

Confronting the Joint Legacies of the Holocaust and Colonialism

in Alex Miller's *Landscape of Farewell*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to apply the concept of synergy to the workings of memory in Miller's *Landscape of Farewell* (2007) by focusing on the relationship between its two main characters, Max Otto, a German professor of history, and Dougald Gnapun, an Aboriginal elder. It does so with a view to analysing the way in which fiction can weave connections between different histories of violence—in this case the Holocaust and the colonisation of Australia—while simultaneously pointing to the risks of downplaying the specificities of each case. Both men are burdened by traumatic memories of past atrocities: for Max it is his father's complicity in the crimes of Nazism, while for Dougald it is the 1861 Cullin-la-Ringo massacre of white settlers, allegedly led by his great-grandfather. Max and Dougald meet through Vita McLelland, a young Aboriginal academic visiting Hamburg, who invites Max to a conference at the University of Sydney and then to visit her uncle Dougald in Queensland so that the professor can learn about the history of Australia's indigenous people. Though far from one another in terms of geographical and cultural background, a close friendship develops between these two men whose only initial link is their being descendants of perpetrators. I argue that by confronting the joint legacies of the Holocaust and colonialism through Max and Dougald's synergistic and transformative friendship, and by placing their stories/memories in a broader transnational and transhistorical context, Miller's fictional recreation of these historical events engages with the complex relationship between victimisers and victims, perpetrators and descendants, history and fiction, remembrance and appropriation, which, as in the case of Max and Dougald, suggests the possibility of reconciliation with, and a letting go, of traumatic pasts.

Keywords: Alex Miller, *Landscape of Farewell*, Holocaust, colonialism, perpetration, memory

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### Overcoming Insularity

*Synergy* (from the Greek *synergos*), as Peter A. Corning points out, is a ubiquitous and fundamental phenomenon in the natural world. Broadly defined, it

refers to combined or “co-operative” effects—literally, the effects produced by things that “operate together” (parts, elements or individuals). The term is frequently associated with the slogan “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”... but this is actually a caricature, a narrow and perhaps even misleading definition of a multi-faceted concept. We prefer to say that the effects produced by wholes are different from what the parts can produce alone.<sup>1</sup>

I use the concept of synergy as a metaphor for what happens in some novels, like the one analysed in this article, Alex Miller’s *Landscape of Farewell* (2007), when characters who are burdened by painful memories meet and interact. This sets in motion processes that fit Corning’s definition in that the effects produced by the parts that interact are different from what each of these parts can produce alone. Miller’s novels in particular often feature isolated characters who set out on a quest leading to reconnection, both with others and with their inner selves. This quest involves not only an inner journey but also a “radical geographical dislocation... to alternative centres in truly foreign places.”<sup>2</sup> Once there, the protagonist finds another human being who helps him to find himself, but, given the operation of synergy, the encounter also changes this other. In Miller’s fiction, this usually happens through a friendship that grows from the interplay of similarity and difference between the two characters.

The aim of this article is to apply the concept of synergy to the workings of memory in Miller’s *Landscape of Farewell* by focusing on the relationship between its two main

characters, Max Otto and Dougald Gnapun. It does so with a view to analysing the way in which fiction can weave connections between different histories of violence—in this case, the Holocaust and the colonisation of Australia—while simultaneously inviting reflection on the risks of downplaying the specificities of each case. In this novel, the characters that undergo a transformation through friendship are both marked by traumatic historical events: one is a German professor of history burdened by his father's complicity in the crimes of Nazism, while the other is an Australian Aboriginal advocate descended from the (fictional) leader of the Aborigines that carried out the Cullin-la-Ringo massacre, an attack on European settlers at Cullin-la-Ringo Station (near modern-day Springsure) in 1861, and a turning point in the frontier wars in Queensland. Though far from one another in terms of geographical and cultural background, the past weighs heavily on these two men who are linked by their being descendants of perpetrators. As the physical distance between them closes, their slowly evolving friendship changes them both, illustrating Miller's view that as a genre, the novel

retells again and again the story of the person who is marooned on some kind of island of metaphor and who comes up the tracks of another self. Which may be the story of two people who fall in love or it might be the story of two warriors who fight each other, or two kingdoms of peoples who challenge each other for occupation of the ground. But it is always the story of the isolated self seeking to transcend his isolation by becoming the other, the other self, through the communication of the subjective reality of the self.<sup>3</sup>

Miller's words bring to mind John Donne's famous statement in Meditation 17: "no man is an island." As Elizabeth McMahon points out, while Donne cautions against

isolation, the interrelation suggested by the metaphor of man and island “nonetheless stands,” conveying “both the positive impulse and the prescription against it.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, Donne’s interdiction contains an implicit admission of what it denies. Each of us is as bounded as an island, and yet we need to reach out to others beyond the borders of the self.

In the context of trauma and memory studies, this need to “reach beyond” can in turn be related to such notions as Michael Rothberg’s “multidirectional memory”<sup>5</sup>—an approach that can open new paths to solidarity and justice through the productive comparison of different histories of violence; or to Max Silverman’s “palimpsestic memory”<sup>6</sup>—a similar view of memory as intrinsically comparative and dynamic, which Silverman approaches through the central trope of the palimpsest to suggest that memory works through both spatial and temporal overlappings and intersections. Underlying both concepts is the idea, formulated by Cathy Caruth, that traumatic memories “may provide the very link between cultures.”<sup>7</sup> But here, too, the dynamics of the man-island metaphor applies: while the emphasis is on connecting burdensome memories and linking painful chapters of history, the positive impulse to connect, to overcome insularity, coexists with the prescription against impairing the distinctive history/memory of each side.

### The Distance between Self and Other

There is no denying that memories of suffering and loss can provide a link between selves and cultures, especially at a time marked by globalisation, multiculturalism and the aftermath of decolonisation processes. But memory alone would not be enough, as something else is needed to establish connections without falling into what Jill Bennet calls “crude empathy,” a Brechtian phrase denoting “a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other’s experience to the self.” For Bennet, the exact measure of our

empathic response to the other's suffering is "grounded not in affinity... but on a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different."<sup>8</sup> Empathy, as Dominick LaCapra insists, must be kept within the limits of "empathic unsettlement," which involves "virtual, not vicarious experience."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Marianne Hirsch emphasises that being responsive to the suffering of others is productive only if "identification can resist appropriation and incorporation."<sup>10</sup>

This openness to the other coupled with the recognition of his/her otherness can be said to apply in a special way when it comes to cross-cultural connections between memories of people's traumatic pasts. Miller resorts to fiction as a vehicle for bringing together the Holocaust and Australia's colonial past, which inevitably raises not only important questions about the relationship between the Holocaust, colonialism, and genocide, but which also resonate with what is happening in our globalised world. While the Holocaust continues to figure prominently in trauma and memory studies, in parallel with the postcolonial turn the question of its uniqueness as a paradigm of collective traumatic memory has attracted growing academic attention. As Robert Eaglestone puts it:

[I]t is clear that other memories and other paradigms of memory are emerging. In part, this is precisely because, after Rothberg, we can understand that memory is not competitive, that it is not a question of *either* the Holocaust *or* some other memory, but precisely that the Holocaust *enables* or provides a point of access to some other memory. ... This vector is clear in the work of critics such as Michael Rothberg, Colin Davis, Max Silverman, Bryan Cheyette, Debrati Sanyal, Stef Craps and others who show how issues of memory, empire, race and genocide have always been interwoven.<sup>11</sup>

Multiple connections have indeed been found which help to look beyond the isolation conveyed by Donne's island metaphor, but there has also been a call for "cross-traumatic affiliation," understood as "a way of bringing different historical traumas into contact in an ethically responsible manner; that is, without collapsing them into one another, preserving the distance between them."<sup>12</sup> So the attempt to forge connections for understanding and socio-political engagement comes with a recurrent warning that literary and non-literary representations and critical interpretations should do justice to the particularities of the Holocaust and other traumatic events it can be linked with, including the history of colonialism. It is not surprising that this approach has proved to be controversial and characterized by what Dirk Moses calls "conceptual blockages." Yet despite the polemics, as he explains, there is no denying that "[r]acial extinction... was a common notion in Europe long before the Holocaust. But if claims of Australian or American holocausts are hyperbolic, is it possible nonetheless to relate colonial genocides to the mass exterminations of the twentieth century, in particular, to that of European Jewry? It is, if they are linked as constituents of a *unified process*."<sup>13</sup> The attempts to place the Holocaust within a longer history of violence and extermination are not new, as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism (Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft, 1951)* and Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism (Discours sur le colonialisme, 1955)* established such links already in the first decade after the war. New arguments and perspectives were introduced by later historians, such as Dirk Moses, Dan Stone, Donald Bloxham, Mark Mazower, Timothy Snyder, and Jürgen Zimmerer, as well as by literary critics and scholars, such as Robert Eaglestone—especially in *The Broken Voice*, his latest work on post-Holocaust literature. I argue that Miller's *Landscape of Farewell* is a literary response to these questions, as well as a reflection on the role of fiction in coping with the memory of traumatic pasts and in forging cross-traumatic

affiliations.

*Landscape of Farewell: Between the Holocaust and Australia's Colonial Past*

In “The Mask of Fiction,” Miller, who was born in England but emigrated to Australia in his youth, writes that the idea of *Landscape of Farewell* first occurred to him during a visit to Germany in 2005:

The elements came together for me in Hamburg, my own unvisited guilt-by-association for both our treatment of the Aborigines and the terrible newsreels of Belsen and Buchenwald which I had seen as a young schoolboy in London, the Germans' own intractable sense of guilt by association, the silence in Australian history about the massacre at Cullin-la-Ringo. ... I began with great excitement to sketch lines of intersection and to see how they fitted together into a whole, not an Australian or European whole, but a human whole.<sup>14</sup>

These words on the genesis of the novel also suggest that traumatic memory is intrinsically comparative, and thus allows to fruitfully bring together Holocaust studies and postcolonial studies. Miller implicitly questions the notion of “uniqueness,” in so far as it precludes detecting the “lines of intersection” that may help to cope with the burden of the past. This questioning underlies the quest of his two main characters—German history professor Max Otto and Aboriginal elder Dougald Gnapun—out of their insularity, and informs the complex process of their negotiation of connections *and* divergences. The narrative thus brings together the Holocaust and the European colonisation of Australia without blurring the differences of the two historical realities represented by Max and Dougald. And it does



so by choosing the legacies of perpetration as the main focus of their individual stories, each with its own specificities of place, time, and culture.

Max Otto, who is also the narrator, is an elderly and disillusioned German professor of history, devastated by the recent death of his wife. He has suffered all his life from “guilt-by-association with the crimes of [his] father’s generation”<sup>15</sup> and has good reason to believe that his father took part in the atrocities of the war. However, he has not been able to properly investigate the crimes of Nazism and the extent of his father’s involvement in them, and this despite the fact that his own field of research is the historical study of massacres. As the novel begins, we find him preparing to deliver his last lecture—“The Persistence of Massacre in Human Society”—only to kill himself afterwards. Unexpectedly, when he finishes giving the talk and the applause dies down in the grand library at Warburg Haus, he is challenged by Vita McLelland, an Aboriginal professor from the University of Sydney who is visiting Hamburg University. Incensed with what she regards as scholarly negligence, the young academic publicly upbraids Max, her words full of scorn and contempt as she asks: “How can this man presume to speak of massacre and not speak of my people?” (17). Later on, they converse in a calmer mood and even strike up a friendship, which accounts for Vita inviting him to a conference she is organising in Sydney, and then to Queensland for a short stay with her uncle (Dougald Gnapun) in the hope that he will learn something about the reality of indigenous Australians, their present and their past. Their colonisation and incorporation into the European-dominated capitalist world is also part of Max’s past and ancestry as a white European. Besides, Vita somehow envisions that Max and her uncle can help each other, which further explains her scheme of bringing them together. As Max eventually confesses his plan to commit suicide, Vita solemnly remarks: “The time to kill ourselves is after we’ve paid our debts, not before” (59). And so Max will find a way to pay the debt to his

own past—of his family, his people, his nation—by accepting Vita’s invitation and immersing himself in another people’s story of atrocity. He sets out on a journey that involves both his geographical dislocation and his reconnection with his past and with others, made possible by a new sense of self-knowledge.

It is in Mount Nebo, in the Central Highlands of Queensland, that Max meets Vita’s Uncle Dougald: a direct descendant of Gnapun, the warrior who led the Aborigines at the Cullin-la-Ringo massacre according to the story handed down orally for generations. Dougald is tormented by the thought that this story will die with him: “I don’t know what it is. I can tell it, but I can’t write it. . . . I’m the only one left who knows the truth of what happened. If it’s not written down the truth of it will be lost when I die” (178–79). He entrusts this task to Max, a historian who has more than once admitted his loathing of “books that are made up” (33), and who is not yet aware that there are things in history that can be best thought of and expressed through stories and parables. This is the lesson Max learns when he understands that he will only be able to write the story of Dougald’s forebear and the Cullin-la-Ringo massacre by having recourse to his creative imagination, writing it as fiction, not as history. Developing this fictional narrative constitutes the last step in the process of releasing the blockage of his own traumatic past and in turn helps Dougald to do the same.

#### Max and Dougald: Perpetrator Legacies and the Literary Imagination

The Cullin-la-Ringo massacre, which took place on 17 October 1861, is said to have been the largest massacre of white settlers by indigenous Australians. The victims, probably the strongest group of white settlers to enter the Central Highlands up to that time, were all killed by the local Aborigines, who suffered no casualties. Though none of the Aborigines thought to have been involved was questioned or brought to trial, they were quickly and

brutally punished. The massacre seemed to have been extraordinarily well planned, which led some to think that there must have been an Aboriginal leader of great character and strategic intelligence behind the attack.<sup>16</sup> Although this may be mere speculation, in the novel Miller recreates that charismatic leader as the warrior Gnapun, Dougald's great-grandfather. When Max writes Gnapun's story, aware that his tale may have no historical authentication, he is convinced that it conveys a different and even deeper kind of truth. And so, although he thinks of it as fiction, he gives it the subtitle: "A true story by Dougald Gnapun."

The story's title, "Massacre," points directly to Max's research specialty but also to Miller's interests as a writer: his previous novel, *Journey to Stone Country* (2002), is also about a massacre, with the difference that the victims are Aborigines, while in *Landscape of Farewell* the Aborigines are the perpetrators. As Shirley Walker notes, Miller is interested in the psychology of massacre, carried out in one continent or another and, in the case of Australia, by one side or another in the frontier wars.<sup>17</sup> But *Landscape of Farewell* explicitly frames this within a broader question: the recurrence of massacre in human history and what it conveys about human nature. Especially significant is the quotation from the *Iliad* that Max includes in his farewell lecture and that eventually emerges as the novel's central motif, suggesting that the Holocaust and the Australian case are part of the same human impulse to violence and destruction that led Agamemnon to utter the following: "*We are not going to leave a single one of them alive... down to the babies in their mothers' wombs—not even them must live. The whole people must be wiped out of existence, and none be left to think of them and shed a tear*" (13; italics in original). This is what the commander in chief of the Greek army tells his brother Menelaus as he urges him to destroy the Trojans. Later in Miller's novel the very same words are uttered by the leader of the Aborigines shortly before they slay the white settlers at Cullin-la-Ringo (230).

But Agamemnon's edict could also be said by a Nazi discussing the Final Solution. Similarly, what Max says about the Holocaust—"an evil beyond the reckoning of humanity was being done in our names and... we were never to understand it or to recover from it. It has haunted my generation and the ghost of it will not be gone until we are gone" (263)—could equally well be said of the massacres carried out in the colonial frontier, a subject usually erased or covered up in Australian history.

The possibility of attributing Agamemnon's speech to diverse perpetrators in human history is consistent with the relatively new transnational and transhistorical approach to the study of violence against the other. Much has been written about the causes of Nazism and the Holocaust, often suggesting that they can be traced back to the long tradition of racism and anti-Semitism, the brutalising experience of the First World War, radical nationalist ideologies, but also, especially in the last few decades, to Germany's and, more generally, to Europe's colonial and imperial past.<sup>18</sup> While some have looked back and tried to place the Holocaust in modern history, others have looked forward, like the Frankfurt School thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse, whose analysis of anti-Semitism saw the eradication of Jewish otherness as a presage announcing the attempts to eradicate other types of otherness in post-World War II capitalism.<sup>19</sup> And so, just as the historical study of the Holocaust sets one on a journey across multidirectional connections, Max's journey in *Landscape of Farewell* is a spatial journey that involves a return to the traumatic past of another, which is "in a complex interchange, somehow also the past of the self."<sup>20</sup> The narrative thus progresses by weaving links between Max and Dougald and their respective histories.

Dougald's farm in Central Queensland reminds Max of the time he spent in his uncle's farm in Germany during the war years. The passion of his uncle for his ancestral farmland was "an indissoluble aspect of his innermost sense of who he was, that source from whence

he had his origins” (111). Likewise, Dougald’s deep attachment to his country is “an ancestral knowing grappled into the roots of his being” (102). This attachment to the land is at the heart of the respective massacre defining each protagonist’s identity. In his obsession, which nears madness, Max’s uncle evokes the German cult of blood and soil. But blood was also shed on Australian soil, mostly the blood of those who were violently dispossessed of their ancestral land. Even in the story that Max finally writes for Dougald, where the Aborigines are the killers, what precipitates the massacre is the fact that the white settlers had tampered with their sacred land: for the Aborigines the soil is indeed sacred and is seen as an umbilical cord tying them with their ancestry; yet the attachment to it can also expose genocidal logic. In her essay on *Landscape of Farewell* and historical representation, Dianne Molloy uses the metaphor of the positive and negative sides of a photograph to show how the themes in the novel are presented in dualistic terms.<sup>21</sup> For example, we are invited to reflect on Aboriginal love and spiritual connection to the land and, at the same time, on the German people’s *Lebensraum*—the territorial expansion initiated in the 1890s that culminated with Nazism. Moreover, if the Nazis’ *Lebensraum*—literally, “living space”—was the driving force behind their invasion of other countries, so as to use their resources for the benefit of Germany, the English settlers who started the war against the Aborigines in the late eighteenth century also did so in order to expropriate their resources and justified their actions by invoking another doctrine about the land—that of *terra nullius*, or “empty land”, which justified acquisition without treaty or payment. Both cases were grounded on the link between capitalist incorporation and colonialism, on the one hand, and various forms of violence, suffering and, ultimately, massacre, on the other. This does not mean that the two cases can be conflated. On the contrary, it is part of the novel’s dynamics to suggest historical connections but to leave it to the reader to find out their limits.

A similar connection and oscillation of positives and negatives emerges when considering the role of silence in the novel. There is first the silence that stems from guilt and shame, the silence imposed by family and country on perpetrators and their descendants. After the war, burdened with doubts about his Nazi father, Max kept silent to sustain the lie that they were a “normal” family. It was so with the second generation, while it was the third generation that, in contrast to their parents, started “much more to act out the symptoms that correspond to the family’s Nazi past” and, by so doing, began “to expose and confront this past.”<sup>22</sup> As Max himself realises, the war had trapped his generation “in an iron cage of remorse and silence” (46). Psychologist and behavioural scientist Dan Bar-On sees this secrecy about the past as an interaction, a “double wall” of silence developed and maintained by parents and children: the former erect a wall about the atrocities they witnessed or carried out, and the latter react by building their own protective wall.<sup>23</sup> This was the case with Max’s family, and so, although he often imagined himself asking his father “*Dad, what did you really do in the war?*” he could never say it aloud (53; italics in original). The question had never ceased, nor the feeling that those like him had to apologise for being their parents’ children, guilty-by-association with their crimes.

If Max’s life was shattered by the Third Reich, that of Dougald was also drastically changed by the white colonisers’ invasion. Historical events had impacted their family history, complicating especially their interaction with their respective fathers. As was the case with Max, Dougald’s relationship with his father was marked by silence. Deracinated and alcoholic, his father beat him almost every night but he kept silent, aware that his rage had a deeper cause. This cause was not related to a legacy of perpetration (Dougald’s father was the grandson of the warrior Gnapun) but rather to the consequences of the violence, pain and defeat he and his people suffered at the hands of the European

colonisers—the expropriation of their land, the destruction of their lifestyle, their culture, religion and physical existence. The victimisation of indigenous Australians is present throughout the narrative, through Vita’s commitment to the history of her people, through Dougald’s role as cultural advisor and advocate, and through his family past as well. But the story’s main focus is on the Aborigines as perpetrators of a massacre and Dougald’s problem in dealing with *this* story, which he fears is doomed to be lost with the passage of time. Similarly, then, though for different reasons, Max and Dougald are unable to tackle their respective forebears’ story of perpetration.

There is a silence in the novel that is related to Max’s view of “defeat [as] a great silencer” (140), and both he and Dougald are affected by it and its variants—the silence of pain, of loss, of shame, of guilt... But, in contrast to this type of silence, the novel also recreates another kind of silence, which breaks the first and shows that silence can be full and empty, good and bad, echoing the dynamics described above. This other silence is the silence of the Australian landscape that engulfs Max at Mount Nebo, “the peculiar silence of this place. The silence between Dougald and me. *His* silence. A silence that was, in a mysterious way, the medium through which he and I had begun to understand each other” (128; italics in original). It is by yielding to this silence that Max eventually finds the healing words of fictional narrative. In his study of the novel’s soundscapes, Joseph Cummins sees Miller as building a double-axis situation in which the silence of the landscape resounds between the two men in their present mood and shared geographical location, but also between their geographically distant individual pasts.<sup>24</sup> The silence resonates outside, in the exterior environment, and inside, in their emotional landscape. *That* silence, which Dougald temporarily fills with the story of the Aborigines’ massacre of white settlers, empowers Max to imagine the warrior Gnapun and what happened at Cullin-la-Ringo. By writing his own version of what he hears, he can come to terms with his own

silences indirectly, while simultaneously addressing the silences in Dougald's traumatic history.

### Gifts and Rifts

I started this article by relating the synergy that operates between Max and Dougald to their friendship, a value cherished by Miller and usually dealt with as a gift in his fiction. Drawing on Lewis Hyde's work on the gift, and especially on what he calls the spiritual economy of the imagination, Ronald A. Sharp concludes that the gift is "Miller's central trope... for both the defining act of friendship and the defining act of artistic creation."<sup>25</sup> In his theory of the gift, Hyde elaborates on the distinction between gift exchange and commodity exchange. Unlike a commodity, which is meant to be taken out of circulation, a gift must always be kept in motion: "whatever we have been given is supposed to be given away again, not kept. Or if it is kept, something of similar value should move on in its stead, the way a billiard ball may stop when it sends another scurrying across the felt, its momentum transferred."<sup>26</sup> This distinction clearly applies to *Landscape of Farewell*, where the transformative power of synergy operates between Max and Vita, on the one hand, and between Max and Dougald, on the other, through a network of gift exchanges. Vita's friendship with Max saves his life, literally, and it is she who arranges for Max and her uncle Dougald to spend time together, thus setting the gift in motion. Friendship grows between the two men, and Dougald passes on to Max the gift of the story he received from his ancestors. Max writes his own version and gives it back to Dougald, who was aware that he should keep moving the gift, but did not know how to go about it, and had long been experiencing the story as "a terrible burden."<sup>27</sup> Max's "Massacre"—his version of Dougald's account of his great-grandfather's leading the attack on the colonisers—



powerfully contributes to relieving that burden and becomes a gift in itself. And yet, as I will show, this is not where this movement ends.

“Massacre” constitutes Chapter 25 of the novel. In Max’s rendering, the Aborigines are warriors determined to defend their customs and sacred land. Their leader Gnapun is a shaman who undergoes visionary seizures. Thus, before the attack, he is able to identify with the white leader, to experience what he experiences, his love of his dear ones, his fears and his impending death. This is why, after stabbing him, Gnapun is described as “step[ping] away from the dying man. The man, who is himself” (236). Gnapun’s ability to be himself and his other allows Max to include in his narration both perspectives on the story of the massacre. Once the white settlers are killed, Gnapun foresees that the warriors will be hunted down and murdered, and that he will become an outcast, burdened by a story that he will carry in his heart “like a beast that sleeps but will not die” (238). Moving back in time, the story of the massacre grafts itself onto the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:14), even echoing its words, as between Gnapun and the white leader “there is only the bewildering mystery of their brotherhood. *Thou has driven me out this day from the face of the earth... and I shall be a fugitive and vagabond in the earth*” (239; italics in original).

This allusion to the first murder, the biblical tale of brother killing, fits Max’s scholarly interest in massacre as something that recurs throughout history, and attests to Miller’s aim in writing the novel, which, as noted earlier, was to “sketch lines of intersection and to see how they fitted together into a whole, not an Australian or European whole, but a human whole.”<sup>28</sup> However, it should be noted that Miller’s project, and Max’s story in particular, open up a number of rifts.

Miller’s Central Queensland novels—*Watching the Climbers on the Mountain* (1988), *Journey to Stone Country* (2002), *Landscape of Farewell* (2007), and *Coal Creek* (2013)—

were written in a charged political context, marked, among other things, by the History Wars, the denial of the extent of frontier violence, the “Bringing Them Home” report, and the debates on the appropriateness of applying the term *genocide* to the case of Australia’s indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>29</sup> When read against this context, Max’s story falls short of specificity and may appear as a romanticised version of a historical event.

The Cullin-la-Ringo massacre seems to have been carried out in retaliation for previous attacks and was followed by several acts of vengeance in which at least seventy Aborigines were killed. Moreover, colonisers and native police used the massacre for months after the attack as an excuse to kill Aboriginal people, whether or not they were connected with the events, without allowing them a fair trial.<sup>30</sup> For Miller, the novel genre arises “out of the shortcomings of history,”<sup>31</sup> and it is true that Max’s story is a fictional and even allegorical version of the story Dougald tells him, to which version, however, the reader has no access. It is the closeness of the two men that allows for their friendship and for the multiple connections between German and Australian history. Important as this is for multidirectional memory and the comparative understanding of violence and suffering, Miller takes risks that go beyond the fictionalisation of history or the way history is told. What brings the two men together is a legacy of perpetration, and it is not settler guilt that is explored in tandem with the consequences of the Nazi genocide. Maggie Nolan, for instance, is critical of the novel’s sustained analogy between indigenous Australians and the defeated (and dishonoured) Nazis:

One effect of this analogy is that the novel projects a kind of perpetrator guilt onto the Indigenous subject. In so doing, it suppresses a key productive benefit of a comparison between the settlement of Australia and the Holocaust. ... Settler Australians do not need to recognise themselves as either perpetrators or beneficiaries of colonial violence,

nor do they need to consider questions of recompense or redress because perpetrator trauma is displaced so effectively onto Dougald.<sup>32</sup>

*Landscape of Farewell* is not a story that explores how settler Australians may come to terms with their legacies of perpetration. It is another story, uncomfortable and questionable at times. There is no denying, though, that the novel portrays Dougald and his people as suffering from the insidious legacy of colonialism. Dougald's family and those he helps as an advocate are victimised by it, and Vita definitely takes responsibility, as an academic, for the underrepresented history of Aboriginal Australians. But the legacies of victimisation *coexist* in Dougald with those of perpetration. Thus indigenous peoples do not become non-victims in the fictional universe of *Landscape of Farewell* because an Aborigine in the novel descends from a perpetrator, nor is perpetration displaced onto Aboriginal peoples as a whole for that mere reason. Without denying the cruelty and consequences of their dispossession, the narrative also acknowledges that their massacre of white settlers is part of the same pattern of massacres that define history on a global scale. The novel teases out any simplistic understanding of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy and shows that it is not only victimisation but also the burden of perpetration that may block, traumatise, and bring people together. The fact that Max is the son of a perpetrator facilitates communication between the novel's two main characters, awakens their empathic imagination and sharing of stories. And this is a key goal in any sort of reconciliation process.

#### Artistic (Re-)creation and Responsibility for the Past

*Landscape of Farewell* plays with similarity and difference to call attention to both the connection and the distance between Max and Dougald, their personal and national

histories. Commenting on the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Ian McEwan pointed out: “If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim.”<sup>33</sup> Max’s story recreates an extreme kind of empathy, as the warrior shaman actually imagines himself into the thoughts and feelings of his victim. Nevertheless, he kills him and the distance between them is simultaneously narrowed and reinstated. This is a recurrent mechanism throughout the novel.

Max’s narrative is an imaginative recreation, not an account of what actually happened. A white historian’s writing down of a story handed down orally among Aborigines may be seen as an act of appropriation. However, it is clear that Max does not see himself as the author of the story but simply as its scribe, as he suggests when he says that it had just been “placed... in [his] care” (192), or when he says, once he had finished writing it, that what he had done “was no longer [his]” (242). This explains why Max gives the story away to Dougald, renouncing his claim to it as he hands to his friend the manuscript where Dougald appears as the author in the subtitle, *A true story by Dougald Gnapun.*”

If the issue of appropriation is raised in connection with Max, then a similar accusation could be levelled against the author. As Elizabeth Webby notes, Miller’s first novels were published towards the end of a period when the debates about the ethics of representation were informed by feminism, multiculturalism and postcolonialism. If in feminist circles the appropriation of the female voice was a central issue, in Australia “the debate was particularly focused on the question of white writers’ representation of Aboriginal people.”<sup>34</sup> But there is an insistence in Miller’s work that authorial identity should not restrict the literary imagination.<sup>35</sup> Indeed his creative reconstruction is a salutary attempt to move beyond identity politics, to reject the imposition of taboos on literary creation. It is,

at the same time, an acknowledgement that there is something that links people, cultures, histories, beyond differences, but also that one's subject position places certain limits on the imagination. The novel and its careful handling of stories reinforces Bennet's assertion that, in this globalised world, the space between self and other should not be eradicated but "inhabited."<sup>36</sup>

The stories of Max's father and of the warrior Gnapun are part of the larger and more complex human history with its fundamental pattern of pain and cruelty, which always admits different ways of looking at reality. Max could not write about his father because of his emotional attachment to the subject and also because, as a German historian, he was aware of the debates surrounding the representation of perpetration. In her introduction to *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, Jenni Adams claims that the traditional sense of unease associated with any attempts to conceptualise or depict the Holocaust perpetrator has persisted into the twenty-first century.<sup>37</sup> The reasons for this reluctance—doubts concerning the risk of de-emphasising the victim's perspectives and experience, refusal to exonerate or legitimise the perpetrator's viewpoints—are the same reasons that stop Max from facing the task. However, this changes following his meeting with Dougald, an indigenous Australian, whose main concern about his ancestors' story is not absolution or explanation, but oblivion. Thanks to him, Max feels for the first time unconstrained by the strictures of history, "at liberty to invoke the dilemmas inscribed in my own heart" (249–50), and relieved by his new awareness that one can write not to accuse or to forgive, but simply to take responsibility for the past.

For his part, Dougald also has a journey to complete. He seems to have lived in a self-imposed exile, but now that he knows his story will not die with him, now that Max's words have filled some void inside him, he feels ready to visit his ancestors' land. Significantly, Max's journey in his inner self culminates in *Landscape of Farewell* with a

journey to the inner land: the place where Dougald's great-grandfather is buried, in the terrain of the Expedition Range. The gift is thus kept in motion: as Max gives Dougald the story he asked him to write, Dougald takes Max on a journey to his ancestral country. This journey has a marked spiritual, healing dimension, and constitutes the last stage in the two men's process of reconnection and change. Shortly afterwards, Max returns to Hamburg determined to write the book about the Holocaust that he had always wanted to write; and soon afterwards, Dougald dies. Max meets Vita once again after her uncle's death and it is then, at the novel's conclusion, that we realise that the story we are just completing was written by Max as a final gift to Vita. In Lewis Hyde's words, as noted earlier, the only essential thing about the gift is this: "*the gift must always move.*"<sup>38</sup> Vita set the gift in motion by inviting Max to Australia and now the gift has returned to her following the series of exchanges that have transformed all of them.

*Landscape of Farewell* is, in this sense, a paean to life and friendship, which somewhat counterbalances the pervasive presence of death in the novel. If the transformative power of friendship accounts for its being conceptualised as a life force in the narrative, the same applies to the transformative power of artistic creation, the other gift that is exchanged in the novel. After the massacre of the white settlers, Gnapun reflects: "to suffer from one's past is a punishment without remedy. ... To sing, after this, would be a blasphemy. After this there can be no innocence" (219).<sup>39</sup> And yet, the novel unquestionably opens a space for what Gnapun seemed to distrust: the possibility of song, of poetry, of art. After all, the narrative is built upon the transformation of painful memories into stories—artistic (re-)creations predicated on the empathic imagination—that may open up the past as a space of remembrance, negotiation, and reconciliation.

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## Notes

1. Corning, "The Synergism Hypothesis."
2. McMahon, "Continental Heartlands," 131.
3. Miller, "Chasing My Tale," 6.
4. McMahon, *Islands*, 20.
5. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, *passim*.
6. Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*, *passim*.
7. Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 11.
8. Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, 10 (italics in original).
9. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 41, 135.
10. Hirsch, "Projected Memory," 7.
11. Eagleton, "Conclusion," 278–79 (italics in original).
12. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 17.
13. Moses, "Conceptual Blockages," 7, 31 (italics in original).
14. Miller, "The Mask of Fiction," 37.
15. Miller, *Landscape of Farewell*, 14. Hereafter page numbers are cited in the text.
16. This is part of the information on the Cullin-la-Ringo massacre that Miller himself provides at the end of the novel. He also gives some bibliographical sources, including Les Perrin's book *Cullin-la-ringo: The Triumph and Tragedy of Tommy Wills* (1998), and articles by Gordon Reid, Henry Reynolds, and David Carment. For information on the subject, see also Carment, "The Wills Massacre of 1961," and Richards, *The Secret War*.
17. Walker, "Frontier Wars," 159.
18. Kühne, "Colonialism and the Holocaust," 339.
19. Agger, "Dialectic of Desire," 75.
20. McMahon, "Continental Heartlands," 132.

21. Molloy, “To Sing, After This,” 231.
22. Rosenthal, “National Socialism,” 247.
23. Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence*, 328.
24. Cummins, “Sound and Silence,” 9.
25. Sharp, “Vision of Friendship,” 97.
26. Hyde, *The Gift*, 4.
27. Sharp, “Vision of Friendship,” 101.
28. Miller, “The Mask of Fiction,” 37.
29. See Crotty, “Beyond Genocide”; and Curthoys and Docker, “Introduction – Genocide.”
30. Richards, *The Secret War*, 24.
31. Miller, “Written in Our Hearts,” 8.
32. Nolan, “Narrating Historical Massacre,” 9.
33. McEwan, “Only Love and Then Oblivion.”
34. Webby, “Representing ‘the Other,’” 114.
35. Miller himself explained the genesis of his first published story, which recalls the intercultural exchange between Dougald and Max and also illustrates the writer’s rejection of “no entry signs” when it comes to literary creation. In the course of a long conversation, his friend and mentor Max Blatt—a central European Jew, survivor of the Holocaust—told Miller the story of how he escaped an anti-Semitic attack in Poland at the beginning of World War II. Miller then reworked this brief oral story into a longer narrative entitled “Comrade Pawel,” which he gave Max to read. Full of emotion, Max concluded: “You could have been there.” Miller, “Waxing Wiser than Oneself,” 25. These are the very same words Dougald tells the fictional Max in *Landscape of Farewell* after reading the story of the warrior Gnapun.
36. Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, 105.

37. Adams, "Introduction," 1–2.

38. Hyde, *The Gift*, 4 (italics in original).

39. Gnapun seems to ventriloquize here Adorno's famous dictum about the barbarism of writing poetry after Auschwitz. As is well-known, he later modified his views, arguing that "[p]erennial suffering has as much a right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 362.