

‘Racy of the Soil’: Ian Mudie, right-wing nationalism, and the South Australian soil erosion crisis

Jayne Regan

On Friday 18 of September 1936, as part of a series of events celebrating the centenary of South Australia, residents of the state capital, Adelaide, turned out to witness a floral pageant in the city centre. A crowd of 130, 000 people marvelled at elaborately decorated city buildings, and lined the route along which twenty-seven floral floats travelled through metropolitan Adelaide. The event was considered a popular success. However, in the week leading up to the festivities preparations were hampered when strong winds swept through the city, bringing with them a thick dust. Dust enveloped Adelaide; low visibility caused traffic congestion and accidents, and delayed trains. The combination of wind and dust damaged houses, and the flowers that festooned city buildings in preparation for the parade. This was a spectacular and timely reminder for Adelaide residents, in the midst of their celebration of progress across one hundred years of white settlement, that this history had also unleashed an environmental disaster.

As dust from eroded regions of rural South Australia fell on centenary preparations, Adelaide-based poet Ian Mudie was, as yet, unknown. Over the coming years Mudie carved out a position for himself in the Australian literary community as a nationalist, and as an advocate for the Australian environment. He was particularly alarmed by the state of Australian soil. Soil imagery became integral to much of Mudie’s poetry, particularly after he aligned himself with the Nazi-influenced, right-wing nationalism espoused by his friend and mentor Percy Reginald (P.R.) Stephensen in the late 1930s. Mudie’s environmental concern was intimately linked with his nationalism, yet critics and historians generally see Mudie as either a nationalist or an environmentalist; they do not address the intersection of these two ideologies in his work.

Mudie has been described by historians as a ‘nationalist and propagandist’¹ and a ‘hectoring’ nationalist.² His contemporary critic A.D. Hope even likened his rhetoric to that of the Hitler Youth Movement.³ He has been considered by others an early conservationist⁴, his literary associations even earning him the label ‘proto-ecologist.’⁵ *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* hints at the relationship between nationalism and environmental concern in Mudie’s work, labeling him ‘aggressively conservationist’⁶, and David Bird recognises that ‘elements of ‘Nationalism and Radicalism’ combined with environmentalism’

¹ Brain Elliott, *The Jindyworobaks* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), xlvii.

² Peter Kirkpatrick, ‘Jindy Modernist: The Jindyworobaks as Avant Garde’, in Peter Kirkpatrick and Robert Dixon (eds.), *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia*, pp. 99-112 (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2012), 106.

³ A.D. Hope, ‘Culture Corroboree’, *Southerly* 2, no. 3 (1941): 31.

⁴ William Henry Wilde, Joy Wendy Hooten and Barry Geoffrey Andrews (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1991), 552; ‘Death of Poet Ian Mudie’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Oct., 1976.

⁵ Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer, ‘Introduction’, in Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (eds.), *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*, pp. 1-13 (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 9.

⁶ Wilde et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 552.

in Mudie's work, though neither investigate this in detail.⁷ I offer a more nuanced reading of Mudie's political and literary sensibility, in order to explain the relationship between environmental concern, soil erosion, and nationalism in his poetry and political thought.

The connections between environmentalism and right-wing nationalism have been given the most scholarly attention in Germany, particularly in relation to the Nazi period; according to Frank Uekoetter conservation in the Nazi era is one of the best researched topics in German environmental history.⁸ In a series of books and articles across the 1980s Anna Bramwell controversially argued that the Nazi Party had a 'green wing', spearheaded by Reich Peasant Leader and Minister for Agriculture, Richard Walther Darré.⁹ She went as far as to suggest that 'without [Darré] the ecological movement would have perished in his time and place'.¹⁰ Most recent scholarship rejects the connection Bramwell made between Nazi environmental thought and the modern environmental movement, yet still acknowledges that environmental ideas and Nazi ideology could coexist, and were sometimes complimentary.¹¹ While much work exists on these connections in German historiography, little has been written about the relationship between right-wing nationalism and environmental thought in Australia.¹² Ian Mudie and his poetry offer an opportunity to consider this relationship in the Australian context.

Though Mudie was influenced by Nazi 'blood and soil' ideology, the relationship between nationalism and environmental concern in his poetry and political thought was distinctively Australian. I argue that there are three ways we might perceive the local distinctiveness of Mudie's poetic engagement with soil. Firstly, soil was not simply a way to lend metaphorical support to Mudie's nationalism, he was also scientifically engaged with the salient environmental issue of soil erosion. Mudie's poetry demonstrates the increasing authority and influence of scientific experts and government agencies in relation to the problem of South Australian soil erosion. While existing histories of Australian soil erosion have tended to emphasise legislative and scientific developments¹³, Mudie's literary interest in the

⁷ David S. Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime: Australian Enthusiasts for Hitler's Germany* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 171.

⁸ Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 211.

⁹ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré & Hitler's 'Green Party'* (Abbotsbrook: Kensal Press, 1985); Anna Bramwell, Ricardo Walther Darré: Was This Man 'Father of the Greens'?, *History Today* 34, no. 9 (1984): 7-13; Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹⁰ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 200.

¹¹ Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc and Thomas Zeller (eds.) *How Green were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Thomas M Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jonathan Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism: Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999); Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown*.

¹² For some examples of scholarship that deal with the connection between right-wing politics, racism and environment in the Australian context see: Andrea Gaynor, 'Antipodean Eco-nazis? The Organic Gardening and Farming Movement and Far-right Ecology in Postwar Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (2012): 253-269; Kylie Mirmohamadi, 'Wog plants go home': Race, ethnicity and horticulture in Australia,' *Studies in Australian Garden History* 1 (2003): 91-107; Nicholas Smith, 'Blood and soil: nature, native and nation in the Australian imaginary', *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1-18.

¹³ John Bradsen, 'Soil Conservation: History, Law and Learning', Stephen Dovers (ed.), *Environmental History and Policy: Still Settling Australia*, pp. 273-94 (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 273-294; John Bradsen, *Soil Conservation Legislation in Australia* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Printing Department,

problem enables this article to contribute to an emerging literature which emphasises the wider cultural and social ramifications of soil erosion.¹⁴

Secondly, while traditional German blood and soil ideology emphasised the importance of the relationship between the peasant and the land, Mudie rejected popular Australian nationalism that celebrated the agricultural and pastoral relationship with the environment, complicating simple comparisons to Nazi ideology. For Mudie, farmers and pioneers were representative of the destructiveness of white colonists more generally; through his soil erosion poetry Mudie emphasised that white colonisation should be recognised and remembered as careless and environmentally devastating. Mudie presented the Aboriginal relationship with the environment as an alternative goal toward which white Australia should strive. Mudie did not argue for any active cultural exchange black and white Australia, but appropriated Aboriginal symbolism and mythology in an attempt to claim a longer history, and sense of authentic indigeneity, for white Australians. Finally, though Mudie's metaphorical engagement with soil was occasionally used to further his extreme politics, on the whole his combination of environmental concern and nationalism could be comfortably incorporated into a longer tradition of Australian nationalist writing. Mudie was well-known and liked among his contemporaries, and his poetry found favour among the many cultural nationalist writers that dominated the Australian literary community in the 1930s and 1940s.

To demonstrate that Mudie's evocation of soil was the unmistakable product of a settler imagination, I revive the now obscure phrase 'racy of the soil.' 'Racy of the soil', a phrase likely Irish in origin and later transplanted to various British colonies, particularly Australia and Newfoundland, denoted a distinctively national quality.¹⁵ In nineteenth century and early twentieth century Australia, 'racy of the soil' was used to describe someone or something considered typically Australian. It was generally used in association with rural and bush environments, and often to describe books and poetry that took rural Australia or bush life as their subject. This phrase, more than 'blood and soil', helps to elucidate the specifically Australian context of Mudie's racially-charged nationalism, and the way these concerns interacted with his environmental concern.

Ian Mudie

1988); Roland Breckwoldt, *The Dirt Doctors: A jubilee history of the Soil Conservation Service of NSW* (Sydney: Soil Conservation Service of N.S.W., 1988); A.F. Tideman, *Half a century of soil conservation: A brief history of the South Australian Advisory Committee on Soil Conservation 1940-1990* (Adelaide: Department of Agriculture, 1990); Michael Williams, *The Making of the South Australian Landscape: a study in the historical geography of Australia* (London: Academic Press, 1974); Mary-Anne Young, *Keeping the ranges off the plains: 50 years of the west Broughton Soil Conservation Board* (Beetaloo Valley: West Broughton Soil Conservation Board, 2004).

¹⁴ Such research includes that of 2013 Nancy Keesing Fellowship recipient Michael Thompson, recently completed PhD theses by Janette Bailey and Sabine Sauter, and Cameron Muir, *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress: An Environmental History* (New York: Routledge/Earthscan, 2014).

¹⁵ Phillip L. Marcus, *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance*, Second Edition (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 1. John Strachan and Claire Nally, *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture in Ireland, 1891-1922* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 70; *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, s.v. 'Racy', accessed 15 May, 2016, <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/dictionary/a-z-index.php#3579>.

Ian Mayelston Mudie was born in Hawthorne, Adelaide, 1 March 1911, to bank accountant Henry Mayelston Mudie and his second wife Gertrude Mary, née Wurm.¹⁶ Mudie's family was well respected and reasonably well-off; his grandfather was a school teacher and Anglican priest, his father the manager of the Savings Bank of South Australia between 1919 and 1924, and his brother was the town clerk for Hindmarsh, Adelaide.¹⁷ Between 1920 and 1926 Mudie attended Scotch College Adelaide, an independent Presbyterian school for boys, where he performed poorly, more interested in reading books of his own choosing than the work prescribed by teachers.¹⁸ Mudie left school in 1926 at the age of fifteen without obtaining his leaving certificate and held several jobs before he spent a few months in 1930 'carrying his swag' around rural Western Victoria with a friend. Retrospectively, Mudie claimed that they travelled this way 'for the fun of it', and, as 'clean and smiling' swagmen as opposed to the unemployed, they 'lived like kings' on the donations of the public.¹⁹ From a young age Mudie was self-consciously dealing in Australian imagery and attempted to foster an image for himself as an 'ordinary bloke', distanced from his family and school background. When he insisted on pursuing a literary career, apparently from the age of ten, he departed from the financially sound and practical professions in which his family engaged.²⁰

In October 1934, after a short stint living in London in a failed attempt to boost his literary career, Mudie returned to Adelaide and married Renee Dunford Doble. The couple would have two children, and it appears that Doble did not have paid work. To ensure the financial survival of his family Mudie eked out 'a sort of a living' writing journalistic articles and short stories for a range of Australian publications including the *Adelaide Advertiser*, the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail*, the *Bulletin* and the *Australian Women's Mirror*.²¹ Though skilfully adaptable as a freelance journalist, it was through poetry that Mudie expressed his personal, emotional, and political ideas. Yet, in this period, the Australian literary marketplace was dominated by the novelist, and publishing poetry was particularly difficult; prior to 1937 Mudie had only managed to get a handful of poems published.²² It was not until the late 1930s and early 1940s that Mudie found greater publication success, primarily because he had aligned himself with two movements that reflected the depth of social uncertainty and cultural questioning that characterised the interwar years.

Mudie was profoundly affected by publisher, critic and polemicist P.R. Stephensen's popular book, *Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect (Foundations)* (1936), and he found a publishing outlet in W.J. Miles and Stephensen's magazine the *Publicist* from 1937. Mudie was an enthusiastic member and contributor to Stephensen's ultra-nationalist, and allegedly fascist, Australia First Movement, established

¹⁶ Phillip Butterss, 'Mudie, Ian Mayelston (1911-1976)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.au/biography/mudie-ian-mayelston-11192/text199949> (accessed 19 May, 2015).

¹⁷ 'Death of the Rev. W.H. Mudie: A veteran clergyman', *Register*, 11 March, 1903; 'The people's banker: Mr H.M. Mudie's proud record', *Mail*, 10 March, 1923; 'Death of Mr H.M. Mudie', *Advertiser*, 21 Feb., 1933.

¹⁸ Ian Mudie, Interview by Hazel de Burg, 27 October 1966, audio recording, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Richard Nile, *The Making of the Australian Literary Imagination* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002), 167-8.

in 1941. In the same year he became a paying member of Rex Ingamells' Adelaide-based Jindyworobak poetry movement, which advocated the production of an 'authentic' Australian literature inspired by the Australian landscape and Aboriginal history and mythology. The Jindyworobaks claimed their aim was 'a more effective fusion between our inherited Western culture on the one hand and, on the other, the primitive culture and place values of the continent which we have made our own.'²³ The annual *Jindyworobak Anthology* offered Mudie another opportunity for regular publication. Once he had established relationships with Stephensen and Ingamells, Mudie transformed from a poet preoccupied with generic urban scenes and found the Australian emphasis for which he would become renowned. Bush and arid environments, extreme nationalism, and Aboriginal Australia all appeared in Mudie's poetry in the late 1930s. The sudden, rather than gradual, appearance of these themes suggests that Mudie was primarily inspired to this change by Stephensen's call in *Foundations* for literature 'drawn direct from Australian life'²⁴ and Ingamells' insistence that writers pay particular attention to Australia's 'environmental values.'²⁵ As a result, Mudie is best remembered for his relationships with Stephensen and Jindyworobak.

Historian Brian Elliott casts Ingamells as the 'founding father' of the Jindyworobak movement, who attracted 'followers and disciples' and identifies Mudie as one of Ingamells' earliest 'active supporters.'²⁶ Stephensen's biographer Craig Munro briefly describes Mudie as 'perhaps the *Publicist's* most dedicated supporter' and as Stephensen's 'dedicated and lifelong friend.'²⁷ In *Nazi Dreamtime: Australian Enthusiasts for Hitler's Germany*, David S. Bird gives Mudie the most thorough consideration of all scholars to date. Since his focus is on Australian Nazi enthusiasts, Bird emphasises Mudie's relationship with Stephensen and Australia First and those elements in his poetry that demonstrate his right-wing politics. Though Bird's interest is not specifically in the connections between environmental thought and right-wing politics, he does argue that Mudie's poetic emphasis on soil was 'marked by the *volkisch* sensibility of blood and soil' that was reflected in other 'Nazi dreaming' around the world.²⁸ The phrase 'blood and soil' had been used by nineteenth century agrarian romantics in Europe²⁹, but was popularised in 1930s Germany by Richard Walther Darré, Reich Peasant Leader and Minister for Agriculture between 1933 and 1942.³⁰ Blood and soil ideology implied a 'special connection between the German people (blood) and the land (soil)'³¹, and emphasised the virtues of the peasant population who were so intimately connected with the soil.³² As will be explored below, Mudie was less than enthusiastic about Australian agriculturalists and pastoralists, whom we might expect to have acted as

²³ 'The Jindyworobak Club', *Venture* 1.1 (1939): 7-8.

²⁴ P.R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self Respect* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986, originally pub. 1936), 29.

²⁵ Rex Ingamells, *Conditional Culture* (Adelaide: F.W. Preece, 1938), 11.

²⁶ Elliott, *The Jindyworobaks*, xvii.

²⁷ Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters: The Story of P.R. Stephensen* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 193.

²⁸ Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 282 & 166.

²⁹ Gesine Gerhard, 'Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich: Richard Walther Darré's Agrarian Ideology', in Brüggemeier, Cioc and Zeller (eds.), *How Green were the Nazis?*, pp. 129-146, 131.

³⁰ Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism*, 76.

³¹ Gerhard, 'Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich', 131.

³² David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 96-7.

substitutes for a peasant population in the Australian context.³³ Yet, there was certainly still an echo of the Nazi rhetoric of blood and soil in Mudie's poetry; in this Mudie was primarily inspired by his friend and mentor Stephensen.

Blood and soil

Contributors to Stephensen and Miles' *Publicist* magazine expressed admiration for the German and Japanese governments, and in the May 1937 issue the magazine printed the first of many extracts of Hitler's speeches. In 1941 the *Publicist* declared itself 'For 'White' Australia; against heterogeneity', 'For Aryanism; against Semitism' and 'For national socialism; against international communism'.³⁴ From October 1937 Mudie regularly contributed poetry to the magazine. He quickly became the *Publicist's* in-house poet, and remained so until the publication's demise in 1942. Mudie travelled to the inaugural general meeting of Stephensen's Australia First movement in the Shalimar Café on Elizabeth Street Sydney, 20 October 1941, where he was elected to the executive committee.³⁵ In March 1942, Stephensen, along with fifteen other members and associates of the movement, was accused of treason and ties to the Japanese government and held without trial until the end of the war. How Mudie, as an executive member of Australia First, avoided internment is unclear; his residency in Adelaide, away from the hub of Australia First's Sydney-based activities, might have saved him, or perhaps, as a 'literary fellow-traveller', he was considered less dangerous than more political members.³⁶ Mudie's home was searched by police, who confiscated an English translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* carefully annotated in Mudie's hand.³⁷

Mudie had also read J.B.S. Haldane's *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* and Isaac Taylor's *Origin of the Aryans*, indicating an engagement in racial theory and eugenics, recurring themes in the *Publicist*.³⁸ Historian Cameron Muir points out that in this period a great number of Australians 'were gripped by anxieties and concerns over racial hierarchy, population and invasion, and the effect of the environment on bodies and culture'.³⁹ In this sense Mudie's interest in the connections between race and environment seem less unusual. However, Mudie also demonstrated a more specific anti-Semitism. He expressed his 'indignation at Jews/Communists' to Jindyworobak Victor Kennedy.⁴⁰ Also, writing under the pseudonym 'Wilka Yelper'⁴¹ in the *Publicist*, Mudie objected to Jewish immigration to

³³ Though peasant is a word not usually used in the Australian context, Mudie's good friend and well known Australian writer, Miles Franklin had, in her 1901 novel *My Brilliant Career*, specifically addressed the 'Australian peasant.' She described Australian peasants as the 'bone and muscle' of the nation, who battled hardships, many of them thrown up by the Australian environment. This too echoed nationalist 'blood and soil' rhetoric. See Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979, originally pub. 1901), 230-32.

³⁴ 'The *Publicist's* Fifty Points', *Publicist* 66 (1941): 16.

³⁵ 'Australia-First Movement: Manifesto Issued and Meetings Arranged', *Publicist* 65 (1941): 5.

³⁶ Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, 224; Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 341.

³⁷ Barbara Winter, *The Australia-First Movement and the Publicist, 1936-1942* (Brisbane: Glass House Books, 2005), 156.

³⁸ Ian Mudie, personal anthology, PRG 27/17, Papers of Ian Mayelston Mudie (hereafter Mudie Papers), State Library of South Australia (hereafter SLSA), Adelaide.

³⁹ Muir, *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress*, 117.

⁴⁰ Victor Kennedy to Ian Mudie, 23 June 1941, PRG 27/1/1941, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

⁴¹ Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 319.

Australia, complaining that the 'refugee is the refujew'.⁴² His racial politics were clearly influenced by his relationship with Stephensen.

Foundations included a chapter titled 'Race and Place' which argued that a national culture is the expression 'of the spirit of a Race and of a Place.'⁴³ Stephensen also argued that it was imperative for Australia to be 'culturally weaned from Europe' and allowed to 'grow upon this soil'; cultural autonomy would ensure that white civilisation could survive in Australia if it were to be destroyed in Europe and America.⁴⁴ Inspired by Stephensen's soil rhetoric, Mudie prefaced his 1940 poetry collection *Corroboree to the Sun* with a quote from Stephensen that argued 'we have a job to do here in Australia, to become acclimatised mentally in our own Austral latitudes and firm rooted in our own Austral soil.'⁴⁵ Throughout the 1940s Mudie employed a soil/growth metaphor in his poetry to emphasise the possibility of white 'acclimatisation' to the Australian environment.

For Mudie soil acted metaphorically as the foundation from which the Australian nation could grow: true Australian 'flesh' would be 'quarried from its earth.'⁴⁶ Though Mudie's poetry did not venerate the peasant, or farmer, in the same way that traditional blood and soil rhetoric might, he did suggest that white Australian population should strive for an intimate and spiritual connection to the native Australian environment. In 'The Australian Dream' (1943), a poem celebrating Australia's survival of the 1942 Darwin bombings, Mudie referred to 'Austral blood':

in which the sands of all our deserts run,
and all our creeks and rivers flow, in which
Katoomba's rocks and red Macdonnell's stone
have ground in strange and national alchemy⁴⁷

Here sand, rocks and stone are fused with the blood of white Australians. This exemplifies Mudie's emphasis on the symbolic importance of the Australian environment, soil in particular, from which the Australian people might draw vitality and strength. For both Stephensen and Mudie unspoiled Australian soil was a 'cultural asset', and so was a useful metaphor which they could evoke in aid of their ultra-nationalist political stance.⁴⁸ However, Mudie's poetic engagement with the salient issue of soil erosion was not simply the opportunistic adoption of an environmental issue to lend metaphorical support to his right-wing politics. Mudie also engaged deeply with the science of the unfolding South Australian environmental soil disaster.

The South Australian soil erosion crisis

⁴² Ian Mudie as 'Wilka Yelper', 'Ten Tropical Couplets', *Publicist* 66 (1941): 13.

⁴³ Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, 14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ P.R. Stephensen, preface to Mudie, *Corroboree to the Sun* (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1940), np.

⁴⁶ Ian Mudie, 'This is Australia' in *This is Australia* (Adelaide; Frank E. Cork, 1941), 9.

⁴⁷ Ian Mudie, 'The Australian Dream' in *The Australian Dream* (Adelaide: Jindyworobak, 1943), 8.

⁴⁸ Smith, 'Blood and soil', 11.

One hundred and fifty years of land clearing, pastoralism and agriculture in Australia, had, by the interwar period, culminated in widespread soil degradation. The ecologically delicate, semi-arid regions of Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales and Western Australia had, since World War One, been opened up to wheat cultivation, where dry farming techniques imported from America intensified pressures on Australian soil.⁴⁹ Dust storms, caused by wind erosion, were common in rural Australia, but, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, a combination of strong winds and severe drought brought spectacular dust storms to many Australian coastal cities, including Adelaide. Metropolitan awareness of soil erosion, combined with reports of disastrous consequences for agriculture caused by soil erosion in the American mid-west and a greater scientific understanding of soils, revealed that sand drift had the potential to diminish the long-term profitability of Australian soil.⁵⁰ John Bradsen has demonstrated that, during the 1930s and 1940s, there was widespread political engagement with soil erosion, and that this resulted in a shift in government land use policies, from a developmental model to a conservation model.⁵¹ Through significant critical engagement with past practices, and a sense of need for new programs and awareness, conservation of soil, and other natural resources, became central to building a wealthy stable nation. A spate of state government legislation attempted to address the issue: Soil Conservation Act 1938 (NSW), Soil Conservation Act 1939 (SA), Soil and Land Conservation Act 1945 (WA) and Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act 1949 (VIC). Such government intervention in environmental issues was characteristic of the period.

American environmental historian Thomas R. Wellock argues that between 1920 and 1945 Progressive-era conservation dominated by community led environmental organisations came to an end and environmentally concerned activists increasingly ‘accepted and often promoted institutional reform and placed power in the hands of new agencies, commissions, and technical experts.’⁵² In the Australian context, Libby Robin labels this development ‘conservation science.’⁵³ She argues that ‘the confluence of science and governance is a hallmark of the modern nation-state.’⁵⁴ The shift toward government control and technical and scientific expertise in Australia was particularly evident after the establishment of the federal government agency for research, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), in 1926. The CSIR investigated sheep blowfly, cattle ticks, rabbits and prickly pears – all problems pertaining to rural Australia and farming in particular.⁵⁵ The soil erosion crisis endangered the agricultural and pastoral industries that were seen as integral to the nation’s identity and wealth and, as a result, the CSIR became concerned with ameliorating the degraded and inefficient condition of Australian farming land. Cameron

⁴⁹ Sabine Sauter, ‘Australia’s Dust Bowl: Transnational Influences in Soil Conservation and the Spread of Ecological Thought’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 61, 3 (2015): 355.

⁵⁰ Maurice Collins, ‘American expert’s warning on soil erosion danger’, *Mail*, 19 April, 1941; R.L. Curthoys, ‘U.S.A. fights soil erosion’, *Advertiser*, 23 May, 1936.

⁵¹ Bradsen, ‘Soil Conservation: History, Law and Learning’, 276-280.

⁵² Thomas R. Wellock, *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements 1870-2000* (Wheeling: Harlan Davison, Inc., 2007), 80.

⁵³ Libby Robin, ‘Ecology: a science of empire?’, Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds.), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, pp. 63-75 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 70.

⁵⁴ Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 202.

⁵⁵ William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 166.

Muir argues that ‘science was gaining authority as the primary interpreter of the natural world’; accordingly Mudie incorporated scientific knowledge into his poetry.⁵⁶

Mudie took great care to make a scientific understanding of soil erosion explicit and integral in ‘Wool-Cheque’, a 1940 poem representative of Mudie’s poetic engagement with soil erosion and degradation.⁵⁷ Land clearing with ‘axe and fire’, damage done by ‘small sharp hooves’ and the ‘man-made rabbit curse’ are all identified as contributors to vegetation loss, which leave soil exposed to both wind and water erosion.⁵⁸ The process of water erosion is expressed poetically:

Sheep and the man-made rabbit curse
ate the last shrubs, the flood was free
to rush in frothy licence down the hills,
bearing in brown and scummy arms
what once had been root-feeding earth.⁵⁹

Land without vegetation to promote stability and absorption is particularly vulnerable to flood, and the loss of nutrient rich ‘root-feeding earth’ limits the prospect of future flora regeneration. Additionally, ‘rivers silt’ recognises the problem of salinity, and ‘deserts creep’ engages with the common fear of desertification, the human creation or expansion of deserts due to unwise use of the land.⁶⁰ Mudie’s understanding of the causes of soil erosion in Australia aligns closely with those outlined in the 1938 report of the South Australian Soil Conservation Committee, which concluded that:

2. All cases of soil erosion are fundamentally due to the destruction of the natural vegetative cover and the consequent exposure of the bare soil to the erosive action of wind or water.
3. The factor responsible for the destruction of the perennial vegetative cover in the pastoral country of South Australia is the grazing animal. The effects of over-grazing are accentuated by dry seasons and the depredation of rabbits.
4. In the mallee areas the destruction of the vegetation was deliberately brought about to make way for the plough⁶¹

In 1936 English biologist and CSIR investigator Francis Ratcliffe had similarly concluded that grazing was principally responsible for the destruction of vegetation that had led to soil erosion in the northern areas of South Australia.⁶² That Mudie could identify all the major

⁵⁶ Muir, *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress*, 114.

⁵⁷ For other Mudie poems that reference soil erosion see ‘Landscape’ in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 3; ‘This is Australia’ and ‘Tomorrow’ in *This is Australia*, 7-10 & 11; ‘The Australian Dream’ in *The Australian Dream*.

⁵⁸ Ian Mudie, ‘Wool-Cheque’ in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 13-14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁰ Jock H. Pick, *Australia’s Dying Heart: Soil Erosion in the Inland* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1942), 11-13; G.V. Jacks and R.O. Whyte, *The Rape of the Earth: A World Survey of Soil Erosion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 170-3; Paul B. Sears, *Deserts on the March* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980, originally pub. 1935).

⁶¹ South Australia Soil Conservation Committee, *Report of the Soil Conservation Committee* (Adelaide, Government Printer, 1938), 54.

⁶² Francis N. Ratcliffe, *Soil Drift in the Arid Pastoral Areas of South Australia* (Melbourne: CSIR, 1936), 8.

causes of vegetation loss and soil erosion outlined by both Ratcliffe and the Report of the South Australian Soil Erosion Committee indicates the pervasiveness, and importantly the accessibility, of government-funded scientific findings. Much scientific information was made publicly accessible, making non-expert engagement possible.

Books of popular science, which often had a broad scientific and historical focus, were aimed at a public audience. In 1938 Ratcliffe published *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand: The Adventures of a Biologist in Australia* based on his experiences as a CSIR investigator of flying foxes in Queensland and soil erosion in arid South Australia. Ratcliffe claimed the book, which is part popular science, part travel book, was 'a collection of observations, impressions, and reminiscences, on the whole more subjective and trivial than scientific and serious', yet the scientific findings of his CSIR sponsored travels were included.⁶³ The work of independent researcher Jock Pick was also published as *Australia's Dying Heart: Soil Erosion in the Inland*, which Mudie had read and strongly recommended to good friend, well known Australian writer, Miles Franklin.⁶⁴ Beyond Pick's book it is unclear how much of this popular science Mudie had read. Nevertheless, Mudie could have gained a reasonably sophisticated scientific understanding of soil erosion through South Australian newspapers, many of which he contributed to as a freelance journalist.

During, and in the aftermath of, severe dust storms South Australian newspapers ran substantial articles on the 'choking pall' and 'gloom', and the damage and 'havoc' caused by the dust in metropolitan Adelaide.⁶⁵ Newspaper articles also investigated the cause of these storms, identifying drought and the loss of native vegetation through deliberate clearing, overstocking and rabbits as factors contributing to soil erosion.⁶⁶ Ratcliffe's research activities were reported in both the *Adelaide Advertiser* and *Mail* across 1935-6, and a summary of his CSIR report appeared in the *Advertiser* in May 1936.⁶⁷ Pick's book was also favourably reviewed in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, and he authored a substantial article on soil erosion in the *Adelaide Mail*.⁶⁸ Between 1937 and 1940 Mudie collated newspaper cuttings on a range of South Australian topics, including sand drift and soil erosion, indicating that at the very least his soil erosion poetry was informed by these reports.⁶⁹

Due to the accessibility of information about soil, and its metaphorical potential, Mudie was not the only Australian writer interested in the topic. Examples of literary engagement with the soil include Myrtle Rose White's memoir *No Roads Go By* (1932), Frank Dalby Davison and Brooke Nicholls' travel book *Blue Coast Caravan* (1935), Judith Wright's poem 'Dust'

⁶³ Francis Ratcliffe, *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand: The Adventures of a Biologist in Australia* (Sydney: Pacific Books, 1970, originally pub. 1938), xiii.

⁶⁴ Ian Mudie to Miles Franklin, 8 April 1942, G27457, Correspondence and literary papers 1887-1954, NLA, Canberra.

⁶⁵ 'Adelaide's worst dust storm – rain in North', *Register News-Pictorial*, 3 June, 1929; 'Record duststorm causes havoc', *Advertiser*, 9 Jan., 1942.

⁶⁶ 'Choking cloud over city: dust from denuded north lands, Says Professor', *Advertiser*, 23 March, 1933.

⁶⁷ 'Soil drift increasing', *Advertiser*, 1 May, 1936.

⁶⁸ 'Australia's soil erosion problem', *Advertiser*, 6 March, 1943; Jock H. Pick, 'How to save this state's saltbush country', *Mail*, 16 Dec., 1944.

⁶⁹ Collated articles include those titled 'Sand drift at Parachilna' and 'South Australia's shifting soil', see Newspaper cuttings relating to South Australian history, 1937-1940, PRG 27/ 14/8, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

(1945), Myra Morris' poem 'Sand-Drift' (1946), and Elyne Mitchell's non-fiction 'Books and the Soil' (1944), *Speak to the Earth* (1945) and *Soil and Civilisation* (1946). This literary interest in soil erosion reveals both the pervasive influence of scientific expertise *and* the continuing ability for the non-expert to find a voice in this era dominated by government science. Mudie used this voice to challenge popular soil conservation concerns, which emphasised the economic potential of the land.

The 1938 Report of the Soil Conservation Committee recommended that South Australia:

adopt a policy of soil conservation which would have as its aim the protection of the agricultural and grazing country from the effects of water and wind erosion, so that the productivity of those lands will remain unimpaired for the use of future generations.⁷⁰

Similarly, in the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of South Australia*, Agricultural Advisor O. Bowden stressed that:

It is imperative that all sections of the community appreciate the essentiality of the land as the one great asset of the Nation, wherein lies the security of both their existence and that of the generations to follow.⁷¹

Mudie was a self-described Australian nationalist, however, he was less interested in the economic potential of the land, and preferred to explore the spiritual, moral and environmental consequences of soil erosion.⁷² Like fellow writer Elyne Mitchell, Mudie believed that 'human dependence on soil is not only a material necessity, but metaphysical.'⁷³ Mudie argued against dominant national narratives that celebrated the relationship between the Australian landscape and the white pioneer or farmer; in this he breaks with blood and soil rhetoric. As critic Gary Catalano points out, during the early 1940s, 'farmers are pilloried as the main agents of environmental degradation' in Mudie's poetry.⁷⁴

The price of wool

Kosmas Tsokhas explains that in 1939-40 Australian wool growers 'earned a record wool cheque.'⁷⁵ This was a result of the 1939 Imperial Wool Purchase Scheme, under which the British government purchased the entire Australian wool clip, other than that required by Australian manufacturers, for the duration of World War Two plus one year. For Mudie, though, the price of wool had more serious implications than the economic stability of an iconic Australian industry. According to Mudie, in the history of white Australia 'spoliation,

⁷⁰ South Australia Soil Conservation Committee, *Report of the Soil Conservation Committee*, 57.

⁷¹ O. Bowden, 'Our Agriculture at a Cross Road', *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of South Australia* 46, no. 12 (1943): 351.

⁷² Ian Mudie, 'New Australian Voices', draft script for performance on ABC radio with D. Ingram Smith, 1944, PRG 27/1/1944, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

⁷³ Elyne Mitchell, 'Books and the Soil', *The Australian Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1944): 64.

⁷⁴ Gary Catalano, *An Intimate Australia: The landscape and recent Australian art* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985), 45.

⁷⁵ Kosmas Tsokhas, *Markets, Money and Empire: The Political Economy of the Australian Wool Industry* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press: 1990), 160.

rape, greed, and unconcern, loomed large as a dust-storm.⁷⁶ Mudie attacked popular Australian nationalism that celebrated agriculturalists and pastoralists as pioneers; the title of 'Wool-Cheque' alone reveals his contempt for what he considered the economically-motivated nationalism that destroyed South Australian soil.

In 'Wool-Cheque', farmers have 'gold-blind, wool-blind, / hides-and-wheat-and-tallow blinded eyes', and are motivated purely by greed. Rather than the crux of Australian national wealth, agriculturalists and pastoralists are avaricious and destructive. Mudie's hostility toward farmers and farming practices is even more direct in 'Retreat of a Pioneer', a poem that also appeared in the 1940 collection *Corroboree to the Sun*. It is worth quoting the whole of the short poem here:

Vacant he sits, sucking his yellowed teeth;
hostile to change, sprawling uneasy feet
that bullock-dray and shuffling camel knew.
Half-blind from sand; the tribes he stole from, dead;
the land he raped made barren as his mind.⁷⁷

Characterising the pioneer's mind as 'vacant' and 'barren' at once engages in hostility toward farmers and emphasises the damage done to the land. What is perhaps most striking about the poem is Mudie's use of the word pioneer in the title. Mudie directly challenges the accepted usage of the word, which typically brimmed with positive nationalist connotations. Instead greed and violence become the central themes of white pioneering and settlement. This emphasis enabled Mudie to problematise popular national narratives that celebrated the relationship between the farmer and the land; in this sense both 'Wool-Cheque' and 'Retreat of a Pioneer' can be considered anti-pastoral poems, and demonstrate Mudie's significant distance from traditional German notions of blood and soil.

'Wool-Cheque' and 'Retreat of a Pioneer' challenge the notion of a peaceful and prosperous Arcadia in rural South Australia, and expose the violent relationship between the land and white settlers. William Lines argues that art depicting 'subdued landscapes and the absence of conflict in the scenes of gum trees, sunny pastoral panoramas with winding rivers, green pastures and mountain backgrounds' suited the conservatism of Australia in the 1920s, 'which sought to minimise dissension and impose a view of the colonisation of Australia as an unqualified success.'⁷⁸ Further, Jeanette Hoorn, in her study of Australian pastoral painting, argues that 'conflict and violence were unrepresentable under the dictates of decorum and it was the role of the painter of pastoral landscapes to efface this other, darker side in celebratory, decorous images.'⁷⁹ Though Hoorn is specifically referring to the effacement of actual frontier violence between the colonisers and colonised Indigenous populations, that Mudie emphasised the violent nature of European settlement can still be considered an intentional, oppositional violation of the 'decorum' of the pastoral mode. Mudie positioned his poetry in opposition to other literature that idealised the white

⁷⁶ Ian Mudie, 'Prelude to the next ten years', 64.

⁷⁷ Ian Mudie, 'Retreat of a Pioneer' in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 18.

⁷⁸ Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, 185.

⁷⁹ Jeanette Hoorn, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2007), 10-11.

Australian presence in bush and pastoral settings, exemplified by much of the *Bulletin* poetry of the 1890s. In a youthful treatise on the political potential of poetry, Mudie had argued that poetry should be used to reveal 'our faults and ugliness through the burning glass which only poetry can hold to life.'⁸⁰ In his anti-pastoral poetry Mudie presented the Aboriginal relationship to place as a point of contrast to this 'ugliness.'

In the 1938 Jindyworobak manifesto *Conditional Culture*, Ingamells argued that Australian Indigenous culture was 'closely bound in every way with their environment'⁸¹ and believed that 'from aboriginal legend, sublimated through our thought, we must achieve something of a pristine outlook on life.'⁸² Mudie held similar ideas, at least from February 1938 when he published a suite of poems in the *Publicist* that explored the history, mythology and, in a limited way, language, of the South Australian Kurna people.⁸³ Mudie imagined that a genuine sense of belonging in the Australian landscape would transform white Australians into 'new Kurna-men.'⁸⁴ In 1941, after he had officially aligned himself with Jindyworobak, Mudie made his views on the value of Aboriginal Australia more explicit. In a short prose article that appeared in *Cultural Cross-Section*, Mudie contended 'isn't it about time that we woke up to the boundless gain we may find in the study of the culture of a people that over umpteenth-thousand-years-and-fifty-three adjusted themselves perfectly to their environment.'⁸⁵ Mudie expressed this 'perfect' Indigenous relationship with environment poetically:

The great land
slept,
with its dark sons and daughters well content
to leave its soil unraped, and worship it
as mother-goddess of their hero-gods.⁸⁶

This characterisation of the Indigenous population as 'content' serves as a contrast to the gluttony and destructiveness Mudie ascribed to white Australian society.

Mudie imbued the Indigenous Australian environment with a sense of natural order, one that was missing from noisy, dirty and morally degenerate urban society. In 'Wool-Cheque', Mudie inverts the usual imagining of white man as order and nature as wild. When the land is cleared, and sheep and rabbits eat the remaining shrubs, floodwaters are 'free, to rush in frothy licence down the hills', sweeping away precious soil.⁸⁷ Here it is the natural order which has been disrupted by white inhabitants. Further, in 'Moana Increase-Site' (1940) a 'line of increase stones' arranged by the Indigenous inhabitants once held meaning, but that meaning is now 'muddled' amidst the chaos of white settlement:

⁸⁰ Ian Mudie, *The Case For Poetry*, c.1932, PRG 27/32/3, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide, 32.

⁸¹ Ingamells, *Conditional Culture*, 17.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1

⁸³ The Kurna people traditionally lived in the Adelaide plains area, from Cape Jervis in the south to Crystal Brook in the north, and bounded to the east by the Mount Lofty Ranges.

⁸⁴ Ian Mudie, 'New Kurna Men', *The Publicist*, no. 20 (1938): 11.

⁸⁵ Ian Mudie, 'Politics and Aboriginal Culture', in John Ingamells (ed.), *Cultural Cross-Section*, pp. 27-30 (Adelaide: Jindyworobak, 1941), 27.

⁸⁶ Mudie, 'The Australian Dream', 13.

⁸⁷ Ian Mudie, 'Wool-Cheque', 13.

litter, litter, litter, old tins
and broken beer bottles, a wood spade,
where once was order.⁸⁸

Cattle, campers and litter, including 'yesterday's tomato-sandwich-stained / dull news of Europe's dull hysteria', have destroyed the environmental/Indigenous balance. However, Mudie believed that white Australia might yet absorb an Aboriginal outlook that would provide environmental and cultural balance for modern, urban society.

In 'Growth' (1940) the speaker grew 'from this earth, this air, / these few remaining trees.'⁸⁹ As a result of this earthy connection, the speaker is able to locate a sense of Indigenous spirituality despite no actual relationship with any of the 'vanished people':

There was none to tell me
The stories of this earth, nor tell the names of the sacred places, but,
Unknowingly, I found the camp-sites and the sacred places . . .⁹⁰

Here the Indigenous people and the environment are inextricably linked, and have the ability to shape the new inhabitants of the land. Mudie imagined that white Australians could be 'one / with the dark warriors and the lubras', and have a legitimate claim to leading a 'resurgence' of true Australianness, creating 'continuity' between black and white Australia.⁹¹ Like many fellow Jindyworobaks, Mudie did not advocate the actual adoption of Indigenous cultural practices or religion, but believed Australian 'writers and painters must become hard-working students of aboriginal culture' in order to inspire spiritual appreciation for the Australian environment in the broader population.⁹² Mudie claimed that white Australians had a lesson to learn from the original inhabitants, 'that of adapting our culture to our environment.'⁹³ Lawrence Buell argues that such appropriation of Indigenous cultures is not uncommon in settler societies:

the art of bringing to full personal consciousness and articulating a sense of place is arduous, and for new world settler cultures especially so, given the relative shortness of their history in place. These cultures face the uphill battle of jump-starting the invention of place-sense by superimposing imported traditions and jerry-building new ones – Anglo-American wholesale borrowings and fabrications of Indian stories being a conspicuous example of this kind.⁹⁴

In a similar way, Mudie imagined a harmonious relationship with the environment, modelled on what he assumed about the Aboriginal relationship to place, as fundamental to the formation of a 'true', and importantly white, Australian nation.

⁸⁸ Ian Mudie, 'Moana Increase-Site' in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 5.

⁸⁹ Ian Mudie, 'Growth' in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ian Mudie, 'Continuity' in *Corroboree to the Sun*, 32.

⁹² Ingamells, *Conditional Culture*, 17.

⁹³ Ian Mudie, 'New Australian Voices.'

⁹⁴ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 257.

To us, Mudie and Stephensen's Nazi-inspired racism combined with an admiration for Aboriginal Australia may seem irreconcilable interests. Stephensen rationalised this combination with the argument that 'the Aborigines are the oldest Aryans on earth, and in my opinion the Aryan Race originated here, immigrated to India, then to Europe via Persia and the Caucasus – this means that Australia is verily our Home.'⁹⁵ It is unclear whether Mudie endorsed this rather bizarre racial theory. Alternatively, Mudie's belief that the Australian Aboriginal population was 'dying' perhaps enabled him to avoid the contradictions in his racial ideas.

The conviction that the Australian Aboriginal population was a 'dying race' was common in early-twentieth century Australia, exemplified by this excerpt from a 1936 article that appeared in the *Adelaide Mail*:

today a few scattered remnants of a dying race are left as a ghostly monument to the legion that has passed. When another hundred years have passed, the only record of the black man is likely to be in museums and in distorted place names.⁹⁶

In 1938, the same year as Mudie's Kurna suite appeared in the *Publicist*, anthropologist Daisy Bates further popularised the notion of the dying race in her book *The Passing of the Aborigines*. Bates characterised her work among Indigenous groups in remote areas of Western Australia and South Australia as 'easing their inevitable passing.'⁹⁷ This sort of attitude is evident in the specific case of the Kurna; as early as 1879 they had been declared 'Extinct.'⁹⁸ Mudie believed the Indigenous population to be in decline, and his poetry almost always presented the Aboriginal population as dead or dying. In 'Museum' the Kurna are already gone, 'across their graves/bitumen lays a seal', their skulls are now mere curiosities to be displayed in a museum behind 'cleaned and polished' glass.⁹⁹ In 'New Kurna-Men' the Kurna 'died and were buried' within 'half a life-span' as a result of white settlement of the Adelaide region.¹⁰⁰ According to Mudie, Aboriginal and white Australia would not coexist for long; what would soon develop was a 'white dream-time.'¹⁰¹ He believed that a mental and cultural shift in white Australia's environmental imagination would be progressive and inevitable, shaped by prolonged residency in the Australian environment, a place permeated with the culture of dead Aboriginal tribes.

Bird argues that figures such as Stephensen and Mudie demonstrate that 'it was possible in Australia in the late thirties to be a *quasi*-Nazi dreamer utilizing aboriginal symbols and concepts in the service of 'blood and soil', as well as an advocate of a new society based on 'Aryan' racial purity.'¹⁰² Though Bird is not altogether incorrect, I would like to emphasise

⁹⁵ Stephensen to Mudie, 16 July 1941, PRG 27/1/1941, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

⁹⁶ 'The passing of the Aborigine since the settlement of the State', *Mail*, 21 March, 1936.

⁹⁷ Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime spent among the Natives of Australia* (Heinemann: Melbourne, 1966, originally pub. 1938), 237.

⁹⁸ J.D. Woods, 'Introduction', in George Taplin (ed.), *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, pp. vii-xxxviii (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg & Son, 1879), ix.

⁹⁹ Ian Mudie, 'Museum', *The Publicist*, no. 20 (1938): 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Mudie, 'New Kurna Men', *The Publicist*, no. 20 (1938): 11.

¹⁰¹ Mudie, 'Prelude to the next ten years', 65.

¹⁰² Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 166.

that Mudie's poetry was unmistakably the product of a settler imagination, rather than the regurgitation of Nazi ideology in the antipodes. Historian Graeme Davison argues that Australian nationalists of this period either celebrated Australia's 'newness' as an opportunity for cultural revitalisation away from Europe or 'yearned for a deep or primordial connection to their land.'¹⁰³ Mudie did both. He celebrated white residency in the largely unspoilt Australian landscape as an opportunity for racial renewal away from the degeneracy and violence of the Old World, but was also determined to forge historical 'bonds of sentiment' with the land, particularly by drawing on Aboriginal culture.¹⁰⁴ Mudie's settler mentality complicates any simple comparisons to Nazi blood and soil ideology. I want to revive 'racy of the soil' as a related, and more appropriate, phrase to apply to Mudie's work. This phrase better captures Mudie's racially-charged nationalism and neatly connects it with his interest in soil erosion, without over-emphasising the influence of Nazi ideology.

Racy of the soil

Now obscure, 'racy of the soil' was a phrase used to describe someone or something celebratory of places, people and characteristics considered typically Australian. For example, in 1933 author Arthur W. Upfield's stories were described as 'racy of the soil' because the 'thrilling' tales were:

true to the Australian ideal in describing the bush, and the plain, rivers, the sport of drought, the hardy men of the saddle, the rough pioneering ways, and with a glimpse of the bush children of Australia, the aboriginals.¹⁰⁵

In the poetry of Joseph Furphy, Bernard O'Dowd saw the foundations of an Australian literature that could be 'racy of her soil and conscious of her destiny.'¹⁰⁶ Additionally, 'Australianities: Topics Racy of the Soil' was a weekly column that appeared for a period of six months in 1938 in the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, and included short stories, poetry and bush sketches.¹⁰⁷ Thinking through Mudie's poetry using the phrase 'racy of the soil' helps us to see his work in a longer tradition of Australian landscape writing and alongside the nationalist literature produced by many of his contemporaries.

Historians of the Australian literary community recognise that there were a range of literary and political responses to the international crises that have come to define the interwar years. David Carter argues that there were four main 'possible modes of relating Australian literary space to world literary space' in this period; his category of 'modernising nationalism' is most relevant here. According to Carter, modernising nationalists 'inherited the organic metaphors of nineteenth-century nationalism' but 'their project was defined by a distinctively modern sense of social crisis'.¹⁰⁸ Using slightly different language, Robert Dixon and Drusilla Modjeska identify the same impulse among many in the Australian

¹⁰³ Graham Davison, 'Rethinking the Australian Legend', *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012): 436.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ 'Barrakee Mystery – Forward,' *Advocate*, 8 April, 1933.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard O'Dowd, 'Preface', in Kate Baker (ed.), *The Poems of Joseph Furphy*, pp. 1-2 (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Will Carter, 'Australianities: Topics Racy of the Soil', *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 7 Oct., 1938.

¹⁰⁸ David Carter, 'Modernising Anglocentrism: *Desiderata* and Literary Time', in Peter Kirkpatrick and Robert Dixon (eds.), *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia*, pp. 85-98 (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2012), 90-91.

literary community.¹⁰⁹ Modjeska argues that the dominant literary group, spearheaded by the influential Palmers, married an emphasis on cultural nationalism with a need for progressive social reform.¹¹⁰ Following Dixon and Modjeska, I will use the term 'cultural nationalists' to identify the group of Australian nationalist writers that revolved around Nettie Palmer and the increasingly politicised Federation of Australian Writers (FAW).

Art historian Richard Haese rightly takes issue with the way divisions between writers and artists in this period have often been characterised in terms of 'internationalists' and 'Australianists'.¹¹¹ Cultural nationalists valued the development of an Australian national literature, but recognised that this literature was intimately influenced by world events. Despite a reputation for parochial nationalism the Australian literary community of the 1930s and 1940s was in constant dialogue with, and even preoccupied by, compounding global crises. All cultural nationalists, to varying degrees, were concerned with both the national and the international. They could take an interest in political doctrines emanating from Europe, and remain committed Australian nationalists. Both Stephensen and Mudie fit into the imprecise, but useful, cultural nationalist category.

Bird acknowledges that Stephensen's 'avowed intention to foster the development of Australian culture – his cultural nationalism', rather than his interest in Nazi ideology, was what primarily attracted prominent literary followers like Miles Franklin, Xavier Herbert, Ingamells and Mudie.¹¹² Despite Stephensen's subsequent notoriety as an alleged fascist and government internee for the majority of World War Two, Munro argues that Stephensen was first and foremost a literary man and an intellectual, an accurately self-proclaimed 'man of letters'.¹¹³ The historical and cultural significance of Stephensen's *Foundations* has been noted by many; John Barnes describes *Foundations* as 'probably the most influential piece of critical writing in the period'¹¹⁴ and Stephen Cowden believes it to be 'one of the most interesting documents on the state of cultural politics in Australia in the interwar period'.¹¹⁵ In a period of world-wide political and cultural anxiety, *Foundations* offered cultural nationalism to Australian writers as a way to demonstrate their uniqueness and distance themselves from the 'barbarous and sub-civilised Europe'.¹¹⁶ That Mudie found Stephensen's ideas so appealing is not surprising considering the similarly enthusiastic response from many other Australian writers and critics; *Foundations* received praise from respected Australian literary figures such as W.M. Hughes, Nettie Palmer, Mary Gilmore,

¹⁰⁹ Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*, (Sydney: HaperCollins, 2014, originally pub. 1981), 8-9; Robert Dixon: 'Australian fiction and the world republic of letters, 1890-1950', in Peter Peirce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, pp. 223-54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 237; Robert Dixon, 'Home or Away? The Trope of Place in Australian Literary Criticism and Literary History', *Westerly* 54, no. 01 (2009): 12.

¹¹⁰ Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, 8-9.

¹¹¹ Richard Haese. *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), 94.

¹¹² Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 172.

¹¹³ Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, 3.

¹¹⁴ John Barnes, *The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), 165.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Cowen, 'Shaky Foundations', *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature* 14, no. 1 (2000): 65.

¹¹⁶ Stephensen, *Foundations*, 162.

Xavier Herbert and Miles Franklin.¹¹⁷ Rather than simply a ‘follower’ of Stephensen’s right-wing politics, Mudie was one of many writers, at least in the mid to late 1930s, who sought to carve out a position in the Australia literary community with reference to Stephensen’s ideas. In fact, once Mudie harnessed the nationalism offered by Stephensen and synthesised it with a sense of environmental concern, he found a firmer foothold within the Australian literary community and contemporary cultural and political debates.

Mudie was not paid for his *Publicist* contributions but regular publication boosted his profile in a literary marketplace within which, according to Mudie, it was difficult to make a name.¹¹⁸ Though the circulation of the *Publicist* was very limited, being associated with the increasingly infamous political magazine garnered Mudie some attention.¹¹⁹ Prominent Australian literary critic A.D. Hope, in his 1941 review of several Jindyworobak books, clearly alluded to Mudie’s political connections when he described Mudie’s poetry as having ‘traces of the fanaticism of the Hitler Youth Movement.’¹²⁰ Retrospectively, Mudie remembered that such critical attacks had the power to ‘bring your name before people...it was wonderful, people talking about [Mudie’s poetry] everywhere.’¹²¹ Mudie revelled in this sort of attention, which helped him to find more regular publication in a range of politically moderate Australian journals and little magazines, including *SALT*, *Poetry*, *Meanjin* and *Southerly*.¹²² That Mudie found greater publication success as his relationship with Stephensen developed suggests that, though occasionally extreme, his political poetry resonated with many in the Australian literary community. In fact, his close friend Miles Franklin remained a great supporter of his ‘racy of the soil’ poetry, despite her reservations about the potentially ‘suppressive or retrogressive politics’ of Stephensen.¹²³

In 1944 Franklin saw ‘The Enemy Within’, a newsreel produced by Cinesound in conjunction with the New South Wales Soil Conservation Service focusing on the ravages of soil erosion in Australia.¹²⁴ In correspondence with Mudie she explained:

Cinesound gave a review of the Mallee desert – worse than the dust bowl in America . . . A person with your poetic powers shd [sic] not miss it. You should be sent by aeroplane to see the film at nearest town or better to the Mallee so you could Boanerge in a grand tragic poem about it.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, 159 & 166-169.

¹¹⁸ Mudie, Interview.

¹¹⁹ David Bird estimates that, at most, 3000 copies of the *Publicist* were sold per month. Bird, *Nazi Dreamtime*, 54.

¹²⁰ A.D. Hope, ‘Culture Corroboree’, *Southerly* 2, no. 3 (1941): 31.

¹²¹ Mudie, Interview.

¹²² In the six years prior to the publication of his first *Publicist* contribution ‘South Australian Spring’, Mudie had only managed to get five poems published. In the six years following, he was able to get at least 29 poems published in magazines and journals, not including those that appeared in the *Publicist* itself, or the *Jindyworobak Anthologies*. These numbers are compiled from Jennifer Tonkin and Jennifer Van Wageningen, *Ian Mudie: A Bibliography* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1970), 2-30.

¹²³ Miles Franklin to Ian Mudie, 21 April 1942, PRG 27/1/1940, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

¹²⁴ *The Enemy Within: Soil Erosion* (Australia: Cinesound, 1942), filmstrip, 5:25 min. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

¹²⁵ Miles Franklin to Ian Mudie, 26 Nov., 1944, PRG 27/9/1, Mudie Papers, SLSA, Adelaide.

Franklin may have been joking. Though she did believe strongly in the social importance of the poet, and found Mudie's nationalistic poetry 'intoxicating', so it is also possible that she truly felt that Mudie should have been sent to the Mallee by the government in some sort of official capacity.¹²⁶ In a period when conservation was dominated by government agencies and scientific expertise it is hardly surprising that Mudie was not sent to lyrically record the demise of the Australian soil. However, as an unofficial preacher of the dangers of soil erosion, Mudie reveals that this governmental control did not suppress literary engagement with the issue. Through his poetry, Mudie offered a race-based soil/growth metaphor as an alternative to a national identity centred on economic prosperity, and marshalled soil erosion science in aid of the range of increasingly extreme political views he took up, inspired by Stephensen.

Historian Andrea Gaynor, in her article on the connections between right-wing politics and the organic gardening movement in Australia, rightly concludes that "points of contact' between neo-romantic movements and fascist politics were evident in Australia . . . but were nowhere near as extensive and well-developed as in Nazi Germany."¹²⁷ Mudie and Stephensen were certainly one such point of contact. However, rather than simply an antipodean instance of Nazi 'blood and soil' ideology, Mudie's fusion of right-wing politics, environmental concern, scientific language, and imitative Indigenous mythology reveals his Australian cultural nationalism, and a distinctive settler imagination.

Mudie was convinced that poetry could be profoundly political, with the potential to affect change in the reader and the wider population.¹²⁸ Realistically Mudie's poetry, in a literary era dominated by novelists, made a relatively minor political impression. Yet, his poetry demonstrates Gaynor's argument that 'soil was both the dominant environmental problem of the day and an important contemporary point of connection between scientific and social discourses.'¹²⁹ For Mudie, soil had an earthy actuality as well as important metaphoric potential; harnessing both enabled him to capture the intersection of politics, culture, and science around the particularly salient environmental issue of soil erosion. At the heart of Mudie's 'racy of the soil' poetry is the synthesis of two distinctly modern phenomena: the appeal of extreme political doctrines in a period when the Western world seemed on the brink of political collapse *and* increasing scientific and cultural engagement with the idea of a looming environmental crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Australian Historical Association and the Copyright Agency for the opportunity to attend their 2015 academic workshop and mentoring scheme. Through this programme I was given the opportunity to work closely with Dr Emily O'Gorman, her generous advice improved this essay enormously. This essay also benefited from thoughtful feedback from Professor Nicholas Brown, Professor Tom Griffiths, and Dr Julieanne Lammond, as well as two anonymous reviewers.

¹²⁶ Miles Franklin to Ian Mudie, 20 July, 1941, PRG 27/9/1, Mudie Papers, SLISA, Adelaide.

¹²⁷ Gaynor, 'Antipodean Eco-nazis?', 256.

¹²⁸ Ian Mudie, *The Case For Poetry*, c.1932, PRG 27/32/3, Mudie Papers, SLISA, Adelaide, 32.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.