

**Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver: *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt*.**  
**The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2020. 229 pp.**  
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It felt appropriate that I received the review copy of *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt* in the mail the day following the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Captain Cook's first Australian landing; the quote on the book's back cover is from Cook's diary, accompanied by a ghostly image of a kangaroo taken from the front cover painting, and reads:

One of the Men saw an Animal something less than a greyhound; it was of Mouse  
Colour, very slender made, and swift of Foot.

This quote clearly establishes the study's central concerns of the strangeness, the alien-ness of the kangaroo to the Europeans who first saw it, and the animal's position as 'something less than a greyhound' but of almost immeasurable significance to the Aboriginal peoples and the colonists who invaded them. The first beautifully-coloured plate of a kangaroo, painted in 1789, reinforces the colonial inability to transpose what their eyes saw into a true pictorial representation of the animal that would, as Gelder and Weaver discuss in intimate depth, come to both define the colonial project and thwart its aims simultaneously. This is a cultural study of colonisation through the lens of the kangaroo and, as is clearly argued, it is a lens that is significant in ways that are just beginning to be explored and understood.

This book could be described as the focal point of the colonial cultural project Gelder and Weaver have been engaged in, both together and separately, for more than a decade since their editorship of the Melbourne University Press anthologies of Australian colonial genre fiction. All of their research in this field, including their admirable book *Colonial Australian Fiction*, published in 2017 as part of the Sydney Studies in Australian Literature series by Sydney University Press, seems to have been tightening and sharpening their gaze until, with this book, they have distilled their understanding of colonial cultural development with this one metaphor: the kangaroo hunt and its significance to the establishment and development of Australia as a colony.

There is no contextualising introduction to the study; it moves quickly to the first chapter, 'Shooting the First Kangaroo' and notes:

For John Simons, the first documented shooting of a kangaroo on 14 July 1770 'contains in itself the microcosm of the settlement of Australia.' In fact, he goes on to compare Gore's shooting with the famous 'shot heard around the world' fired five years later at Concord, Massachusetts, that literally triggered the American revolution. (2)

The significance of the kangaroo clearly established, it continues with five further chapters, 'Settlers, Aboriginal People and the Kangaroo Hunt,' 'The Kangaroo Hunt as Sport,' 'The Kangaroo Hunt Poem,' 'Dogs, Skins and Battues,' and 'Colonial Kangaroo Hunt Novels and Fantasies.' While this structure allows the reader to develop a clear understanding of the kangaroo hunt in settler and colonial Australian culture and cultural production and how its significance fluctuated and morphed over time, there are no subheadings used within the chapters. I am sure there are many reasons for this decision but there are a few chapters, the

fifth chapter ‘Dogs, Skins and Battues’ for example, where subheadings would have been beneficial for the reader to signal a change of focus.

The depth of the primary research in the study is an example of scholarship at its finest point; readings from journals, letters and colonial newspapers all coalesce into a multifaceted, studiously argued thesis on the significance to the development of colonial Australia of the hunting and consumption of what is now one of our most recognisable national symbols. At almost no point is there a research point that is not followed in some detail, and this makes the reading experience a very satisfying one, almost as if the authors are answering questions before the reader has time to ask them.

There are a number of comments throughout the book where the gendered nature of the kangaroo hunt was discussed, and this is one of the few points where it felt like the authors had more to say and had decided not to extend their work in this direction. Having said that, to fully engage with the genderedness of the kangaroo hunt and its impact on literary and artistic culture would have broadened their scope to gender in colonial Australian literary and cultural representation, and beyond their stated and intended purview.

This study details the symbiotic exchange between the kangaroo hunt as an act, the history of the significance and form of that act, and the active colonisation of which the kangaroo hunt forms a part. This exchange is assiduously charted, illustrated and read, and the authors weave this relationship into an historical, cultural and literary whole. It is a conscious step forward in our understanding of the process and experience of colonisation as settlers experienced it, and the expertise in this area the authors have brought to bear on their analysis informs the complex, rich and cohesive work.

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