

Authors Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella's poetic collaboration *False Claims of Colonial Thieves* assails its readers with a litany of concerns relating to the ongoing impacts of European colonisation of Australia – in particular Western Australia. Their poems, although coming from different perspectives, explore the cultural desecration of traditional sacred sites and beliefs from personal experiences, knowledge and observations, and highlight the schism that exists within Australian society between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Both employ story telling in their poems as a means to engage their audience and to impart a sense of immediacy, which is assertive in some instances and insistent in others. Through this, they are able to decry the institutionalised “privilege” they see as endemic in modern Australia.

Throughout the text the ongoing effects of colonisation are exposed and the consequences examined. The “bloodied history” of dispossession of Indigenous lands and the subsequent alienation of Indigenous peoples are explored in the poems: ‘Always Thieves’, ‘Prologue/Prologue Response’, ‘I don’t like flying over’ and ‘Hawes – God’s Intruder’. In these, one can piece together a mosaic of images and events that paint a very different picture of the colonisation of Australia to that espoused in traditional non-Indigenous histories – one where “cruel colonial practices” are laid bare for all to see, as is exemplified in the line “for this is the whiteworld” where there is no “barna” and the “Yamaji culture and history is still/not celebrated or appreciated ...”; one that rebuffs the notion of “privilege blindness” which reinforces the dominant non-Indigenous societal view that the lands were free for the taking. This is perpetuated institutionally – through religious, educational and mining organisations – where “mining companies reach into our schools/funding programs that make students in their own image”, and where missionaries once “gallop[ed] in, bible and cross in hand” to build a church on land that was considered sacred by the Indigenous inhabitants, to make them “bow [their] heads and conform” to the norms of European society.

Both Papertalk Green and Kinsella bemoan the effect that colonisation had on Indigenous culture and peoples. The natural world is integral to Indigenous culture; and images of wildflowers, native shrubs and flora, and native animals are used by both poets to reference the symbolism of nature to Indigenous beliefs and culture throughout the collection. When Kinsella writes in ‘The Great Western Woodlands’ of “the emptiness of grassed plains that weren’t/grassed plains” one gains an insight into the environmental intrusion of non-Indigenous society on the natural landscapes. Contrasting imagery of nature and natural landscapes with environmental degradation of the land is presented in the poetic dialogue between the poets in ‘Undermining’, where the open cut uranium mine in Wiluna is contrasted to “the king brown” “wrapped tightly away” safe “from its own poison” – Papertalk Green leaves the reader with dire warning that the “Uranium is best left in the earth/Like a sleeping Elder”, again highlighting the connection between Indigenous culture and nature. This contrast is further explored by Papertalk Green in ‘Creation Markings – Ellendale Pool’ where she writes that the “Amunga cultural site [is] drowned” and that the “Colonised story [is the] forefront story” – again highlighting her views that Indigenous sensibilities have been forced to take second place, in this instance, behind the

tourist dollar.

By relating personal recollections and insights, the authors are able to impart a poignancy and relevance to their poems. Both are able to reflect on their experiences to produce a collection of strong, combined poetic voices that condemn colonisation as being detrimental to the Indigenous inhabitants of this land. Kinsella is empathetic in his contribution to 'Grandmothers' (another poetic dialogue): "Those of us with colonisers/as ancestors look for ways to retell/their stories" in an attempt "to build hope" acknowledging the position that modern Australian society has its foundations in ignorance and exploitation; but it is Papertalk Green, in 'Hawes – God's Intruder', who is more able to voice the actual lived experiences of the "displaced and alienated" – of those living off "leftover sandwiches and cakes" from the tables of the benefactors in town. In the poems 'Grandmothers' and 'Always Thieves' one can see the development in her views on her, and her family's, life as it became more evident to her that there was a divide within the community that was both discriminatory and racially based – from her being "just a kid watching trains" to her being an activist calling out "thieves ... in all disguises/mining companies, politicians, [and] governments". Although both express similar points of view, Kinsella can only show and express empathy, whereas Papertalk Green speaks with an authentic voice of one who has experienced societal attitudes and prejudices resultant from our colonial past.

The effects of these personal impacts of a shared, but differently experienced, colonial heritage is evidenced when both they raise their voices up in protest against the perceived injustices perpetrated against Indigenous peoples both past and present. This can be clearly seen in the poems: 'Always Thieves', 'Don't want me to talk', 'I don't like flying over' and 'Grandmothers' where Kinsella comments that "this [desecration of spirit and place] is no small-scale/intrusion" indicating the size of non-Indigenous expansion into Indigenous culture, and Papertalk Green pointedly remarks that "you don't want me to talk about/the concept and construct of 'whiteness'" making the point that Australian society at large has turned a blind eye to the ongoing plight of Indigenous peoples. She further elaborates on this point referencing Rottnest Island: the "memory of shootings/hangings, drownings, measles, [and] influenza" that had horrific ramifications for Indigenous peoples; that it was "not a holiday place" irrespective of "how...prettied up" it had been and that it should not be viewed through the lens of a collective societal "amnesia". Her most strident and assertive commentary, however, is seen when she refers to those that adhere to, and profit from, non-Indigenous histories as "thieves" with "dirty hands" whose claim to the land was "dripping with Aboriginal blood" and was "passed on generation after generation".

By the bringing together of recollections of past injustices – of dispossession and resettlements; of the non-recognition of Indigenous culture and its deep connection to the land – whether by design or not; of embedded institutional racism; and of the creation of a chasm between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australian society, Papertalk Green and Kinsella's collection *False Claims of Colonial Thieves* does give the reader a disturbing insight into both the

cultural and personal impacts on our society in living with our colonial past. In terms of our colonial history, Papertalk Green's haunting repetition of the lines: "Arrived as colonial thieves/Remain as colonial thieves" is thought provoking for all Australians – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.