

CQUniversity, Australia

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The Sleeping Camel hosts an Indian summer squall

Abstract:

A collaboration of writers and artists led to the writing of a poetic tribute to Peter Indans' work and subsequently his legacy, in the poem *The Sleeping Camel hosts an Indian summer squall*. The discussion here has as its' focus the relationship between writers, artists and the landscapes they explore in their chosen medium.

Biographical note:

Dr Lynda Hawryluk is a Lecturer in Literary and Cultural Studies at CQUniversity, where she teaches undergraduate creative writing subjects and supervises Masters of Letters and PhD students. Lynda has been coordinating the Idiom 23 Writers' Workshops on North Keppel Island since 2005 and has facilitated many writing workshops in the Central Queensland region. She is the Deputy Chair of the AAWP and has been published in a variety of academic and creative publications.

Keywords:

poetry – landscape – Indans, Peter

In the shadow of a monolith
Sleeping sentinel against a late summer heatwave
Tussock grass up top bent to a breeze which doesn't quite reach us down here

Driving down a corrugated country driveway
The jolt of the cattle grid on unsuspecting suspensions
Bouncing us back to reality
And to lunch at a bush studio of its own making
Birds hear the friendly banter and bickering
Of new friends chattering in sultry sweaty stillness
Sipping a tonic or two to ward off the heat

A palm slaps against exposed and fresh flesh again
I am a novice at this
And wore short pants to the artists' picnic
Bushman's repellent no match for the midges' miniature might
Squid rings in a white wine reduction provide simple sustenance
To soak up a solitude only broken by an old dog's satisfied sigh
And the laughter of likeminded souls

The horizon is conquered by *Gawula*
Looming silently before us, a benign benefactor of generations past
Tinted with the stain of genocide
The mountain wears its low cloud crown proudly
Rising through mist, a tussock-covered phoenix
In the late afternoon a summer squall sets in
A tempest in the treetops
A willy-willy wandering by.

Eucalypts bend back lazily, stretching their limbs after a long day providing filtered shade
The sky turns gunmetal then opens up and envelops us
Washing away the heat and dust
Fat drops drip their way through a frayed gauze sunshade
The sad grey skin of low cloud breaks open
Revealing a white light interior

And still the majestic monolith watches on
The trachyte teeth of a still-sleeping camel bared in solemn warning
Blue-green hues of a murky mountain
Hide the soft edges of a jade statue
Pushed up through the earth with volcanic force
And carved out over 60 million years or so
Hidden rivulets and valleys snake their way across the landscape
To a mob of contiguous eucalypts
Looking up at an old man's forehead formed by the wisdom of age
Firm but fair, a guiding hand to explorers long since lost to time
Laughter subsides to silence as the squall passes by

The nearby trees are still once more
While the last fallen leaves dance a mournful corroboree
Welcoming restless spirits home
We congregate like parishioners around the pews of Peter's table
To learn a lesson about being reborn from the ground up

Research statement

Research background

This poem describes a visit to artist Peter Indans' (1947-2011) bush studio in Central Queensland. It captures how history has impacted understanding of the landscape, and pays homage to Indans' work. The poem originated from collaboration between artists and writers. Indans' *Cockscomb I* (2007) depicting the steep cliffs of Gawula provides the artistic counterpart to this poem.

Research contribution

This poem juxtaposes the imposing stature of Gawula with the group gathered below its façade. The geological structure of the mountain is described in detail; its stained history acknowledged (Archer in Mullins, Danaher & Webster: 32). Indans referred to the mountain as feminine (Svendsen: 66), however here it is a masculine presence. A sudden squall and its aftermath demonstrate the experience of the 'build-up'; the escalation of humidity and tension before a storm (Darwin Storms Team, online). The poem captures the beautiful ruggedness of the landscape and responds to the question posed by Indans' friend Komminos Zervos in 'Prawns at Rosslyn Bay':

memories inspire
poetry and paintings
what is left
of a life
when we are gone? (17).

Indans leaves his artistic legacy, a deep appreciation for the landscape of Central Queensland and an ability to 'make places make meanings' (Krauth 2003), which has informed my work since.

Research significance

Fitzgerald describes discussions with Indans taking on the properties of a lesson, whereby the student becomes 'somewhat inebriated but profoundly knowledgeable' (8). This poem has been performed in Rockhampton and a version appeared in *The Sentient Landscape*, a posthumous retrospective of Indans' work.

Works cited

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