

### Book Review

**Matteo Dutto, *Legacies of Indigenous Resistance: Pemulwuy, Jandamarra and Yagan in Australian Indigenous Film, Theatre and Literature*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019, 241pages.**

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This book is a first of its kind. While there have been other books telling the individual stories of early Indigenous resistance leaders who fought against British invaders, such as Eric Willmot's (1987) *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*, and Pedersen and Woorunmurra's (1995) *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*, this is the first book to explore such historical Aboriginal heroes within the scope of the nation. It also has an interdisciplinary and multi-media approach: interdisciplinary in the sense that it uses methods and theories from history, cultural studies and performance studies, and multi-media in that it takes into account the multimodal nature of Indigenous storytelling as well as its rapid adaptation to stage and screen. There is a compelling logic to the fact that Indigenous traditions, being themselves largely performative, should take advantage of more performative renderings of their history, and eschew their enclosure in texts of academic history, and perhaps miss the chance for political exposure.

Towards the end of his book, standing in the middle of the very public space of Yagan Square ('Perth's new central civic space and cultural district'), Dutto reflects on his own project of bringing these stories together and making them more public in his own way:

Throughout this book, I have proposed a new approach that could account for the mobility, continuity and heterogeneity of Indigenous multimodal approaches to history-making. This was done not only with the objective of facilitating the recognition of Indigenous cultural productions as valid forms of doing history, but to stress how learning from the lives of historical figures like Pemulwuy, Jandamarra and Yagan requires us to engage with their incarnations across different media and across different times to truly understand what their legacies entail in the present and how they are shaped by Indigenous cultural activists (207-8).

This is an activist text, in that these histories are histories for the present. The continuities are stressed (*their* struggle continues to be *our* struggle in the absence of their resolution by treaty or other instrument) as well as the impact that contemporary re-presentation can have. *Legacies of Indigenous Resistance*, Dutto announces near the beginning, setting out his project:

...looks at stories of Australian Indigenous resistance leaders and at how new retellings of these stories across different media by Indigenous directors, playwrights, writers, musicians and scholars counter colonial appropriations of Indigenous histories not just to retell the stories of these historical figures but also to restore their legend and celebrate their legacy, thus continuing the fight they began. (3)

This partisan position will have conservative historians huffing and puffing: how can Dutto *take sides* like this? Surely he should 'step back' and take a more objective, distanced perspective? One could argue that that so-called objective position is the comfortable position forged by conventional white national historiography, engendering a calm even-handed tone

as if the academic writer had no skin in the game. But we all have skin in one game or another, and Dutto's game is to promote a different kind of historiography, not 'just to retell' but to performatively 'restore' and 'celebrate' 'legend' and 'legacy'. The crucial link is in the recognition of continued state violence, between past and present, and he quotes Tony Birch writing about 'the impact of ongoing denials of a history of state violence on young Indigenous people in Australia today', an articulation that the 'white history perspective' makes 'impossible'. (5) And let's not forget that this 'white history' is partisan in itself, as it builds settler nationhood by quietly forgetting about men like Yagan, Pemulwuy and Jandamarra.

History, then, can be creative, dramatic and passionate without losing its footnotes and becoming fictional. Writing history in this new mode constitutes a drama of contestation and critique. It recognises that there are dominant positions to fight against, so it is interestingly stereoscopic. In an inspired move, Dutto borrows an idea from speculative fiction writer China Miéville, to invent the concept of the 'crosshatch' historical perspective (and crosshatching—*rarrk*— is the name for a Northern Territory art technique as well). In Miéville's 2009 *The City & the City*, there are two cities existing in parallel space. Citizens of Beszél and Ul Qoma have their own jurisdictions, languages and architectures. The inhabitants can recognise 'the other', but are trained not to 'see' it, even as they move together through this crosshatched space. If they make a mistake the 'breach' is punished by a third power.

Moving through a city and not seeing its other reality—its other history, law and culture— seems to describe what it's actually like to live in a city like Perth today, a city which is also Whadjuk Noongar Country. In many instances, the two sets of inhabitants just walk past each other without interacting. At this point the reader needs to watch Kelrick Martin's award-winning movie *Yagan* (2013), set in both Perth Whadjuk Noongar Country *at the same time*, and described in depth in the book. It performs the crosshatching of archival footage and contemporary re-enactment, invasion history and present-day resistance, so its its aesthetic moves it underscores Dutto's more theoretical argument.

Matteo Dutto has given Australian Studies a beautiful gift. Coming from Italy to do his doctorate at the Monash University, he has rewritten it with admirable clarity for the *Australian Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* series edited by Anne Brewster. It is thus not only interdisciplinary but also internationalist in its perspective, helping promote Australian Studies to the world.