

“Time Has Caught on Fire:” Eco-Anxiety and Anger in Selected Australian Poetry

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Abstract

This essay discusses fire as a significant factor shaping Australian social and cultural life. It focuses first on the climate-change induced emotions such as eco-anxiety and anger that can be tied with the Australian landscape, and then moves on to a discussion of the presence and function of fire in selected contemporary Australian poetry. The reflection on the poetics of trauma in the second part of the essay is accompanied by a discussion of solastalgia connected with land dispossession as an experience of the First Nations expressed in the Aboriginal literature in English.

Keywords: emotions in Australian literature, solastalgia, metaphors of anger, Anthropocene, Australian wildfires, trauma

[...] have we eaten in the heart of the yellow wheat
the sullen unforgetting seed of fire?
And now, set free by the climate of man's hate,
that seed sets time ablaze.
Judith Wright, "Two Fires"

"There is a country/ burned of ashes/ far beyond the stars:"¹ Introduction

Fire is the element that has not only transformed the Australian landscape: it has also affected the patterns of social, economic and political life, impressing itself on the Australian culture in more than one way. While c. 1.3% of Australian GDP is spent to cover the preventive measures, the response to its spread and the destruction it wreaks yearly, fire costs human and animal lives, with c. 100 human fatalities and 83 properties per annum (Ashe et al.). Its environmental, social and economic costs are connected with strong emotions, which politicians come to acknowledge, addressing them in policy development on local and central levels (Ashe et al. 1). However, the logic of total average costs does not articulate the toll of bushfires and wildfires as ecological disasters; neither does it reflect the range of human emotion tied to the overwhelming sense of loss in the aftermath of such destructive events.

Wildfires are, as Stephen Pyne underlines, the consequence of urban and industrial development in the 19th and 20th century. Their appearance and prevention were systematically approached only in 1939, when the Black Friday fires led to the emergence of the first bushfire protection policies. These, however, did not suppress the big fires of 1974–1975 or 2002–2003, or Black Saturday of 2009 (Pyne), or indeed the catastrophic fires of 2019–2020. The images of raging Australian bushfires readily covered by international media present only a part of a complex picture, whereby emotional responses to blaze are not limited to these connected with loss only, and come attached to the cultural traditions of fire management which are much older than the white presence in Australia. The history of fire, its emotional resonance and expression, is embedded within the Australian cultural imaginary, with collective memories of fires and the accounts of fire-related events making an impact on the Australian literary output.

The interconnectedness of fire and emotion in the Australian landscape is articulated by David Horton in a meditation which links the climate, the landscape and the feeling human body:

¹ Lionel Fogarty, "Kargun". In *Kargun*. Coominya, Old: Cheryl Buchanan 1976.

This is an Australian landscape, and I try to view it with Australian eyes, my body attuned to the rhythms of the country as much as to the movement of blood in the veins. Here is a land where climate and landscape have shaped the vegetation, where climate, landscape and vegetation have created a particular fire regime for this area, and in turn, that fire regime has helped to modify the pattern of vegetation. It is a complex interplay in a land of complex ecology, whose secrets have been hard to unlock. (71)

This essay offers a brief consideration of the complex relationship between fire and Australian culture, addressing the whole range of emotions tied with that particular element. It briefly discusses the central importance of the conceptual metaphor of anger as heat and danger in Western culture to underline the reliance of language on the emotive potential of fire and its imagery. The phenomenon of climate-change-related anger, its social effects and its possible representations in Australian literature are briefly outlined with a larger aim in mind. The motivation behind this very introductory study is to trace and discuss possible occurrences of fire in literature, with a special focus on how anger and fire are discussed in selected Australian poems. These include Aboriginal poetry in English, with two important caveats. Aboriginal literature in English dates from David Unaipon's *Native Legends* (1929) and encompasses such classics as Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)'s book of poetry, *We Are Going* (1964). It has become a vast territory, where a non-Aboriginal, non-Australian literary historian will be at a loss. Yet, to leave it out of consideration altogether would be a gross oversight. Additionally, the cultural significance of fire in Aboriginal cultures has been different from the modern post-industrial Western prohibition of fire (Macaulay), hence the writing of First Nations' authors was approached with this objection in mind.

Even though an extensive analysis of the metaphorical uses of fire in Australian literature as such and Aboriginal literature in English in particular goes well beyond the scope of this study, one can risk a hypothesis that an emotive exploration of the patterns, severity and duration of Australian fires is one of the Australian literary topoi, possibly connected to the more general social, economic and cultural concerns such as individual and generational traumas of wildfire-survival and land dispossession. This has been briefly addressed in the present writing through an introductory discussion of eco-anxiety and solastalgia defined in the second part of the essay. As one of the ways of coping with the increase of eco-anxiety is to look for its representations as well as the expressions of resilience and hope that can be found in creative fiction (Affifi and Christie), these are briefly addressed in part three which provides a sketch of the (metaphorical) presence of fire in the contemporary Australian poetry.

“All that rage:” metaphors we live by

Metaphors related to anger have been discussed extensively: in cognitive linguistics anger conceptualisation in American English has been provided by Lakoff (1987), and Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) look at it interculturally, arguing that expressions of anger are symptomatic of coherent conceptual frames which we all share as human beings (cf. Charteris-Black). They point to the embodied character of the emotion, and the fact that the physiological effects of anger are likened in human languages to insanity, a dangerous animal, to burden, but also to a rise in heat and internal pressure, to the point of burning, as in:

She was doing *a slow burn*.

He was *breathing fire*.

The central metaphor which occurs in these two examples can be described as ANGER IS HEAT. We might think of it as a fluid and then ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER, but we might also think of it as if pertaining to a solid substance; then anger is conceptualised as ANGER IS FIRE (Lakoff, Lakoff and Kövecses). This metaphorical entanglement of anger with Western thinking about the elements seems of particular interest in the wake of the catastrophic climate-change which rather justifiably awakes a range of emotions, with anger as a commonly addressed option which resonates in many societies, including the English-speaking Australian population.² Gibbs discusses this affinity between bodies and elements stating that:

bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear. [...] Communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion. (Gibbs n.p.)

The double bind between anger and fire is a point on which Blanche Verlie elaborates in her study of “Climatic-affective atmospheres:” “While affects may function like fire, fires are also affective” (4), she claims. Unsurprisingly, Verlie uses the Australian summer of 2018/2019 as a study case for her discussion of “climatic-affective atmospheres” as the record-breaking heat in January worked to enrage tempers and temperatures alike: “This summer has been dubbed another ‘angry’ one. [...] it is not just the climate that is angry. Many Australians are getting angry in the heat, and about the heat” (Verlie online). Fires rage, as not only the time seems to be out of joint: the climate is. The emotive potential of fire in this particular instance relates to the aftermath of the natural disaster, but comes to engulf also its causes,

² It would be interesting to note, to what extent the patterns of fire and anger expression described above are present at all in over 200 language groups classified as Australia’s indigenous languages.

as the summer of 2018/2019 became for many the eye-opening moment in their approach to the Anthropocene and the climate change-induced environmental hazards (cf. Roelvink and Zolkos, Bladow and Ladino).

As an affective response to environmental change, anger has been addressed as one in the possible reactions subsumed under the more general term, eco-anxiety, defined by Panu Pihkala as distress connected with profound environmental change which has the bearings of an "ecological crisis" ("Anxiety" 4). Even though the occurrence of eco-anxiety is increasing only now owing to the rapid climate change and growing awareness of the impending climate catastrophe, especially in young populations, anxiety and the accompanying "difficult emotions" – which in the environmental context are dubbed "ecological emotions" – have long been triggered by environmental events on a catastrophic scale, with such terms as "ecological trauma," "Anthropocene Horror," "environmental melancholia," climate distress, solastalgia, climate grief, mourning, environmental despair, eco-guilt emerging only in recent years (Pihkala "Anxiety" 4), to systematically describe a phenomenon specific for the Anthropocene. In this way "ecological crises and social crises become intertwined into socio-ecological crises and catastrophes," with a number of social and psychological vulnerabilities as factors conducive to the emergence and severity of environmentally-induced distress.³

Pihkala argues that "Anxiety often breeds anger, and repressed anger may manifest as anxiety" ("Eco-Anxiety" 10); anger can, therefore, be addressed as one of the ecological emotions that accompany the state of distress caused by environmental change. As a state which is generated and sustained by affective contamination, eco-anger can potentially be shared within the dominant frameworks of public feelings (Antadze). "Climate rage," "eco-anger" or "terrafurie" has been recognised as culturally dependent, and as the vast cultural history of anger suggests, its expressions can also vary according to gender.⁴ Anger is multi-dimensional and "may have a vastly important role in resisting injustice and providing energy to act," therefore it is also worth investigating its occurrences not only in the discourse surrounding catastrophic events, but also in more subtle cultural reactions to them, which might be connected with the emergence of versatile forms of "transformational resilience," "emotional resilience," or "affective adaptation" (see Pihkala's discussion of the terminology in question). These, I would argue, can be found in various forms of cultural expression, with literature serving as an important tool in promulgating and disseminating emotive patterns of reaction, coping and, possibly, resilience.

³ According to Pihkala climate anxiety has a practical dimension, related to the adaptive measures one can take to protect themselves from the hazardous circumstances.

⁴ For a discussion of anger, grief and climate change see also Kleres and Wettergren; Gibson et al.; for a discussion of eco-anxiety and indigenous groups, see Middleton et al.

“Culture a-Burning:” The past which is never gone

The Australian landscape, touched and shaped by fire, heaves with symbolic meaning: the threat of destruction demands vigilance while living with fire demands resilience. The constant change that landscape undergoes through fire does evoke emotional reactions, with anger and grief as understandable responses to fire-related loss. It is in contemporary poetry that the imagery of the Australian landscape is evoked, and its readiness to burst into flames becomes a significant trope, as in John Kinsella’s “fire poems” such as “Bushfire Approaching” or the lines opening the volume *Peripheral Light*:

There are days when the world
Buckles under the sun, trees blacken
To thin wisps, spinifex fires. (3)

As Grace Moore and Tom Bristow demonstrate, fire remains a destructive force in the imaginary of Australia’s most eminent contemporary eco-poet. A portent of doom, it always looms on the horizon, and its memory and future occurrence cause traumatising anxiety:

Kinsella’s fires occasionally warm, but mostly they are catastrophic and destructive, sweeping across the land and spreading terror. These fires are symbolically complex and at times contradictory. Often, they are invested with what Massumi describes as the “could-have/would-have logic,” in that if a specific fire does not result in widespread destruction, it remains a harbinger of fires to come. (345)

In *Earthly Delights* (2006) Stephen K. Kelen uses direct, descriptive language to address in detail the workings of the “revenge spirit of many firesticks” – as “the new year feels incendiary”. He asks a plain and yet dramatic question “What starts a fire?” (47) similarly to Kinsella underlining its anthropogenic character:

Lightning strike , flicked cigarette,
foolish prank or a psychopath –
al Qaeda goblins play with matches.
Bushland, fences and permanent homes
are kindling the future X-ed for burning. (47)

The threat of wildfire destruction that affects neighbours and strangers alike is revealed in the course of the poem to work metaphorically, as the rage of the fire-storm is likened to an act of terrorism by the “al Qaeda goblins”. Towards the end of

the poem, the terror of the catastrophe gradually subsides, obliterated by the realist attention to the smallest detail in the world that fails to respond adequately and is quick to forget: "the fire chief asleep on the job/ telephone ringing and ringing" (48). Once "The bushfire move[s] in next door", the danger loses its immediacy. What threatens our neighbour is no longer that terrifying, seems to be the implied message, further strengthened by the quiet irony of the closing statements:

An old man chokes on fumes
and dies. It's sad. And it's bad for people
losing homes and lifetime treasures.
It takes a few years to get back on your feet. (48)

The pragmatic bluntness of such an ending is juxtaposed with the omnipresence of the danger:

The bush burns all day, all night,
its glow like a sunset. A state of emergency
ensures we live in interesting times. (48)

A similar poetic strategy in the approach to bushfires, this time treated literally, can be found in an earlier, 1994 poem by Kate Llewellyn. In "Magpies", she contrasts a realist observation of the wildlife and its concrete, albeit somewhat noisy, beauty with the horror of the fiery death happening elsewhere. The enumeration, which in Kelen's text serves to paint a picture of urban human lives, here is used to a much more universalising effect. Fire-related loss happens to the Australian landscape with humans treated as its integral part; the vastness of the destruction is highlighted by the caring focus on the "micro-description" of magpies' art:

Magpies found this fountain [...]
They made a midsummer opera [...]

While all this was happening
A hundred fires swept the State.
Great trees exploded,
birds and animals caught fire.
People died and houses burned,
Yet still these magpies sang
Around the fountain in the tree. (62)

The daily dangers of fire and its aftermath are present also in the poetry of Grace Perry's *Be Kind to Animals* (1984), in "Bushfire", "After fire" and "Morning"; Caroline Caddy constructs her poems along patterns similar to those of Perry, Kinsella,

Kelen and Lewellyn in the texts written between 2007 and 2010, but these accounts of bushfires strike a very personal note. Their very structure seems to be affected by the heat of the blaze, with caesura visibly marking the verses interspersed on the page (“Fire 1”, “Fire 2”, “Fire 3”, “Aftermath 1”, “Aftermath 2”, “Firebreak”, “the burning car”, “Diminished Responsibility”). The lyrical reaction to loss by fire, leaving the speaking self defenceless and almost speechless in the face of the catastrophe (“has the fire whipped the word from my head?”, “Aftermath 1”), operates on the premise that fire is a force of utter destruction. Still, even in the poems which read like a traumatised survivor’s eyewitness account of the blaze, there is a sense that survival is more than an option, as they tend to utilise imagery sourced from the natural world to herald resilience and the hope for regeneration:

The intimate ties between the natural world, the individual sense of the self and belonging to a place are also the subject matter of the poetry of Judith Wright (Bureau). The poetic voice of the twentieth-century Australian literature, and the Nobel Prize nominee, Wright notes:

Australia is still for us not a country but a state of mind. We do not speak from within but from outside. From a state of mind that describes rather than expresses its surroundings or from a state of mind that imposes itself upon rather than lives through landscape and event. (1969, 301, qtd. in Bureau 68)

Written around the same time as the passage above, her “Flame-Tree in a Quarry” expresses that sense of connectedness, incorporating the re-visionary sense of coming together with the landscape, the painful past and the transcendent present. The initial death-like barrenness of the landscape and the short-lived vision of life offered by the “bush of blood” lead to an overwhelming sense of oneness with the fiery universe, which permeates the landscape, its elements and the speaking I:

From the broken bone of the hill
stripped and left for dead,
like a wrecked skull,
leaps out this bush of blood. [...]
flesh of the world’s delight,
voice of the world’s desire,
I drink you with my sight
and I am filled with fire.
Out of the very wound
springs up this scarlet breath –
this fountain of hot joy,
this living ghost of death. (62)

What Bureu calls "the poet's metaphysical projection" (72) can be thought of as a budding sense of ecocritical imagination. Wright's poetic realisation that human life and death are but a part of a natural cycle is recognised by John Charles Ryan as a "time-plexity" which "enfolds Aboriginal temporalities and the time of plants [...] Elements of historical time, the mythologised (chronos) time of nationhood, the cyclical (Kairos) time of nature and the experiential time of human generations" (Ryan 176). Judith Wright's poetry looms over the horizon of contemporary Australian literature, not only because of the quality of her writing, but also because of its political undertones. As a poet, she understood the task of poetry to be also about accounting for the past, and saw it a vehicle for expressing "the complex relation of past and present to present and future readers" (McMahon 25 qtd in Ryan 177). Wright, who in the course of her career became a staunch supporter of the Aboriginal rights, was preoccupied with Australia's difficult heritage and expressed that preoccupation through her poetry and activism. The Aboriginal way of life emerges in her environmentally aware writing as a model to emulate, while the First Nations' sense of relatedness to the natural world and its "vegetal cadences" (Ryan 178) is a pattern clearly visible in her poetry. Within such a paradigm, whose traces are observable in "Flame-Tree in a Quarry", fire is a phenomenon, whose cyclical occurrence and natural potency as a source of revitalisation plays a part in building imagery imbued with less ominous significance than in the Poetry of Kinsella, Cadzay or Perry. The eulogy for the past once burning and turned to ashes from which it will be reborn emerges also in Wright's 1955 *The Two Fires*, even though the poem opening the volume does not leave any hope to humanity, as the anthropogenic fire of the nuclear blast is portrayed as the epitome on human-created disaster:

For time has caught on fire, and you too burn:
leaf, stem, branch, calyx and the bright corolla
are now insubstantial wavering fire
in which love dies. (123)

The cyclically burning element enabling generation here becomes a lethal force: "the whole world burns. The ancient kingdom of the fire returns" (123) to consume and devour; the life-giving and myth-making properties of the element transformed through human interference beyond recognition.

As seen in Wright's poems, the anthropogenic fires blasting through Australia since 1788 have more than one meaning and evoke more than one reaction. In the long history of human presence on the Australian continent fire was used both by the Aboriginal groups and settlers as a tool of land management, but also as a weapon in the history of colonial conquest and resistance (Pyne). The practice of controlled fire-stick burning, also known as "cultural burning" is a tradition which has been discussed in connection with subtle changes occurring in the Australian

landscape for approximately fifty thousand years, such as the increase in the number of fire-resistant vegetation and changing patterns of forestation, leading to a decrease of high intensity fires in the areas where grass-eating game was introduced (Pyne). The practice was banned, once Australian fires, hitherto managed and controlled by the indigenous populations, acquired notoriety in the newly-formed colonial state, and as the Aboriginal patterns of fire control were disrupted for almost two hundred years. Fire-hunting became an almost obsolete custom, while industrial fires turned into a new norm. As Pyne concludes, the history of wild-fires in Australia is connected with the fact that aboriginal fire was supplanted by anthropogenic fire: "The history of colonisation (which is a kind of biotic conquest) is thus a history of eruptive fire" (82). The colonisation of Australia is alluded to through the metaphors of fire as anger by T. Birch in his "'The Invisible Fire': Indigenous sovereignty, history and responsibility." The Aboriginal scholar Irene Watson elaborates on the same theme with recourse to the same imagery: "Franz Fanon saw the 'smoking ashes of a burnt-down house after the fire has been put out (but) which still threatened to burst into flames again.' I ask the reader: in relation to Australia, has there even been an attempt to put the fire out." (Watson 17). Fire is here an element evoked rhetorically to historicise the Aboriginal experience of colonisation. It is exactly this experience that remains the locus of Aboriginal poetry in English, albeit fire seems to fulfil a rather different function within it.

In Australian literature anger seems to be evoked, expressed and studied not only in connection with bushfires, but also, and perhaps predominantly, in connection with the colonial past: the told and untold stories of displacement and dispossession; the stories of resistance and conflict; the hardships of migration and settlement; the stigmas tied with the convict system; the traumas of the first and the second world war (Shoemaker). To this sum of all these rages, one could add the trauma of place-based distress or "solastalgia," the disruption of the fundamental sense of belonging to a place (Haugen Askland and Bunn), which seems to be an experience shared by the Australian population and possibly emergent also historically, both amidst the colonisers and the colonised, albeit for strikingly different reasons. As Oodgeroo Noonuccal writes in her canonical poem "We Are Going" in the first collection of Aboriginal poetry in English:

We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders. (Oodgeroo "We Are Going" 148)

Even though this poem has been read predominantly as a sign of resignation and the unheard plea of the subaltern, it gives voice to a collective sense of injustice and offers itself as a political manifesto (Harris; Hodge). As Anne Brewster argues:

"The first-person voice [...] in effect mimics the immediacy of embodied protest" ("Australian Aboriginal" 48). Oodgeroo's assertion "we are the lightning bolt... quick and terrible" is read by Brewster along political lines, which, at the same time, remain ecocritical, as a sense of continuity which Oodgeroo points to in her poetry stems from the oneness of her "tribe" with all the elements. Even amidst the complacent tones of "we are going", the objection to unlawful dislocation sounds very clearly and strikes a resonant cord in the reader. Oodgeroo's writing is symptomatic in this respect for later Aboriginal poetry in English; as already Adam Shoemaker points out: "if there is any school of Black Australian poetry, it is one of social protest" (201). Past dispossession and displacement are the challenges that continue to affect present generations:

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories, I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not the all of me [...]. (Oodgeroo 92)

Contemporary Aboriginal poetry in English is to a large extent poetry of protest, as Shoemaker notes, Brewster emphasises and Bob Hodge underlines; it is through it that the task of collective identity formation seems to be realised, with the campfires of the past, the present and the future serving as a metaphorical site, where a sense of belonging and collective identity can be achieved. Already in Oodgeroo's poetry the insistence on the unifying power of the fire of the campsite is commensurate with a continuing sense of identity, a tradition that might change, but will continue despite anger and trauma:

A thousand camp fires in the forest
Are in my blood. (Oodgeroo 92)

Brewster discusses the significance of trauma and anger with the Aboriginal poet, Jeanine Leane, in the interview published in *Giving this Country a Memory: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices in Australia*. In the interview, Leane points to poetry as the vehicle for social protest the significance of the emotional unburdening oneself through writing which stands behind the heightened emotional intensity of her first volume of poetry *Dark Secrets*. The poetic voice disclosing the dark secrets of domestic violence and institutional racism speaks to those larger patterns of trauma as an effect of disasters and warns against the burnout which accompanies anger. At the same time, however, there appear the characteristic nods towards resilience and hope; as another contemporary poet, Romaine Moreton, notes in her "Rimfire": "You can put the flame out / [...] but there will always be fire" (29).

The colonial experience of over two centuries of systematic exploitation of land to render it more habitable has led to the dramatic changes in the economic, social, political and cultural situation of the First Nations. The systematic control of land and the ban of culture burning and fire-hunting affected the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country, leading as a result to a change in the ecological patterns of land management; these in turn seem to have affected the whole of the Australian society. It was already in the 1950s that the Australian forestry began to realise that controlled burning of land is a practice which protects the country instead of destroying it. For the Australian landscape to blossom and grow, it has to go through its ordeal by fire. Such is the poetic lesson of Mark O'Connor's "Fire-Stick Farming" (1990):

To grow flowers in Blackheath, Australia,
set fire to your field. Let flame
sing the delicate dust-seeds
of native shrubs. Soon they sprout. (132)

A similar realisation, that to survive is to learn from the First Nations, seems to gleam through Billy Marshall-Stoneking's poem. "The Seasons of Fire" adopts the imagery, the narrative patterns and myth-making qualities of traditional Aboriginal poetry. The formulaic "There is Law for Fire" and the refrain: "You have been there, you have seen it./ You know all the names of Fire" (48–50) underline what has become a hard-won knowledge for the Western culture: to bypass the knowledge and the experience of the First Nations may be unwise, if not perilous. As wildfires ravage the continent, gradually, it is realised that the old patterns of controlled bushfires are beneficial to the Australian landscape and that a return to the First Nations' customs of culture burning may be a way towards survival, as "Low-intensity fires are necessary to the ecology [...], restoring soil composition by recycling biomass and thinning out older growth" (Macauley 37). However, to manage fire through culture burning is connected with a change in the way one understands one's place in the world. An acceptance of a changed approach to the Australian fire demands an attitude based on an integration with it, rather than the suppression of its unwanted.

Conclusion

To the Western mind fire is an element which fascinates and scares, its power harnessed through industrialisation and stripped of its former philosophical, mythological and symbolic meaning (Macauley). Similarly to fire, anger has also been contested in the Western culture: even though from the position of political

activists and thinkers it has a liberating potential, its usefulness is critiqued by the proponents of non-violence in conflict resolution. This essay offers only an introductory sketch of the presence and connectedness of eco-anxiety, anger and fire in Australian culture, but the relationship between them seems to emerge as a part of the Australian social, cultural, political and ecological landscape. The evidence for that complex relationship can be glimpsed not only in the media discourse focusing on "terrafurie", but also in the contemporary Australian poetry. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the analysis connecting Australian affective geography with poetry, it seems to point to the significance of understanding how political and environmental changes are evoked, and in what way they are represented. It is only through such an understanding of affective geographies that we can possibly plan for and negotiate emotional regimes which might help all of us all to address, and channel vulnerabilities which are best signalled through literature.

A discussion of fire in Australian culture would not be complete without recourse to its long pre-contact history and the suppression of the First Nations' "fire culture". Admittedly, it is difficult to approach it from the unavoidably Eurocentric perspective of an outsider to the Aboriginal history and culture in particular and to Australian culture in general. Still, a reflection on the history of and significance of fire in Australia, which includes both a repression of cultural burning and the Aboriginal poetry of protest, points to a very simple, but evident truth: to forget the past means to put the present in hazard's way, and to forego a chance for the future. The localised Australian disasters are after all, "sentinel events of processes that are intensifying on a planetary scale" (Oliver-Smith 45). These events are something that we should all feel strongly about, as the emotional landscapes marked by eco-anxiety and eco-anger are something that we all share and something that we will possibly finally learn how to co-inhabit – if only we learn the lessons of offered through the Australian poetry.

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