Fish-out-of-Water: Mainstreaming Settler-Colonial Myths of Origin in Matthew Condon's *The Trout Opera*

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In *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (2000) Graeme Davison traces the history of genealogy as a cultural technology for self-representation. Davison describes a transition from early and mid-twentieth-century Australian histories and memoirs of white patrilinear descent to inclusive and 'more complex renderings of family history' in the late twentieth century (109). This progressive movement culminates in what Ashley Barnwell and Joseph Cummins describe as a collection of 'family historiographies': self-reflexive life writing and fiction that explores 'competing forces of authorship and retelling history within the family' and works to 'uncover, confront, and revise national mythologies' (1). Davison, Barnwell and Cummins describe increasingly sophisticated filial allegories of nation as part of a process of national self-reconciliation and representation. In this paper I examine the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of the trope of genealogy in Matthew Condon's novel, *The Trout Opera* (2007). In Condon's novel, genealogy constructs new inclusive images of national identity and belonging by reworking settler-colonial myths. However, it also exhibits hegemonic effects that trouble the teleological trajectory of Davison's model. There is currently no scholarly work on *The Trout Opera* beyond Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman's literary survey, *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989–2007* (2009). This deficit reflects a lack of critical attention to Condon's oeuvre and its sustained engagement with issues of family history, regional history, commercial, criminal and political enterprise, and mythologies of place.

The Trout Opera, a fictional family saga, comprises two main interwoven narratives. The first represents the life story of Wilfred Lampe, Condon's settler-colonial protagonist. Wilfred's story begins in the first decade of the twentieth century, in 1906, in the town of Dalgety on the banks of the Snowy River. Wilfred is set to play the lead role in the school's Christmas pageant, a theatrical performance designed by German headmaster, Mr Schweigestill, as a tribute to creation (the cycle of life) and the pioneer story of Australia. Condon represents this performance alongside the denouement of Wilfred's life. At the other end of the twentieth century, Wilfred, an ageing bachelor, collapses outside his ramshackle home. Wilfred's inertia presents both a challenge and opportunity to the two company men who discover his body. The men have been employed by the Sydney Olympic Games committee to find a representative of the pioneer spirit for the upcoming opening ceremony. Wilfred, who they hospitalise and effectively hold hostage, is to be used as an emblem of 'the great unflappable and resilient face of the country' (226). Wilfred's life story, retold through a series of recollections alongside the story of his exploitation, is, on the one hand, a story of mythical proportions: the story of a simple man's commitment to place and his struggle to adapt to the challenges of the twentieth century. On the other hand, it is a story of banal circumstance. Wilfred's reticent nature and entrenchment in place forestalls his romance with Dorothea, his one true love, and estranges him from modern Australian life.

Condon's second main narrative, the story of Wilfred's great niece, Aurora Beck, is a counterbalance to this pastoral tale. Aurora's narrative, an urban drama, describes attempts to escape other forms of captivity: namely, her abusive relationship with Wynter, drug addiction, and subsequent isolation. Aurora's story, one of alienation from family and place, sheds light

on other stories; the life of Tick, sexual abuse victim, AIDS victim and Aurora's drug dealer; Wynter, a childhood victim and subsequent perpetrator of domestic violence; and Featherstone, a divorced and disillusioned radio host. Their individual journeys are interwoven with Aurora's: while Wynter is a spectre of violence that haunts Aurora, Tick and Featherstone aid her effort to rescue Wilfred and reconcile with family and place. The integration of their storylines within Aurora's, like the fusion of past and present, the pastoral saga and urban drama, underpins the construction of a more diverse, but no less hegemonic, cultural script for the representation of contemporary Australia.

The Trout Opera embodies the symbolic transition that Davison, Barnwell and Cummins map: a transition from filial orders of cultural representation (namely, homogenous fictions of national descent) to an affiliative, multicultural image of Australian identity. However, it is the dissolution *and* restoration of the old order that drives Condon's narrative arc. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Edward Said describes an analogous transformation from totalising cultural models of filial authority to compensatory orders of affiliation. This dynamic cultural change undergirds the reformation of institutional *and* representational practices. Said argues that the movement from filiative to affiliative orders of cultural representation often reproduces 'the skeleton of family authority supposedly left behind when the family was left behind' and, in doing so, establishes new cultural hierarchies (22). While Said uses high modernist writing as an example of this transition, Victoria Kuttainen (2010) has employed Said's model to reveal a similar dynamic in settler-colonial short story composites. Kuttainen describes how attempts to deconstruct homogenous fictions of national descent reflect 'quests for new models of affiliation which repeat and reconstitute the filiative models they seek to deconstruct' (46).

In Condon's novel this transformation is a dialectical process that takes place on multiple levels. First, affiliative relations are forged via the generic and commercial codes of the novel, what Gérard Genette (1997) calls the novel's peritexts. They are also configured by the structural and aesthetic features of the narrative: specifically, the integration of the pastoral saga and urban drama, the assimilation of multiple storylines into one narrative stream, and Condon's representations of family. On both levels, the democratic potential of a new affiliative model of representation is restricted by the enduring power dynamic of the white filiative order it disavows. I draw on Said's model of filiation and affiliation, settler-colonial theory, critical Indigenous scholarship, and feminist cultural criticism to examine how genealogy organises the structural and thematic affiliations of *The Trout Opera* and, in doing so, naturalises white patriarchal orders of authority. First, I explain the literal and symbolic function of the trope of genealogy, as Condon deploys it.

Condon's model of national representation is underpinned by the dual register of genealogy. First, genealogy forms the novel's subject matter: *The Trout Opera* is a family drama that follows Aurora Beck's quest to trace her history, reconcile with her family, and rediscover the source of her present (self) in the past. The second effect of genealogy is more ambivalent. In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1977) Michel Foucault describes genealogy as a process of deconstruction. *The Trout Opera* reflects key elements of this method. In particular, Condon's novel exhibits an interest in the 'unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogenous layers' (Foucault 146) that comprise both individual histories (Wilfred's and Aurora's) and national history. In Foucault's description, these fissures 'threaten the fragile inheritor' (146) because they fragment 'what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself' (147). In Condon's novel, the unresolved subject is the settler-colonial subject and their volatile inheritance—a ruptured filial and national history. Foucault's

reason for undertaking a genealogy is to reveal 'that truth and being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents' (146). In contrast, genealogy in *The Trout Opera* functions as 'an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things' (146). Genealogy naturalises a white heteropatriarchal order as the teleological master narrative wherein the fissures and discontinuities of history, those that unsettle a cohesive sense of self and belonging, are recuperated and made meaningful. Genealogy presupposes an origin, the pastoral forefather, and shapes *The Trout Opera's* form as a 'pursuit of the origin (*Ursprung*)' (142).

The Trout Opera exhibits a range of peritextual features that frame the novel as an attempt to represent, and reconcile with, the changing character of the nation. Condon's title and the essential notion of 'Australianness' it invokes is underpinned by a postcolonial model of cultural reformation that involves the recalibration of Eurocentric and 'high art' to express parochial experiences and values (Ashcroft et al. 2–3). Condon uses trout, a species of fish introduced to Australia by English pastoralist Sir James Arndell Youl, as a symbol of cultural adaptation: the trout, like the settler-colonial subject, transforms under the impress of colonial conditions. The emphasis Condon places on 'Trout' as the modifier of 'Opera' frames the novel as an aesthetic expression of a unique Australian experience and ethos. In doing so, it leverages a discourse of 'Australianness' that circulates as a commodity in a global symbolic economy. This code of representation, what Graham Huggan calls the postcolonial exotic, imagines the ex-centric geographic and cultural relationship between Australia and Europe as the condition for the construction and commercialisation of eccentric characters, locales, and literature (Huggan, *Postcolonial Exotic* ix; *Australian Literature* 2). Condon's novel both plays up the cultural importance of a distinct (white) Australian identity and insists on its limitations. In *The Trout Opera*, nationalist mythology must undergo aesthetic and cultural adaptation in order to articulate the changing dimensions of an essential Australian identity and to avoid becoming an obsolete and repressive master narrative.

Condon's title provides insight into the generic and thematic affiliations that shape *The Trout Opera* as an allegory of national self-reconciliation. *The Trout Opera* invokes Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart's poem 'Die Forelle' (The Trout, 1783). In Die Forelle, Schubart describes the beauty of a trout swimming in a stream, and the violence of its removal. Rather than a simple elegy to nature, critics have described the symbolic function of Die Forelle as a poem (or parody) of moral instruction, a cautionary tale to women to be wary of the guiles of men, and a political allegory of forced exile, captivity, and conscription by governmental powers (Prandi 119; Brown 21, 26–30). The dual meaning of Die Forelle, as both moralistic drama and political allegory, is reflected by the generic and thematic features of *The Trout Opera*. Condon combines a story of filial and self-alienation, a drama of 'lost innocence' told through Aurora's abusive relationship with Wynter, with an overarching allegory that explores the politics of representation in contemporary Australia. The latter constructs a drama of the nation's lost innocence: a self-exculpatory settler-colonial fantasy that positions Condon's white protagonists alongside marginalised minority groups as victims of nationalist fictions. Wilfred and Aurora, like Schubart's trout, are misled and alienated from (their) nature by grand narratives that serve governmental and commercial interests. Condon's title, and the fish-and-river allegory it deploys, anticipates the reconciliation of both individuals, and the nation, via a myth of origin.

Condon's epigraph frames *The Trout Opera* as an intervention in a dominant settler-colonial literary tradition and mythology. The novel begins with a quotation from Douglas Stewart's 'Green Centipede': 'Whatever lies under a stone, lies under the stone of the world.' In 'Green

Centipede,' Stewart uses a series of sublimations, and minute descriptions, to invert scales of distance, time, and significance: the underside of a stone constitutes a world wherein flowers, 'yellow stars,' 'lit the whole universe' of the green centipede (Taaffe 221). The centipede itself exhibits a malignant and creative 'power' in its 'green grace' derived from its mystical connection to the unknown universe Stewart represents (221–22; Thompson qtd. in McKay 9). The quotation serves, like the allusion to Die Forelle, to establish the themes of *The Trout Opera*: wilderness, ecology, exile, myth, (human)nature, and unknown worlds/stories. Additionally, it foreshadows Condon's structural and aesthetic choices. Condon constructs a microcosmology, the town of Dalgety and the settler-colonial family (Lampe-Beck), as a metonym for national character and for the articulation of a quasi-spiritual metaphysics of belonging. Gelder and Salzman argue that Condon 'draws on clichéd Australian literary traditions to lend further authenticity to his protagonist' and to construct a 'myths-of-origin novel for white Australia' (55–56). The reference to the Green Centipede, and indirect allusion to Banjo Paterson's *The Man from Snowy River* (1895) and Australian pioneer literature more generally, seemingly affirms this. However, the allegorical function of Condon's novel as a self-reflective, albeit self-exonerating, critique of narrative entrapment also reflects a counter-discourse. Condon's intertextual references invoke a collection of settler-colonial texts and white Australian mythology that he seeks to renovate. The ambivalent effect of Condon's epigraph reflects the problematic form *The Trout Opera* adopts as a parody that deconstructs, memorialises, and, ultimately, reproduces white nationalist mythology.

Both peritextual features—Condon's book title and prefatory quote—reflect the key subject and formal preoccupation of *The Trout Opera*: the compulsive search for a form of national representation. In 'The National Longing for Form' (1990), Timothy Brennan argues that the novel's composite form, its capacity to represent the 'one, yet many' high and low categories of culture through a series of linguistic and hierarchical relations, has made it 'crucial in defining the nation as an "imagined community"' (48). The trend in Australian literary and pedagogical institutions up until the late twentieth century to read the novel symptomatically for signs of a national character and culture is well documented (Lawson 1983; Ashcroft et al. 1989; Schwartz and Ray 2000; Johnston and Lawson 2000; Kuttainen 2010; Potter 2019). Lawson argues that this desire 'for images that will crystallise a vision of the national experience' continues to underpin self-critical forms of national literature and literary criticism (197). Laura Moss's (2000) and Victoria Kuttainen's (2010) analyses of postcolonial literature illuminate how attempts to deconstruct national fictions are not necessarily contra to the desire for national form. In settler-colonial writing, a deconstructive ethos often underpins the cultivation of new types of historically informed and reformed subjects, and affiliative literary models for inclusive forms of national representation. As the opening chapters of *The Trout Opera* foreground, Condon's novel is particularly preoccupied with the cultural and historical dynamics that underpin a settler-colonial 'national longing for form.'

Wilfred's narrative reflects a parody, and allegorical critique, of settler-colonial mythmaking. Wilfred's life story begins with an historical recount of the events leading up to his performance in the Trout Opera. The latter, a school play written by Mr Schweigestill, re-presents the story of the introduction of trout to Australia as an allegory of settler adaptation: a story wherein settlers, like the trout, acclimatise and prosper. The play is conceived, in Schweigestill's own words, as a cultural construct: he is literally 'making history' that will '"echo into the century" and into the lives of the children and even *their* children' (42). While the performance is eventually derailed, the powerful hold this pioneer myth has on a white Australian cultural imaginary is reflected by the form and content of Condon's novel. The end of the prologue, when 'the curtains opened' (7), does not denote a cessation of the pioneer myth Schweigestill

orchestrates. Instead, the continuation of the myth beyond the play, and its historical setting, is reflected by the magisterial and solemn tones of the modern genesis Condon imagines in Chapter One:

> Sheep on the hills froze and stared in the direction of the car, and for a moment the distant passage of the white sedan reflected across the water films of their eyes like a parasite ...
>
> They stood motionless now on the tiers of this amphitheatre, mouths locked and holding clods, pink tongues soiled and wet and twinkling with quartz. They trembled slightly. Some urinated. The car crept past, and by the time the sheep had bowed their heads again to graze, they had forgotten what had happened. (11)

Condon uses the liminal space of the prologue in a way that reflects the enduring power of pioneer mythology over a white cultural imaginary, and the pastoral ideal it seeks to uphold against the intrusions, 'parasites,' of modernity. The introduction of the two company men, the occupants of the car, and the abrupt integration of Aurora's narrative strand in Chapter Three (32), reflects a literal incursion on the symbolic space claimed by Wilfred's pioneer narrative. The subsequent alternation between Wilfred's and Aurora's storylines anticipates their fusion suggesting that intrusions are not only inevitable but necessary for individual and national self-reconciliation (Bales 173). Condon establishes the pastoral saga as the preeminent cultural metanarrative to be brought in conjunction with, and reworked through, a modern Australian drama of white displacement. This transformation and the tension it articulates, a drive to sustain a national self-image of origin and progress, is already under way in Wilfred's storyline.

Wilfred's narrative reproduces the codes of pioneer mythology. In particular, it encodes the myth of white man's homologous relation in place and history. Condon repeatedly deploys the tropes of the pastoral—idyllic scenes of repose; the muster as rite-of-passage; the communion of land, man, and animal—to imagine a quasi-spiritual bond between pioneer figures and the Australian environment. The following scene between father (Bill Lampe) and son (Wilfred Lampe) exemplifies this code of representation:

> It wasn't cold enough for a fire but they settled around it, and in their nights across the Alps into Victoria and back again this was how they would settle, in identical order, the same points on a wheel, as if their place was as ordained as a configuration of stars. …
>
> Their voices came into the circle and their thoughts and words passed through the fire, and back and forth, and as the night settled the voices seemed to come not from the rim of the wheel, but from deep in the bush. (160)

The image of the men by the fire enclosed by rings of cattle is repeated (71, 162). It works as a symbol to invoke the worldliness of the cultural order Wilfred and Bill inhabit. This is an enclosed fraternal order wherein settler-colonial men literally and symbolically manifest as the cultural 'wheel' of progress: (hi)story is a consequence of their charter through the bush. The men's unique connection to land is self-ordained and naturalised through a process of mystification. The stories the drovers share, their thoughts and voices that 'passed through the fire,' are shaped via elemental forces and emanate as an element of nature itself: they echo 'from deep in the bush.' This process of representation—the fusion of man and land—is reduplicated at a structural level. A series of historical events and settler-colonial subjects

appear 'ordained as a configuration of stars' in Wilfred's history. These events and historical white men include Clement Wragge (founder of the Meteorological Society of Australasia in 1886), Howard Joseland (British-born Australian architect), and Charles Bell (a fictional representation of George Bell, Scottish-born pioneer of photojournalism in Australia). They exhibit an egalitarian, adventurous, and down-to-earth demeanour that, set against stereotypes of the 'city slicker,' authenticates their place in the Australian bush (Gelder and Salzman 55). This insular homosocial order organises the life story of white men and the nation as one and the same and, in doing so, naturalises settler-colonial men's monopoly over the symbolic order of the nation (McClintock 66; Boehmer 28–29). At the same time, Condon dramatises the tensions inherent in this imagined order and challenges the pretensions of an exclusionary white patrilinear fiction of national descent.

In Wilfred's storyline, pioneer codes of representation and the insular national order of belonging they encode are tested and reaffirmed in response to the globalising effects of modernity. Condon's representation of the Monaro region reflects a level of multi-scalar interplay between provincial, national, and international histories. The history and geography of the Monaro region shapes, and is shaped by, nation-building projects of the twentieth century that, in turn, are linked to international events and influenced by transnational flows of culture and people. Wilfred's narrative dramatises the effect of this local-national-global nexus on the ideas of gender and race underpinning pioneer fictions of white descent. In the first instance, Wilfred's narrative reproduces the gender stereotypes of pioneer mythology that effectively marginalise and subordinate women's agency. Condon's narrative represents the image of the domesticated and abiding housewife: Mrs Corcoran, mother of Maggie, Queen of the Trout Opera, is depicted as dowdy and vain (63); Mrs Muggeridge is reduced to an instrument of domesticity (64); Mrs Lampe, who is only ever referred to as Mrs Lampe or Mother, is represented as a subservient and subsidiary figure to the unified image of father, Bill, and son, Wilfred (38). This image of demure femininity is contrasted with another popular code of representation: the over-ambitious and / or naïve Australian Girl, a symbol of the 'modernity of "modern womanhood"' (Rees 5).

Condon's novel exhibits two distinguishable types of Australian Girl: 1920s representations of the 'Screen-Struck Girl' (Conor 78), embodied by Astrid (Wilfred's sister); and Federation-era depictions of the 'Globetrotting Woman' (Rees 5), personified by Dorothea (Wilfred's true love). Critical scholarship describing the textual and cultural dimensions of the Australian Girl highlights its ambivalent effect: images of the Australian Girl often denote a level of female ambition and independence that ostensibly troubles but ultimately reinforces old, patriarchal, orders of authority (Gelder and Weaver 126). The first trope, the Screen-Struck Girl, describes a girl who naively overidentifies with and seeks to emulate a cinematic (American) image thought untrue to Australian character and life (Conor 78). Liz Conor argues that 'the construction of the Screen-Struck Girl as courting mass recognition through her transformation into reproduced spectacle was used to condemn young women with screen ambitions as morally lax' (78). Condon's representation of Astrid creates a parochial version of the Screen-Struck Girl. Astrid exemplifies the naivety of the latter: on attending the school's Christmas pageant, she consumes the artifice, the Trout Opera, and 'the spectacle had totally consumed her' (66). Astrid's overidentification and interpolation within an aestheticised ideal of life is epitomised when the headdress of the Queen Trout (played by Maggie) falls off the stage onto Astrid, and she is 'eaten by a tongue of feathers and millions of little glass teeth' (68). Astrid's inability to differentiate between art(ifice) and life becomes the key paradigm through which the reader interprets her subsequent moral fall; Astrid runs away from Dalgety with her 'illegitimate' child who begets 'forgotten children' that rupture the 'spidery lines' of filial descent (548). Dorothea

symbolises a more benign deviation from patriarchal norms: her worldliness and career ambitions cause her to leave Dalgety. Dorothea's independence imposes a protracted hiatus on Wilfred's capacity to ratify his place in a patriarchal narrative of succession. In both instances, the Australian Girl symbolises the modern affliction Said's model describes (17): an anxiety over stresses and fissures in the old (settler-colonial) order that pre-empts their resolution.

The second idea Condon reshapes via this local-global dynamic is race: Wilfred's life story is a self-reflective narrative that ostensibly reworks a white national symbolic order. In *The Trout Opera*, Condon represents the effect of (inter)national events—such as World War II, post-war immigration, and the construction of the Snowy River hydro-electric dam—on the quotidian reality and history of the town of Dalgety. Condon describes post-war immigration, in particular, as an event that reconfigures both the physical *and* symbolic terrain of the Snowy River. In the first instance, the physical impacts are immediate: Cooma, the quiet country town Wilfred frequents for supplies, is congested with people and the 'metal and glass' of machinery and vehicles (490–91). In Condon's descriptions, the movement of people, displaced by war, coalesces with the civilising thrust of modernity. The latter exhibits a cliched critique of modernity as the fall, and disruption, of a natural order. Vehicles, cast as simulations of nature with grilles 'like people's mouths,' and headlights, 'like trout eyes,' lack 'colour or life': they are without morals or souls (490–91). This physical incursion is coincident with a symbolic disruption: the first report of the inbound immigrant work force is deemed incredible—'the story sat on the bar as strange and out of place as a glass of milk' (488). Their arrival reflects a symbolic intrusion on the Snowy River: ground-zero for white Australia's exclusive pioneer mythology. Condon's descriptions, in turn, present a parody of a parochial settler-colonial mind-set. The residents of Cooma ventriloquise racist attitudes: the immigrant workers are imagined via a popular trope of xenophobia ('wave') as an overwhelming threat. They are part of 'the whole world' that 'washed up against the mountain after the war' (489).

The immigrants' 'rootlessness' invokes what cultural critics and historians describe as the pathologisation of World War II refugees as transgressive subjects that trouble the national order of things (Malkki 62). Lisa Malkki argues that in post-war scholarly and political commentary, the 'loss of bodily connection to their [refugees'] national homelands came to be treated as a loss of moral bearings' (63). In *The Trout Opera*, this assumption, a fear of refugees' amorality, is compounded by their complicity in war. Wilfred's anxiety is aroused by the 'volume' and cumulative power of men who were once at war with one another and who 'carried death and cruelty and the handiwork of evil in their head and their hearts' (492). This, coupled with a general xenophobia about the 'strange dress and customs and language' that 'tilted it [the Monaro] up and put everyone on edge,' distracts the villagers from what Condon describes as the real threat: the 'monumental size and scope' of the national dam-building project (489). Condon, however, imbues Wilfred with the capacity to see 'past the initial novelty of their clothing' and to recognise the men's struggle to integrate past and present, old and new, a struggle that resonates with his own (491). Wilfred's subsequent involvement in the dam-building scheme is a critical narrative conceit: it enables Condon to inscribe and humanise the migrant experience, in similar terms to Wilfred's, in a democratic history of the people. The dam project conscripts the refugees into a 'new army' (492) that wages a war on the environment and, in doing so, represents the conscription and exploitation of the people by grand narratives and projects of national development.

Condon's representations of multicultural history reproduce a discourse of 'uprootedness' that reinforces a colonial schematic of belonging. Malkki's analysis reveals how 'commonsense ideas of soils, roots, and territory' reflect a type of geographic essentialism that conflates the

identity of people/nation and physical localities and, in turn, naturalises symbolic hierarchies of national belonging (54). Condon's descriptions of the European workers, who comprise part of the world that 'washed up against the mountains after the war' (489), position immigrants as a belated and sympathetically tolerated addition to the national order. Despite their overt racism, the people of the township passively accept the immigration scheme as yet another effect of their involvement in global events: 'it's just what happens after a war, they said. Got to give people something to do' (489). As a belated addition to the nation, the immigrants serve to authenticate an older anglophone order rooted in place. Wilfred's knowledge of the geographical and 'individual' nature of the environment is critical to the safety and success of the construction project and coveted by the project manager, Jack Dunphy (494). Unlike Dunphy, an 'indoors man' whose 'fierce red' neck is evidence that 'the Monaro had gone to work on him' and for whom the land is conceived as a tactical problem (494), Wilfred is attuned to the nature of place and at-one with that nature.

The authenticity of Wilfred's connection to place is reinforced through a second process of differentiation: namely, a duplicitous act of Indigenous recognition and disavowal. As Dunphy describes Wilfred's role as a guide, he also ventriloquises a colonial assumption: Dunphy assumes areas of the Snowy River constitute a pristine wilderness, something that has 'never been examined by human beings' (495). Wilfred's correction ('not by white blokes, anyway') (495), reflects a revisionist impulse to set the record straight via an implicit recognition of the primacy of Indigenous history and connection to land. However, in Wilfred and Dunphy's immediate dialogue this knowledge forms part of the provincial cultural capital Wilfred wields, a testament to the depth and integrity of his belonging, to which the urban interloper can only buy access. Further, when considered in relation to Condon's overarching narrative of settler reconciliation, Wilfred's act of recognition reinforces the effects of the myth of terra nullius it ostensibly challenges. Condon's only Indigenous character, Percy, like his kin, is quickly displaced from Condon's fictional cultural history of the Monaro. In effect, Wilfred is left to vouchsafe for an Indigenous history and connection to land and, in doing so, becomes the embodiment of moral authority and belonging. Percy also serves a second narrative function. In contrast to the European immigrants, he is a source of an 'ultrarooted' (Cerwonka 30) spiritual connection to land, one that, in keeping with a tradition of setter colonial textual appropriations, is redeployed for the legitimation of settler belonging (Dodson 27; Leane 14). Jeanine Leane links this pattern of representation—authors' attempts to 'displace and replace, dispossess and repossess Aboriginal people in their quests' to belong—to a continuing desire for an authentic sense of belonging. In Leane's words, settlers are 'still writing nation from Country' (15). Condon's representation of Percy underpins a similar attempt to formulate a sense of belonging embedded in place. Percy shares with Wilfred the story of the 'Moth Men,' an allegory of the Bogong moth's life cycle (375), that functions both to unsettle and authenticate Wilfred's sense of belonging: it prompts Wilfred to assert what he sees as an equivalent settler creation story, the Trout Opera (376). The symmetry Condon creates between the two—the story of the Bogong moth and the Trout Opera—is critical to the process of settler indigenisation the novel encodes via Aurora's genealogical quest.

Condon represents Aurora's escape from abuse and alienation as a genealogical quest: a narrative of individual and national (self-)reconciliation wherein a sense of self and belonging is extrapolated via the synthesis of individual, filial, and national orders of descent. This quest reflects what Foucault calls 'the pursuit of the origin,' an 'attempt to capture the exact essence of things' (142). In the first instance, genealogy functions as a teleological metanarrative to postulate an origin, the pioneer forefather (Wilfred), for Aurora's 'lost' family history and sense of belonging. This origin, in turn, transforms history into a field of recoverable knowledge.

Foucault uses the phrase 'field of knowledge' to describe an organisational logic: a causal matrix of origin-continuity-subject-event (Foucault 143; Shiner 387). In *The Trout Opera*, genealogy functions, similarly, as a patrilinear model of origin and progressive succession that enables Aurora to recuperate a cohesive sense of history and self: Aurora seeks to 'grab that line that disappeared into the past,' a line of descent shared 'with her mother and grandmother, and whoever else was in the queue beyond them,' because it promises self-reconciliation (365). Significantly, Wilfred is the end of that line. Aurora develops a sense of place and self only by assimilating her history, and recuperating her mother Theresa's and her grandmother Astrid's histories within this patrilinear genealogy: 'the cord, the single line, she always knew existed' (511). *The Trout Opera's* penultimate moment of reconciliation reveals how this model of genealogy is resolutely embedded in place. Under the moral guidance of pastoral forefather (Wilfred), Aurora returns to her own daughter's shallow grave to give her a proper burial (568). In keeping with the symbolism of roots, this is a process whereby Aurora 'brings her baby home' and grounds her, and herself, via the deep roots of family history (568).

The second (national) dimension of Condon's narrative of (self-)reconciliation is reflected overtly via the fusion of Wilfred's and Aurora's respective narratives. Condon describes this synthesis as an attempt to 'picture modern Australia and simultaneously represent Wilfred's Australia by sort of chaffing them together to see what might come out of that' (Condon, *Singing*). I have argued that this process is already internalised in Wilfred's life story. Wilfred's narrative renovates a fiction of homogenous descent by including representations of ostensibly non-conformist women, recognising Indigenous history, and integrating Australia's multicultural history. Condon's representation of contemporary Australia exhibits a similar drive to construct an inclusive image of nation. This attempt, however, is mediated by dramatic structural and aesthetic reconfigurations: namely, the representation of multiple storylines and characters' perspectives. Condon represents Aurora's story alongside the auxiliary narratives of Wynter, Tick, and Featherstone. The narratives of Wynter, Tick, and Featherstone are particularly important because they articulate life experiences and identities hitherto excluded from the nation's dominant cultural narrative: Wynter's sexual abuse by his uncle Stan and subsequent drug addiction; Tick's childhood abuse, drug addiction, history as a trans-gender sex worker, and struggle with AIDS; Featherstone's marital breakdown, occupational discontent, cynicism toward modern Australia, and attempt to escape the trite and bigoted opinions aired on his talkback radio program. Taken at face value, Condon's multiple narratives articulate a new affiliative image of the nation. This model of affiliation, in keeping with Said's explanation (18), is premised on the decline of an old white filiative order (in this instance, the settler-colonial heteropatriarchal order Wilfred symbolises), and the assemblage of a socially inclusive filial allegory of nation. Similarly, the new order is bound by the logic of the old: the inclusion of Australian identities and experiences excluded from national representation is contingent on their capacity to assimilate within old filial orders of authority and belonging.

Condon's affiliative model of family-as-nation exemplifies the dialectical movement Said highlights in his model of cultural reformation and re-presentation. In particular, Tick's and Wynter's tales work in opposing ways to sanctify the authority of the old order: a white patriarchal model of belonging. Condon links Wynter's death to his incapacity to reconcile with his father (260) and the violence he integrates within the filial order. The Italian mafia, from whom he steals and by whom he is subsequently murdered, epitomise both the misappropriation of filial codes, and their consecration as the fundamental order of civility (417, 545). Tick, on the contrary, desires filial reconciliation and seeks this through his affiliation with, and service to, Aurora. Tick helps Aurora, his surrogate sister (344), find Wilfred. As they drive back to Sydney, Tick's motivation is revealed: 'I trust if we are successful my small gesture will

reverberate through history ...' 'It will reverberate. Through my history,' Aurora replies. Tick's response—'One history. Is it not all history?' (458)—reflects the metonymic relationship Condon establishes between individual, filial, and national reconciliation. It also, ironically, highlights the assimilative effects of the representational category of nation and national history that absorbs difference within naturalised cultural hierarchies of representation and belonging (Kuttainen 34). In *The Trout Opera*, one history is not all history. Tick's, Wynter's, and Featherstone's stories all coalesce into Aurora's roots quest. Difference, whether assimilable like Tick and Featherstone, or unassimilable, like Wynter, is conscripted to the reconciliation of a white heteropatriarchal narrative of belonging. The effect, to use Richard Dyer's words, is that whiteness (and, I would add, heterosexuality) becomes 'the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human' (44). The Snowy River, a symbol repeatedly invoked as the 'source of life,' naturalises this reification. Condon's secondary characters and their storylines flow like tributaries into a mainstream narrative of settler-colonial belonging (Aurora's) that ends in the same way that Wilfred's narrative began, with a creation story set on the banks of the Snowy River.

The overarching structure of *The Trout Opera*, and the synthesis it orchestrates, reflects an iteration, and entangled critique, of Anglocentric pioneer mythology. Mirroring the prologue, Condon's epilogue exhibits a magisterial tone that elides the distinction between an overt process of mythmaking, embodied by the Sydney Olympic Games opening ceremony, and Wilfred's life story. First, Condon describes, 'a lone horseman' riding 'into the centre of the Olympic Stadium ... the horse reared, the rider cracked a stock whip and it echoed around the bowl of the stadium.' Then, in a parallel image set against 'the last of the day's light,' 'the man Wilfred and the woman Dorothea' walk 'together along the Old Kosciusko Road, towards Seaman's Hut and the summit, high in the Australian Alps' (574). The symmetry between the ceremony and Wilfred and Dorothea's reunion reveals the extent to which Condon represents, and plays up, his involvement in this mythmaking process. It also produces a slippage in a key theme of the novel.

Condon represents mythmaking as a human predisposition integral to attempts to belong to place. This theme, I have argued, is established early in *The Trout Opera*: Condon contrasts Percy's story of the Bogong moth with Wilfred's memories of the Trout Opera, a quasi-spiritual pastoral myth of origin (375–76). The epilogue reproduces this symmetry. Condon interweaves a settler-colonial pioneer myth of origin with the symbolism of the Bogong moth and 'The Awakening,' a performance designed for the Olympics opening ceremony wherein 'a mass of women,' Indigenous women from Central Australia, formed what Condon describes as 'a huge human head or a womb' as a voice announced, 'the rebirth has started' (576). The imbrication of settler and Indigenous origin stories has two main effects. First, it underpins a process of self-exculpation: mythmaking, including the hegemonic myth of origin Condon re-presents, is naturalised as a human predilection. Second, it configures a process of settler indigenisation that produces a troubling contradiction. Despite having represented the Olympic ceremony and the equally ceremonious reunion of Wilfred and Dorothea as mythical constructs, Condon imbues the latter with greater authenticity. The Bogong moths, a symbol of Indigenous belonging, play in the light of the lanterns Wilfred and Dorothea hold and preside benevolently over their reunion (575–76). The Bogong is appropriated as a symbol of creation (nature's cycle) that constructs, and sanctifies, the reunion of settler-colonial man, woman, progeny, and place as a return to a natural order. Meanwhile, 'a long way away, down on the coast,' the moths that have 'lost their way' form 'frantic halos, striking hot glass': they are 'blinded' and 'removed from the paths of their ancient migration' (578–89). The Olympic ceremony disrupts the continuity of history and nature's cycle in a garish spectacle that articulates a moral fall: a

modern nation misled and alienated from itself by a seductive myth. Ironically, Condon highlights the implication of his novel in the construction and commercialisation of national culture and simultaneously grants his own filial allegory of national representation greater authenticity.

The Trout Opera reflects an individual and national allegory of self-reconciliation, an attempt to reconfigure exclusive fictions of national descent into inclusive models of national representation. This cultural and aesthetic transformation exhibits some of the main literary features of the family histories and historiographies Davison, Barnwell, and Cummins describe, namely: a degree of self-reflexivity, generic hybridity, and cultural inclusivity. However, Condon's attempt to create a diverse cultural script remains subordinate to the desire for a myth of cultural continuity: a drive to chart the evolution of an essential (white) Australian character. The reconciliation of the past and the present, the one and the many faces of Australia, is contingent on their capacity to be assimilated into Wilfred's family history. In *The Trout Opera*, genealogy continues to function as a quasi-biological metanarrative that naturalises white heteropatriarchal orders of descent for a story of national becoming. In playing up his own implication in settler-colonial mythmaking, Condon reproduces an assimilative fantasy of white belonging and assuages guilt through rendering mythopoeia a human predisposition.

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