin from live sheep to prevent blowfly attacks.

Everyone knows sheep have been making great contributions to the Australian economy for two centuries or so (‘the nation carried on the sheep’s back’), until mining took greater prominence. These animals are innocent victims of the Australian pastoral industry. As hinted in ‘The Ascension of Sheep’:

The sun has dragged
the fog away
and now the sheep
in sodden clothes may
fleece the farmer-
who warm by the fire
tallies heads and prices
and thinks about slaughter – 10

Also, sheep had been butchered, as in the poem ‘Windlight: A Reading’:
‘...the rib-bound fleece
that hangs over a corroding washing line,
flapping eerily (and that’s too easy),
under grey-tainted skies...’¹¹

The flapping rib-bound fleece, like a ghost sheep’s lost ribs, made us feel guilty about the cruelty in the farm work.

The poem ‘Arriving at a Deserted House’, reminds us of the numerous rabbits massacred there in the Wheatbelt for meat or skin years ago, as described in the poem: ‘... as the car grinds to a sluggish halt, / tyres slicked with blood-letting, / fur-coated in summer...’¹² However, in most cases, rabbits and other imported feral ‘vermin’ such as

foxes, goats, parrots were killed for the protection of crops, poultry, and other property – profit for human beings, as shown in the poem ‘Shootings’. As examined above, the ecological damage done by Australian farm work on the land and by farm animals has been narrated in this poetry book. However, the climax of criticizing the environmental devastation is definitely expressed by the title poem *The Silo*, which is a confirmation of a hollow harvest or an absolute failure in Australian farming.

The tall cylindrical silo for fresh cut hay, regarded as a symbol of harvest or success according to European culture, is nowadays an inappropriate piece of architecture in the Wheatbelt landscape, and thus unused by this farmer in harvest time, as described in the poem:

Visitors, as if they knew, never remarked
on the old silo with its rammed earth walls
and high thatched roof, incongruous amongst
the new machinery and silver field bins.
...when a bumper harvest filled
every bin and the farmer was hungry
for space – no one ever mentioned bringing
the old silo back into service.¹³

In the above, we have noticed that the silo, as a building in the landscape, symbolizes a failing in farming in this harsh land. While in the following part of this poem, the silo reminds us of a cruel treatment of the animals by farmers:

...at harvest time,
trucks rolling past the ghostly whimperings,
snarls and sharp howls cutting the thick silo's
baffling...¹⁴

‘Ghostly whimperings’ is a reminder of something terrible, like sad crying from ghosts of farm animals. ‘Snarls’ is also associated with wild animals and ‘sharp howls’ often come as if some creature was being seriously hurt inside. In fact, Kinsella is also evoking a local rumour that a mentally defective boy was kept locked in such a silo. Like the legendary Trojan Horse with a potentially disruptive secret locked away inside, the disused silo becomes really another version of the Trojan Horse in the Wheatbelt landscape, with its failure in Australian farming inside.

According to David Suzuki, another modern eco-theorist, ‘...to be ecologically sustainable and revalue the meaning and inhabitation of nature, we need new ways of thinking and acting, new ways of seeing, saying and doing, new ways of being.’¹⁵ It is time for human beings, according to the poet, to be aware of the damage done to this region of Western Australia in the past, and the ‘dark’ sides of these rural communities – prejudice, greed, exploitation, ignorance, indifference to nature or the environment.

However, the highlight of this poetry collection is not merely its reference to environmental devastation, but the way the poet has revealed those dark sides of Australian rural history through the structure of *The Silo*. As mentioned previously, by imitating the five-movement form of Beethoven’s *Sixth Symphony*, the poet adopts the ‘pastoral’ mode in *The Silo* only to expose an anti-pastoral reality – a negative influence

on the environment, imposed by the inappropriate Australian agriculture in this area, known as the Wheatbelt. This is Kinsella's unique 'Trojan Horse' strategy, which pretends to embark on a pastoral literary form only to dismantle it. He seems to intend to describe the 'Avon Valley' as a beautiful landscape (such as originally inspired Shakespeare or Beethoven) only to expose the ecological damage inflicted on this eponymous segment of the Australian continent.

The Second Book of the 'Pastoral Trilogy': *The Hunt*

But now we need to understand the changes, which took place in Kinsella's poetry (both technically and in the development of his ideas about environmental issues) between *The Silo* in 1995 and the appearance of *The Hunt* in 1998¹⁶. Therefore, we must select some key poems from the latter. Certainly, one of them should be the title poem, 'The Hunt', but we should also note others such as 'The Tower', 'Death of a Roo Dog', 'The Rabbiters: a Pastoral', 'Echidna' and the end poem, 'Dematerialising the Poisoned Pastoral'. In passing we might also note that the first of these poems is a regular sestina and the third a sonnet. It so happens that by contrast with the many free verse poems in *The Silo*, the poems in *The Hunt* are frequently more formal or in classical English verse forms. What does this change signify? In looking at these poems we also note changes in the environmental attitudes of the poet.

But before we do that, we should briefly compare this second book of the trilogy with the elaborately structured *The Silo*. Whereas the latter was in five parts, corresponding to the structure of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, *The Hunt* is a more conventional and smaller collection of 51 poems still set in the usual centre of Kinsella's universe, the Wheatbelt. The poems here cover many of the workday tasks of wheat growing and harvesting, especially touching on the dangers and tragedies lurking in the seemingly peaceful countryside. We would claim there is also a good deal of 'black humour' in Kinsella's poetry here, a darker, more sardonic shadow of death and destruction exposing the hidden shame of the environmental damage to the original Australian bush. Another label, which Kinsella has used in one of his lectures on landscape¹⁷ is the 'poisoned pastoral' and the general tone of many of his 'angry' poems in *The Hunt* would make that an appropriate categorisation.

If we look at a specific poem from this collection, for example, 'Echidna' based on the unique Australian spiny anteater (a monotreme or egg-laying mammal), we note it is dedicated to Jacques Derrida, whom Kinsella had met and with whom he maintained correspondence. In fact Kinsella has released in Sydney a collection of his echidna poems in limited edition (*The Doppler Effect: Echidna Poems*, 2007). Something of the more 'serious' or 'studious' nature of *The Hunt* can be gauged from the above dedication and from the following lines:

I consider as memory tracking an echidna
with a farmer in Jam Tree country –
locating the spirit of place,
as if its being curled in a tree hollow

might validate the vast spread
of open tillage – but struck
by a kind of amnesia we wandered
in a circle tight as a fist, exhuming
the deeply choric question of rendering
our meaning into prose...¹⁸

We can take it that there is (metaphorically) a reference here to Kinsella's acquaintance with Derrida and the search for meaning, in which the reclusive behaviour of the echidna is a symbol perhaps for the whole postmodernist uncertainty and Derrida's 'différance'. Yet Kinsella shows very clearly here that even engaged in discussing 'deep choric questions' of our Eurocentric culture he will not shift the 'imagic' setting from his homeland landscapes and thereby identifies himself as the ideal incarnation of ecocritical sensitivity.

Now we want to look briefly at the title poem, 'The Hunt', which appears in the earlier part of the book: it is dedicated to Les Murray, himself one of Australia's leading poets of rural life. 'The Hunt' consists of eight stanzas of seven lines each set in a strict pattern of 12 and 6 syllable lines, devised by Kinsella and reflecting the new directions of his prosody. The poem narrates a holiday incident of two boys on their uncle's farm. Animals and chickens have been killed by a marauding animal, which cannot be destroyed or identified. Such mysterious predators are commonly identified as being too large to be normal feral animals such as wild dogs or cats. Nevertheless, in folklore they become escaped circus panthers or even the extinct thylacine (or Tasmanian tiger). Kinsella believes he has sighted one of these himself in earlier times.

In the poem, 'The Hunt', the boys decide to set traps to catch the mystery animal and bait them with corpses of rabbits. Camping in the bush they do find the frozen body of the thylacine, which has bitten off one of its feet to escape a trap but could not escape all of them. It died before it could touch the rabbits. Confounded by the supposedly extinct animal's death, the boys decide to bury everything including the thylacine and later back at the homestead,

'...telling Uncle that the Tiger
would never be caught, that
it was a creature not of this world – a bitter
cold had struck our bones, fire bringing no relief.'¹⁹

What do we find here compared with Kinsella's earlier work in *The Silo*? In poems like 'On Arriving at a Deserted House Deep in the Country' we saw almost a sense of fresh discovery of the seriousness of the environmental problems that infuse the whole book and helped to make it appeal so widely that it became an established school textbook. In *The Hunt* we no longer so much meet that poet as a toughened campaigner for the environment. Many of the poems reflect no element of surprise at the wretched state of the Wheatbelt's ecology and proceed more towards documenting the severity of the

problems. The poems have moved on in many cases from the mostly free-verse spontaneity of the first book. Perhaps a greater certainty within the poet about his mastery of the poetic craft (and maybe a confidence in the force of his own ideas) is reflected in a poem like 'The Hunt', which, as noted above, is not in an open free verse form but more in the tradition of Elizabethan unrhymed variants. Additionally, the ecological implications of the boys' hunt for the 'tiger' are much more complex than a general theme of exposing environmental abuse such as we find in the earlier poems.

That is not to say that this book is somehow weaker in its attacks on the environmental damage occurring as a result of 'wheat and sheep' farming in south-west Australia. Poems such as 'The Tower', 'The Fruits of Anger', 'Death of a Roo Dog', 'Death of a Farm Boy' and 'The Rearing Tractor' suggest that indeed this 'country life' is not characterised by peace and tranquility, but rather by death and destruction. It seems almost an act of revenge that the land takes upon the farmers, who came to exploit it for monetary gain as much as for an 'Arcadian' or 'pastoral' way of life.

Another poem (and indeed the final poem in *The Hunt*) is written in three stanzas of six lines each, using the same verse form as 'The Hunt'. 'Dematerialising the Poisoned Pastoral' again takes the echidna for its subject. Seeing a dead echidna, the local farmers cannot comprehend that, unlike the imported English sheep, this animal is a natural and non-threatening part of the eco-system, the indigenous landscape. Ironically, their prize sheep lie dead or dying from eating native plants such as the 'poison bush' because they have no natural resistance, unlike the indigenous animals. This points up a further ironic meaning of the poem's title. So the natural environment 'strikes back' by taking revenge on the despoilers of the original bushlands, those sheep, cattle, pigs, rabbits and horses brought into Australia with white settlement. The farmers' ignorance of this punishment leaves them puzzled, looking at the skins of their dead sheep strung on the wire fences.

'Beneath the picture subterranean streams overflow
underwriting patches of poison bush that'd see
the whole flock stone dead on the ground.'²⁰

The Final Work in the 'Pastoral Trilogy': *The New Arcadia*

The final work in Kinsella's trilogy is *The New Arcadia* (2005). Following the international success of Kinsella's other two books of the trilogy: *The Silo* and *The Hunt*, we can anticipate that this new volume will reveal further shifts in Kinsella's poetic development, both in technique and content. American Professor Harold Bloom, the world famous expert on Shakespeare, said of *Peripheral Light*:

'John Kinsella is an Orphic fountain, a prodigy of the imagination...he frequently makes me think of John Ashbery: improbable fecundity, eclecticism, and a stand that fuses populism and elitism in poetic audience... we are poised before the onset of what I prophesy will be a major art.'²¹

Compared to the other two books, the structure of the final work of the trilogy is richer and more complex, and his anti-pastoral viewpoint in *The Silo* and *The Hunt* has been developed into a radical pastoral, one with an even more mature attitude towards current

environmental problems. Or, we can say, a historical and global perspective – a deeper and broader analysis.

Of immediate note, in *The New Arcadia* is a return to the five part structure, as used in *The Silo*, but this time the analogy is not the symphonic structure of Beethoven, for the 'parts' are labeled 'acts', and the form reflects the Elizabethan poets' love of writing verse dramas in the manner of the Greek classical works of Aeschylus and Euripides. Sir Philip Sidney in turn has become something of a model for Kinsella in this regard. He ironically uses an excerpt from Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590 – first written in 1581 in five 'books' under the title of 'The Old Arcadia') for his epigraph to this volume. This ironic reference to the European classical tradition of the mythic pastoral mode is clearly a strong hint to the more than anti-pastoral theme of the whole of Kinsella's new work. Each 'Act' of *The New Arcadia* ends with an 'eclogue', a traditional poetic pastoral dialogue usually between shepherds, made famous by the classical Roman poet Virgil. For most of the poems there is a dazzling array of traditional forms: sonnets, villanelles, sestinas and even a parody of an advertising jingle for a pick-up truck, with the refrain: 'Ay-o-rodeo, hooray!'²². In a word, Kinsella has utilized his 'Trojan Horse' style again just as in the other two books, only to parody the pastoral form while revealing nasty truths about life in these supposedly idyllic farmlands.

Apart from the transformations in the structure of the book, there is a great development in his attitude towards current environmental problems, that is, as we stated before, a more aggressive radical pastoral viewpoint with a historical and global perspective. Take a look at the titles of five poems listed at the top for each of the five Acts, the two words 'Reflectors' and 'Drive' indicate that the reading of this book is like thoughtfully travelling with the author along a long historical road. On the one hand, these poems are noticeably longer than any poems in the other two books of the trilogy, which seems to give us a visual and sensual effect about the road; on the other hand, when he is driving, the reflectors on the road in front of the car always warn us to look back and so to contemplate the past years when people did damage to the Australian landscape. Take the poem "Reflectors: Drive 1", for example (note that each of the five sections has a similar introductory 'Reflectors'):

"A burning off,
orange flames excoriate, scorching
fractious genealogies into tableau,
vista: mesmeric, you decelerate
and smell woodsmoke through a partially
opened window, though it's so far off
you might be imagining it..."²³

In this part of the poet's 'drive' back to his country home, you will find that in order to provide more land for the growing family of descendants of the farmers, they are still cutting down more of the bush and burning it so they can make it into paddocks. The earlier Australian farmers not only destroyed the forest to expand the farming lands, but

also killed native animals cruelly during those early years and still do now (but with their cars) on the highway as shown in the following part:

“...Twenty-three ks
of kangaroo stretch from the V,
though the forest thinning
and few corpses.”²⁴

The farmers even resort to chemical ways to kill animals while protecting their farming harvest with weedicides:

“...They just die
when the spray drifts, when rains
have brought crops.”²⁵

Now in Australian history, you are able to find out the revenge taken by nature on humans’ profit-pursuing ambitions:

“The crosses have multiplied: four
on that bend...”²⁶

The relatives of drivers killed in road accidents are witnesses to the price they possibly pay for past misdeeds as usurpers of the lands and culture of Indigenous Australians. As Kinsella hinted in several poems in *The Silo*, ‘Nature’ can strike back, and therefore he reflects that it is the Europeans who treated them (and this land) unkindly:

“What are we nostalgic for?
We? Family? They were relatively
‘good to the natives’ when they first arrived
mid-nineteenth century, a respected family”²⁷.

He ironically hints that it was his “decent family” who “stole” the land:

“Theft is history, metaphor
assimilation.”²⁸

However, it seems that most people of the Wheatbelt don’t realize that and keep on destroying the land:

“...Look, this
is the country someone else stole
but we make good use of; we said
sorry, and marched intermittently.”²⁹

Here the author leads readers to a deeper thinking from an ecocritical point of view: the *Arcadia* poems in general could hardly be a more perfect example of writing about the Australian environment with an acute consciousness of human responsibility for destruction of the world we live in. What Kinsella sees happening in this far corner of the world is an indicator of the risk in other parts of the world such as China and Europe where the population is many times greater and the level of human activity in industry and agriculture is likely to have catastrophic consequences by comparison. So there is a high level of ecocritical significance in the poems in the final book of the trilogy. That he has only become more concerned and expressed his concern in increasingly formalised poetry, suggests his earlier criticisms of the pastoral myth of rural life are not only confirmed but might have been not strong enough (ten years after *The Silo*). Because actually, the environmental problems have become even more serious and an accepted global problem.

Even though John Kinsella echoes the truth of the environmental problems in the *Drive/Reflections* poems in this third book of *The Trilogy*, he still expresses his potential hope for a change of the current situation. This can be regarded as a great difference from the other two books of *The Trilogy*. In the final part of the book, after five *Drive/Reflector* parts on the road between Perth and York, he still speaks out his internalized worship of or (at least) deep respect for the natural environment as shown in the last poem “Among the Murk I will Find Things to Worship”:

“That probity will move independently
rocks the river redgum, roots set down below
the salt line, a monoplane grinding the air,
droning tepid clouds.”³⁰

The reality is here, though the land is salinated, the plane keeps on spraying the pesticide or weedicide in the air, and “the old man has lost his farm, moved into town – huddles in the kitchen.”³¹ Even the farming people’s gods cannot fight against the tragedy as shown in the line “Christ, down-wind, picks up the static, facing us – offers least resistance...”. However, we should cherish a little hope deep inside to keep us going everyday. John Kinsella is a more positive person in *The New Arcadia*:

“Among the murk I will find things to worship,
the memory dressed up in acrylics, dawn-
haze training scrub on the mountain, bird-exchange
tossed up around them.”³²

He shows his determination to have some really beautiful and pastoral things to worship in the world where people must be worried about climate change when they find the Polar ice-caps are melting away each day. What people could see from this final volume in the *Trilogy* is not just the Wheatbelt in Australia, but land destined in China, Europe,

Africa, America, and elsewhere in the globe, for industrial development or harmful farming practices may bring huge risks to the environment of the world.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine three books by the major Australian poet John Kinsella, his so-called Pastoral Trilogy. We wished to see which developments in techniques and ideas can be observed over the ten years between the first and last of the books in the trilogy. An additional objective was to apply the theoretical approach of ecocriticism to the analysis of these three books and to see how ecologically conscious his poems appear to be, as well as making some assessment of them in terms of the assumptions of ecocritical theory.

By reading Kinsella's trilogy, people can travel from *The Silo*, through *The Hunt*, to *The New Arcadia* – from anti-pastoral to a radical pastoral. They have stepped onto the landscape of Western Australia first and must then turn their attention to other countries. They should have learned from this sad example of Australian history to apply the lesson to the others. That is a main purpose of Kinsella's trilogy we suppose, to evoke in our minds an ecologically caring response. When revealing the serious truth of the environment problem, Kinsella also reveals by implication the hope of an idealized Arcadia, for the people, a hope for the earth. We believe this is why there should be, in our opinion, eagerness to study his works, as a PhD program, specifically *The Pastoral Trilogy* and certainly the final book of his, *The New Arcadia*.

As for the progress of Kinsella's anti-pastoral poetry from his 1995 *The Silo* to his 2005 *The New Arcadia*, we believe that the youthful exuberance of the former with its confident experiments with free verse forms is later replaced in the 1998 *The Hunt* by a swing to traditional or classical poetic forms, at least in part. And finally, in *The New Arcadia*, there is the consummate expression of the poet's technical accomplishment. In terms of the pastoral mode there is his ironic use of the classical pastoral eclogue or dialogue, as well as many other classical verse forms. We have suggested that 'radical pastoral' may be a better descriptive title of his approach these days rather than 'anti-pastoral', the label he wore after *The Silo* came out.

We have noted the increased sophistication of his appeals to the readers of his poetry but no diminution of his ecological concerns. As the great American environmentalist and ecocritic, William H Rueckert has said:

We are not free to violate the laws of nature... Better to bring Shakespeare and Greek tragedy to bear upon our own biosphere's tragedy as a program of action.³³

We might argue that the Western Australian 'Pastoral Trilogy' of John Kinsella therefore should be added to the above panoply of Western culture's significant writings suggested by Rueckert.

Endnotes

¹ (1997) *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, 4th Ed. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, p 833.

² Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm, (1996), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in*

Literary Ecology, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, p xx.

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