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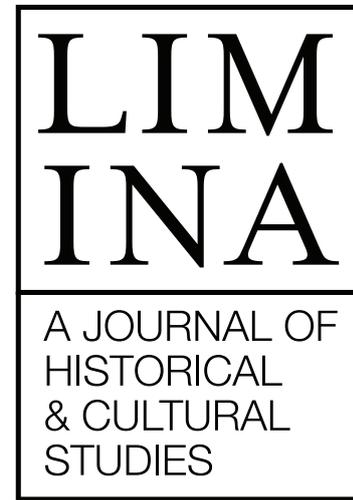
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Submitting to Limina

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Cover Image

In Dreames. Digital image by Brook Guidry

Wood, Robert, *Redgate*, New Delhi, Red River, 2020; paperback, pp.160; RRP \$14.51, ISBN: 9788194509325.

Robert Wood's *Redgate* is an exploration of diasporic identity, imagination, and enlightenment through poetry, offering Hindi translations by Abhimanyu Kumar. Rather than being a heuristic process, Wood's writing creates a 'poetic territory' (10), despite Redgate's existence as a coastal place situated on Wardandi country, in the southwest of Western Australia. Wood asserts his poetry is true to where he stands and what he lives for. His reconciliation of Western and Eastern philosophies and his uniting of reality, fantasy, observation, memory, and imagination to construct a 'welcome location' (155) are what ultimately make *Redgate*, a depiction of hope.

Just as the cover and page art of the book portray an outline of the physical landscape, poetically we are introduced to Wood's version—his drawing of the place. Whilst racial categories remain separate social spaces in *Redgate*, the position of collective pronouns 'them' and 'us' intentionally varies. The beauty in this fluidity—brought about by challenging the notion of the 'other'—is its building of a new reality through discourse. When his 'we' changes, the communal identity that Wood portrays is no longer fixed but shifting. Is it an understanding of selves past and present? Or dialogue between the coloniser and the colonised? The ambiguities of meaning are a riddle in Wood's gnomic poetry.

Within his poem 'Where Carrots' (13), Wood presents his vision of the Georgette Shipwreck of Calgarta Beach. In order to fully grasp this vision, however, the readership must understand grief, displacement, and colonialism:

Where carrots and cabbages and ships
hailed over sand and sound
where they remarked that
the colour was always green, somehow,
and the mushrooms were never found
where the twilight was molasses
because we lost our matches,
that was where they came to
that was where the stockman rescued
and we knew, somehow, that their bones and wings
would be laid there when all the world found out. (13)

Wood's gnomic style lends itself particularly well to the exploration of a historical, and thus undeniably multifaceted phenomenon. Being the first in the collection, the poem acts as a framework for the remainder of the book. In Wood's vision of Redgate, Isaac's rock—the site of the shipwreck—is a symbol of collaboration between a male traditional owner and a white woman in 1876. Isaac's rock is positioned as an anomaly, becoming a poetic place and a symbol of hope. The urgent collaboration of two people saving those in trouble and suffering has been immortalised in the landscape. The tragic and inescapable reality is that massacres of Aboriginal people continued past 1920.

Borne from nostalgia and a deep homesickness, the poetry has been produced in New York, written in old libraries surrounded by works of famous writers and the sense of becoming closer to history. Wood mentions his inspirations at the end of the book, of which Rumi and Neruda are two. The ancient sites being reminisced within Neruda's works are emblematic of the accomplishments of Incan cultures that existed prior to the interference of colonisation. In the same way Neruda achieved a complex

sense of love toward a place, Wood serenades Redgate. His exploration of the past is an act of placemaking, operating as a tunnel into Wood's soul. *Redgate* allows one to realize exactly what it means to be within that land, whilst being hundreds of miles away.

The exploration of enlightenment in *Redgate* also echoes Rumi's influence. I identified a pattern of yearning, struggle, return and ultimately, union in the search for meaning in the work of both poets. Rumi states that we are of God, and while our spirit is separated from God, we always have the longing to go back and join him. On earth we must endure suffering to be able to find him again, not in heaven through death, but as seen in 'We Sat Down' (125), somewhere 'between':

Between heaven and earth
we found windows
in a house made empty
of talk by a wind of wildness.

We sat down to eat
the wrasse brought up from their watery depths
and the ones we welcomed
they told us
of the many thousand miles they'd walked to be here now. (125)

In Wood's poem, 'wildness' banishes 'talk' as a return to one's (wordless) base nature allows clarity in an abandonment of the trivial. The 'thousand miles they'd walked' to arrive at this space of wisdom echoes Rumi's portrayal of the path that must be endured to reach true belonging.

Perhaps with a poetic goal of determining topophilia, Wood binds tragedy with nature and explores the linkages between the culture, history, and spiritual origins of Redgate and its people in an epigrammatic fashion, whilst maintaining an enigmatic style. Reading *Redgate* for me, raised multiple questions, but my favourite has to be—if reaching enlightenment is returning home, had we not intrinsically held within us unknowable truths from the start?

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