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## Solastalgia, Nostalgia, Exhilarating, Immersive: Landscapes: Heritage II

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## **Solastalgia, Nostalgia, Exhilarating, Immersive: Landscapes: Heritage II**

*David Francis Gray (Dalarna University, Sweden)*

Through 2017/18, as the submissions for our thematic issue *Landscapes: Heritage* came together, it became apparent that a single issue would not be enough to contain the overwhelming number of responses that we received from *Landscapes* editor Drew Hubbell's original call for contributions. Thus the editors decided to spread the contributions across two issues, which has been connected in the title for this issue, Volume 9, as *Landscape: Heritage II*. Volume 8 continues to surpass the download statistics for an individual issue of *Landscapes*, which is testimony to Drew's sense of the importance of the topic. And yet this acknowledges too the talent and craft of current and previous editors Glen Phillips and John Ryan, as well as the enduring support of Executive Dean Professor Clive Barstow of the School of Arts and Humanities at ECU. It is these people who make the journal possible, and yet, ultimately it is the contributors who seasonally breathe life into *Landscapes* and the environmental humanities.

Since the last issue and throughout the submissions and revisions phase of Volume 9, there has been further cause to reflect on the interrelationship of heritage with landscape. The frightening consequences of this relationship was defined once again by (man-made) natural disasters. The wildfire season of 2018 in California is regarded in general, as one of the worst on record. More specifically, there was an ominously rich irony to the scenes of the Camp Fire that engulfed and ultimately decimated the small countryside town of Paradise, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The language used to report on the devastation caused by this wildfire often described "hellish" or "apocalyptic" scenes, and while the Inferno of Dante's *Divine Comedy* might have sprung to mind, it was the imagery of the Hollywood environmental-disaster movie *Dante's Peak* (1997) that many used for comparison.

The California wildfires of 2018 were also not the only abnormal forest fires in the northern hemisphere. Sweden experienced an atypically long period of hot and dry weather during the summer months, which resulted in forest fires from the south of the

country up to the Arctic Circle – a pattern that has been largely blamed on intensive forest-farming practices. Fortunately, these fires did not affect populated areas in the same way as California, though the sheer scale and the speed of expansion of the fires led the Swedish government to request assistance through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC). Along with Canadian firefighting aircraft, there were firefighters from Italy, Germany, Poland, Norway and Denmark in Sweden to try and contain three mega-fires in mid-Sweden during the summer of 2018, which covered an area of around 25000 ha. Incidentally, it was only a few months after these fires that 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began her school-strike outside the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm, appalled at the level of inertia shown by adults and politicians in the face of climate change; her stand has since led to similar student-led strikes around the world.

Forest fires are certainly nothing new for California or Sweden, but the scale and geography of the fires of 2018 are what seems to be alarming scientists. The phenomenon of wildfires occurring in regions that are not normally affected, or are little affected, has also been observed in Australia. Like California, Australia is well known for its bushfires. Indeed the native flora in large parts of Australia has evolved to rely on bushfires, and sustainable burning practices have been part of the long-established relationship of Indigenous Australians with the land. And yet in 2018 the bushfires were not only affecting parts of the south of the country, but more northern climes in tropical Queensland; adding a perilous new natural disaster to a state that already struggles with seasonal cyclones and floods. This phenomenon has become known as “the new abnormal” and arguably informs our growing sense of solastalgia.

In response to environmental crises, it is perhaps not difficult to understand why a distinct sense of pre-climate change nostalgia as a theme can be observed in several of the scholarly and creative works published in this issue. In Margaretha Häggström and Anita Synnestvedt’s walk-and-talk study of forest walks in Sweden includes a section “Relatings-Childhood tradition”, where participants could recount their childhood memories of the forest, with one participant recalling:

I have been walking in the forest since I was very small. My grandmother forced me to walk along and pick blueberries and cow-berries, and mushrooms too. Then we stopped for a picnic, drank tea, and ate Swedish crisp-bread. It was cosy. Lovely memories. I am happy for that now. Ever since, I have returned to the forest. Now, I bring my sons here too. (“Forest-Walks”)

The tradition of forest-walks as Häggström and Synnestvedt remind us are part of “an intangible cultural heritage” that connects the past with the future, and in this case can be read against the Swedish forest fires of 2018, which by extension wiped out some- and threatened other areas of- intangible cultural heritage. The forest - “large, old fir trees with moss all over the ground [...] covering big boulders”- is “embedded in silence and mysticism”; troll-forest or *trollskog* is an iconic feature of the children’s literature of Astrid Lindgren and the paintings and illustrations of John Bauer.

Zilia Zara-Papp covers a broad range of geographical locations in her study of formative landscapes and cultural heritage in the animations of Yoram Gross, Takahata Isao and Marcell Jankovics. These case studies highlight the mediation of heavily stylised Aboriginal cave paintings, Hungary folk art, Mongolian rock paintings, Japanese picture scrolls; in twentieth-century animations set in bushland Australia, the Eurasian Steppes and the Japanese urban agglomeration. By continuing these established artistic traditions through the (relatively) new medium of animation, according to Zara-Papp, this testifies to the ways in which human cultural identities, from pre-historic origins, have derived from the landscape. These in turn have become re-invested with culture in the depictive representations of native wildlife and supernatural creatures. Such practices are however juxtaposed, in the animations studied in this article, with the increasing threat of a modern culture defined by human encroachment on natural habitats and rapid urbanisation.

Encroachment can also be seen in others ways, as shown in Richard Hutchings and Marina La Salle’s case study of the newly designated Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (formerly *Reserve*), on Vancouver Island. More specifically it is the placemaking as a contemporary colonial practice, which is a direct descendent of the naming done by

nineteenth-century European explorers to Canada, to which draw they our attention in their essay/photo essay. MABR began as a UNESCO biosphere site in the early noughties and has now become an almost hermetic, elitist landscape within a culturally homogenous heritage narrative:

Emphasizing wilderness and downplaying past and present industry, names and representations of places within MABR narrate a selective version of reality that caters to mostly white, upper-middle class values (i.e., potential tourists and amenity migrants); this echoes regional colonial government and business interests centred around ecotourism. In this regard, MABR as a brand is contributing to and defining an authorized heritage discourse (“In the Name of Profit”).

Crucially for Hutchings and La Salle this is a heritage discourse that contributes to new settlement patterns, forms of ecotourism and a lack of equity for local populations that is profit-driven and wholly unsustainable and thus solastalgic.

Reading these scholarly works, it may be tempting to conclude that literature can only indulge nostalgia or bear witness to what we have lost or are losing. In a more auspicious sense, Rod Giblett’s new book, *Environmental Humanities and Theologies*, as reviewed by Sam Mackey, demonstrates that the future is still open to being reshaped by the heritage practices we adopt in the present. Giblett demonstrates that most religious and secular literatures deride wetlands as chaotic, monstrous, evil domains. Yet, considering their biological importance to the origin of life, wetlands should be considered the world’s most sacred places. Giblett provides insight into how our cultural frames recast the meaning of natural places which then come to symbolize the civilizations deploying them. If such symbolic practice can be decoded, it can also be recoded. In a similar manner, Emily Bayer’s essay on Wendell Berry’s *That Distant Land*, shows that literature can “also influence the ways a culture imagines itself and its place in the natural world”. Bayer argues that Berry’s imaginative fiction “offers us a model for how to build an ethical relationship with the places we inhabit”.

While some of the creative works in this issue also strike a chord of nostalgia or solastalgia, others explore landscape encounters in poetry and prose that are exhilarating or immersive, and always imaginative. “Snorkel Virgin” by Emma Young poetically represents a West Australian coastal zone, a landscape of the mind that is both “menacing” and playful. The city-slicker heroine faces sharks, limestone crags, roiling sea and reefs – some imaginative, some real – before taking the plunge into an ocean that is “not cold” or malevolent but rewarding and “safe”. The out-of-place motif of urbanite in the wild has at least one companionable piece in Ian Smith’s prose poem “Plunging Down Under”. This time the location is aquatic-urban and the young, English-migrant speaker takes the plunge, in this extended metaphor, into the outdoor pool and life in Australia. If the human-water relationship defines these poems, another pair of creative pieces stand out for their depiction of Western Australian bushscape.

Bronwyne Thomason’s short story “Shadow over Mount Barren”, conflates an evening ride through bushland in the Fitzgerald National Park with the narrator’s childhood memories of life growing up in rural South-West Australia. The journey is filled with a unique soundtrack of Cat Stevens and Banksia leaves, Elvis and Weeping Gum trees, which links the dusky bushland exterior with the past and poignant memories of family life. The human-shaped Western Australian bushland is also the focus of Brenton Rossow’s visual art piece “THE JUNK THAT 8 K-TOWN”, a haiku/photo record of bush junk near Kwinana or K-Town, in the Perth suburbs of WA. The photos are similarly full of recognisably native flora, creatively captured alongside pieces of weather-beaten human junk in “serendipitous alignments”.

Our Australian-based creative works are rounded off in Louise Boscacci’s “Hard Data, Soft Data”, and the poems “*Zemlja*” and “Pioneer Day” by Natalie D-Napoleon. Boscacci’s wonderfully rhythmic and syllabic poem, vividly and poignantly evokes the loss of native flora and fauna and the dialects of indigenous peoples – once features of the landscape that are now resigned to “the museum records”. D-Napoleon’s second poem “Pioneer Day” is an experimental and song-like dirt-music homily of sorts on the WA settler narrative. In “*Zemlja*”, D-Napoleon’s first poem, the European origins of the Serbo-Croatian speaker, “the coloniser and / the colonised” arguably operate as a kind of formal and genealogical forbearer of the stock immigrant figure in “Pioneer Day”.

This (re)turn to the Northern Hemisphere is confirmed in the final two poetic contributions of the issue. Lesley Harrison's "North Sea poems" trilogy is visceral, aural, technological, rhythmic and gyroscopic, reflecting an investment of time and energy in this land- sea- scape that ultimately serves to produce a sense of profound poetic immersion, one that clearly echoes the close natural observation found in the work of Kathleen Jamie. From the north-east to the south-west of the British Isles, landscape heritage is captured with alliterative sentiment in Lawrence Upton's Scilly Isles song-series "Fortunates Part 1", where the speaker of the poem replays, snapshot-like, a landscape known over the course of a life, aptly evoking and transforming the Romantic inner eye:

More recently, my brain began to see  
the unchanging changeability, as *theme*  
replayed itself as themes changing  
repetitively and repeatedly,  
bright daisies all out of a now dulled grass,  
birds hopping around shallow fresh puddles,  
much seen anew without becoming bland,  
remaining informative, informational. (Prelude, 44-51)

The speaker thereby offers a productive way of seeing landscape as theme-informational, as *the* important idea running through our lives that is arguably neither immobilized by environmental angst nor saturated in sublime pretence. Ultimately, this completes Volume 9 of *Landscapes*, and while we leave off from the north, it is to the idea of 'North' that we hope to now turn attention for the next issue, which will appear under the new name for the journal, *Landscapes and Language*.