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Review of A Companion to the Works of Kim Scott by BELINDA WHEELER (Ed.)

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A Companion to the Works of Kim Scott edited by **BELINDA WHEELER**
Camden House, 2016 £75.00

Reviewed by **JOSÉ-CARLOS REDONDO-OLMEDILLA**

The Literature of Australia (2009), an excellent primer on contemporary Australian Literature, presented Kim Scott as a writer of novels, poetry, stories, and criticism. In the early stages of his writing career, Scott's narratives explored Australian Aboriginal self-identity and later began to explore contemporary modes of Aboriginality and examined assimilationist policies at the beginning of the twentieth century. His writing analyses his own marginal and privileged position as an assimilated urban Aborigine and the consequences this fact has for identity formation. Scott, a twice Miles Franklin Literary award winner for *Benang* (2000) and *That Deadman Dance* (2011), has shown his great concern with nature and the environment since his first novel *True Country* (1993). His criticism has targeted the kind of economic and social prosperity derived at the expense of the natural environment. Throughout his literary career, Scott stresses the ecological values of a pristine land that existed before the Europeans came to the Land Down Under.

Belinda Wheeler's *Companion to the Works of Kim Scott* is another significant landmark in the area of literary publications on Aboriginal

Australian Literature. It is equally a critical companion and a comprehensive analysis on Kim Scott and his work. It is an impressive effort as it knocks on the doors of the global canon by presenting eleven original essays on Kim Scott's works. The companion is also a kind of literary, social, and anthropological project and the scope of the analysis can be interpreted in a multidirectional way. The collection deals not only with Scott's novels, short stories, and poetry, but pays equal due to his work with the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project and Indigenous health, and includes a comprehensive and vivid interview with Scott himself.

In her introduction, editor Belinda Wheeler, sets the compass on concepts such as country, identity, community, and reception, connecting these themes to the Scott's work. She argues that while the intellectual reflex is central to Scott's project, his writing is built on a self-defined, multi-faceted subjectivity.

The focus of the essays in this collection is obviously Scott's voice, but the contributors do not forget that Scott also gives voice to the members of the Noongar community. The collection does not take an instrumentalist approach to literature in order to contribute to an ongoing debate about globalization, but instead asks the reader to become familiar with one contemporary Aboriginal Australian author. Apart from the final chapter, certainly an exclusive piece and a rich

interview that broadens from the personal to the anthropological and holistic, all the chapters present and represent a multi-voiced study that acts both as a foundation for later studies on the author and as a colourful *tessera* on the mosaic work of Aboriginal Australian studies.

Throughout the collection, the regional, national, and international dimensions of Kim Scott's work are examined. The acculturation phenomenon and Kim Scott's Aboriginal Bildungsroman projection are also examined in this collection, as are issues such as identity and community in key works like *Country* (1993) *Benang* (1999) and his short stories. For example, in her contribution to the collection, "The Land Holds All Things: Kim Scott's *Benang*: A Guide to Postcolonial Spatiality," Lisa Slater analyses the coexistence of multiple ontologies and epistemologies in Scott's success novel *Benang*. This study also analyses the cross-cultural relations between the European settlers and the Noongar people, underlining the "vast chasm between white Australia and its first Nation" (61). Slater highlights the ways in which those relations were eroded by the colonizer's racist bigotry, assimilationist predispositions, and capitalist uses and the resulting irreparable rift in the relationship among communities.

The collection draws on recent trends in Australian literary criticism to scan new horizons, as contributors Arindam Das, Gillian Whitlock and Roger

Osborne, and Lydia Saleh Rofail demonstrate. Therefore, the research and critical observations produced shed new light on the narrative landscape that confronts the ambivalent cultural dislocations central to both the lingering colonialism and the process of decolonization. In spite of the fact that the fictional landscapes in Scott's short stories and novels are envisioned as fraught topographies, figuratively embedded with layers of historical and ancestral trauma, all the contributors to this volume underline Scott's value as a creator of linguistic and literary reciprocity, who seeks balance between the global literary space and the connection to country.

Another singularity of this work is the attention paid to Scott's poetry, whose literary reputation is built on a sequence of novels. For this reason, scholars Nathanael Pree and Hughess-d'Aeth account for Scott's poetry and spatial Poetics without forgetting that an important element in the author is ekphrasis or "poetic representation of visual artworks."

While Scott's literary accomplishments are well known, he is also an advocate for Aboriginal health. In the penultimate chapter, "Kim Scott as Boundary Rider: Exploring Possibilities and New Frontiers in Aboriginal Health," Rosalie Thackrah and Sandra Thompson, two of Scott's former colleagues in Curtin University's Indigenous Health Unit, examine Scott's involvement in the introduction of a compulsory health unit in the

university's curriculum and to the creation of a textbook on Indigenous health.

Ecology is a major concern for Kim Scott and the book shows two dominant lines in his thinking, social and spiritual ecology. It is a blend that leads to a harmonious natural ecology where social ecology is valued as a cooperative relation not only possible, but desirable and where spiritual ecology can be enjoyed through spirituality, art, and nature. Scott's interpretation of the ecosphere is directly linked to the spiritual sphere and this collection reminds us that ecocriticism must also be expanded from the natural field to the social and spiritual realms.

All things considered, *A Companion to the Works of Kim Scott* is a volume that is thematically wide-ranging. This is not a "boutique multiculturalism" book as it rejects the exotica associated with aboriginality. It is a work for sovereign transcultural subjects that connect with

a culture other than the dominant. This book will be staple material and an indispensable book for those longing to know Kim Scott. A book for those with multiple belongings and with an interest in Australian culture and literature.

Works Cited

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