

**Gelder, Ken and Rachel Weaver, *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt*, Melbourne, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing, 2020; paperback, pp 229; RRP \$39.99; ISBN: 9780522875850.**

Ken Gelder and Rachel Weaver's book outlines the history of hunting kangaroos in colonial Australia and explores the cultures surrounding colonial kangaroo hunting practices. It makes accessible a history that is both central to, and illustrative of, colonial relationships with the Australian environment. Further, the history of the colonial kangaroo hunt continues to influence Australian attitudes towards native animals meaning that the book offers an opportunity for understanding and critiquing contemporary attitudes. That this history has not been written before is remarkable, or perhaps almost intentionally self-deceptive, as though Australian history has worked hard to ignore yet another war that has shaped the heart of this land.

Gelder and Weaver have located a diverse range of written and visual texts relating to colonial kangaroo hunting beginning with the first recorded shooting of a kangaroo in far north Queensland in 1770 during James Cook's first voyage on the *Endeavour*, through to the publication of Ethel Pedley's popular children's book, *Dot and the Kangaroo* in 1899. Through close analysis of these wide-ranging texts, they trace a brutal history which reveals the changing attitudes of these colonising people towards the animal life of the continent.

Early descriptions of colonial kangaroo hunting weave together a language of anatomical classification, artistic practice, and culinary details as kangaroos are observed, killed, described, and eaten. During the years of the establishment of the settlement at Port Jackson, the narratives turn to descriptions of hunting strategies, and detailed accounts of kangaroo hunts commence what will soon become 'a narrative genre' of such accounts (21). There follows a period where colonial kangaroo hunting is linked with visions of pastoral abundance and romanticised settler expansion. Chapters on the hunt as both sport and poem reflect upon a period of Australian history that mythologised the kangaroo hunt as a feature of the emerging Australian colonial character. Here the hunt played a feature role within a story of colonial strength, manliness, and frontier conquest.

Through the mid to latter decades of the nineteenth century, the textual analysis reveals the prevalence of an attitude that combined sad regret with a justification or resignation towards the inevitability of cruelty and even certain extinction. We get the impression, through the numerous extracts and examples presented, that many settlers felt powerless to decide, as though, for the most part, they could only consider their own actions as already predetermined by the necessities of colonial expansion. With time, the narratives of justification become increasingly harder to maintain, the connection to necessity or morality growing ever more tenuous. Where the earliest narratives justified the killing as necessary for survival or tied it to narratives of the scientific pursuit of knowledge, later accounts had to work much harder rhetorically to construct mythologies of colonial identity, wild adventure, or transition into manhood.

Although it is not an analysis developed overtly through *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt*, a clear alignment is readable between the forms of these justificatory narratives and the stages

of the developing economic needs of the colony. From basic sustenance to food resource exploitation to symbolic currency for a rampantly exploitative squattocracy, the kangaroo hunt becomes what the colonial economy requires. Once occupancy and economic prosperity is secured, the narratives begin to become more self-critical, countenancing sympathy and generosity towards the kangaroo. The final narrative, the children's book, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, is critical and relational, not justificatory, giving the kangaroo character a voice, allowing her to speak of the savagery and trauma of the hunt from her own perspective at length and in detail. By opening a narrative space where the kangaroo can come into relationship with a child, the book marks a turn towards a future where settlers can begin to build relationships with Australian animals.

Gelder and Weaver show that this relational stance, while it marks an important turn in the narrative of the history of the relations between the colony and its environment, is also clearly part of a long narrative progression. The enormous popularity of *Dot and the Kangaroo* in Australia indicates a public ready to consider this change, from a position where the land has already been seized, cleared, fenced, emptied of native animals, and stocked with domesticated bodies. The turn towards a critical account of the kangaroo hunt occurs when it is no longer a threat to the colonial economy.

This book will appeal to readers with a wide range of interests. Kangaroos are widely recognised as distinctively Australian; indeed, this distinctiveness is so prevalent and strong that, on many occasions, both culturally and commercially, the kangaroo represents this continent. This history, therefore, speaks as a kind of representative history. How Australians have treated the kangaroo can plausibly be regarded as representative of how Australians have treated native animals and the natural environment more broadly. *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt* ends in 1899, approaching the final years of Australia as a British colony, with the authors signalling a shift towards more compassionate and considerate attitudes. This provides a justifiable endpoint to the book as a work of colonial history, but leaves tantalisingly open the question of the history of the kangaroo hunt through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Kangaroo hunting itself continued, and the debate continues to be ethically and politically fraught, culturally entangled, and under analysed. A second volume extending the history of the kangaroo hunt into the post-colonial sphere would be most welcome.

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