



## **Eric Rolls and Environmentalism in Australia**

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### **Abstract**

The discourse of environmentalism now cuts across several disciplinary fields of studies. The scope of environmentalism has widened to such an extent that it is no longer a local or national phenomenon involving a particular group or community but a global and international issue ridden with crises that often touch upon common lives. In Australia the role of man in shaping the natural environment and vice-versa has been extremely important since the time of human settlement and more so after it was settled by the Europeans. Although it is customary to trace the origins of environmentalism to the rise of green movements in North America in the 1950s and 60s, in Australia too much has been written from the perspective of an environmentalist. Environment now comes up as a top priority issue in policy making and planning. Simultaneously, the cultural and literary output that deals with environment has also grown significantly. This paper will look into one of Australia's most well-known writer in this evolving field of environmental discourses and try to analyze his contribution as an environmentalist. Eric Rolls (1923 – 2007) stands out as an important figure in the field of literary and environmental activism in Australia. His works can be best appreciated from the perspective of a living and growing tradition of writing in Australia which overlaps the fields of literature, environmental history and cultural ecology. The issues of resource use and settlement are fundamental to the understanding of Australian nature writing and the importance of Eric Rolls in this context needs to be emphasized. Through his writings on the evolution and formation of Australian wildlife and vegetation after the settlement by the whites, he provided rich commentary on the early colonial attitudes to the continent. The history of environmentalism is a combination of individual and collective activism expressed through cultural, social and political movements. Eric Rolls was not part of any organized environmental campaign. But his writings give us an important insight into the intellectual aspect of environmentalism in Australia. By looking at a few of Rolls's works this paper will look to understand the multidisciplinary discourse of environmentalism in Australia. It will also make a modest attempt to position Rolls in a dynamic and shifting scenario of environmental change and contextualize his views and observations.

### **Keywords**

environmentalism, Eric Rolls, Australia, activism

This paper aims to address two sets of queries: on a more general level it looks to explore a broader and relatively general issue of the interaction between literary activism and environmentalism; on a more particular and specific level it sets out to appraise the writings of Eric Charles Rolls (1923–2007) as a participatory dialogue in the discourse of environmentalism in Australia. The primary issue needs to be clarified in a broader historical context. Many mass movements in human history have been significantly enriched and empowered by literary writings, political treatise, pamphlets, lectures, and so on<sup>i</sup>. The relationship between writing and activism is therefore not a novel phenomenon; nor are the two mutually exclusive in their domains. Emancipatory movements have frequently benefitted from intellectual discourse either as an instrument of empowerment or as a medium for voicing protests. Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the most important voices of African American critical theory argues that the very act of writing is an essentially enabling act: “The act of writing . . . was no idle matter; it represented a profound definition and defense of the critical self. In an act of self-defense, the writer asserts the integrity of the self through the device of displacement” (Gates Jr., 1984, 2). Other movements of protests against discrimination and for emancipation have consistently produced literatures that have helped people to fight for their rights. Whether it is gender, race, caste, civil rights, political rights, land rights, social movements have always had a close and symbiotic relationship with writing. When it comes to the environment, the scenario becomes a little complex. Most other mass movements try to assert rights of human beings and therefore address the issues of identity, difference and representation as categories of primary contention. But in case of environmental movements it is almost always that the activist fights or writes for the cause of a non-human world although the interests of human communities may often be closely related to them. Whether it was in the creation of the world’s first national park in Yellowstone in 1872 or the sustained campaigns of people like Myles Dumphy<sup>ii</sup> for the conservation of the Blue Mountains forest, or the Chipko<sup>iii</sup> movement and the Narmada Bachao<sup>iv</sup> (save the river Narmada) movement in India, or the campaigns of Dai Qing<sup>v</sup> to protest the construction of the three gorges dam in China or the activism of Jose Lutzemberger<sup>vi</sup> in Brazil, there has been a persistent intellectual involvement from writers and activists. The contours of the history of the relationship between environmental activism and literary writing have to be mapped with significant emphasis before exploring the distinctly Australian characteristics of that relation. Most scholars prefer to look at the rise of organized environmental protest movements from the 1960s. Several important works began to come out particularly in the USA which prioritized wilderness values. Roderick F Nash’s

(Nash, 2001) classic study of the wilderness ethos and its role in the American conservation movement still remains a landmark text. So does Rachel Carson's (Carson, 2000) groundbreaking study of the disastrous effects of the use of chemical pesticides and Aldo Leopold's *land ethic*. M Zimmerman, in a serious study of radical environmentalism sees the development of green philosophies and movements as part of a wider counterculture movement in North America. Arguing in favour of a close affinity between ecological movements and other countercultures particularly in the USA, Zimmerman seeks to establish the interrelatedness of ecofeminism, social and deep ecology with the postmodern agenda as a whole which challenges the erstwhile grand-narratives of modernism. Of the other American environmentalists<sup>vii</sup> who were strong proponents of the conservation of wilderness also wrote extensively on the importance of preservation of natural environment for its own sake. Even though scholars<sup>viii</sup> include people like John James Audubon (1785-1851), George Perkins Marsh (1801-1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) as significant contributors to the growth of the conservation movement and green consciousness in America, the rise of organized and collective social movement is considered to have begun during the 1960s. At least two directions in which the environmentalism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century progressed were noticeable. One, the conservation of wilderness for its own values and based on an ethical rather than economic value, two, the conservation of natural resources for their commercial value. This debate is often symbolized by the names of two conservationists who took the two sides – namely John Muir who stood for the first cause and G. Pinchot, who stood for the second<sup>ix</sup>. How did the green movement gain importance in America in the 60s and 70s and then move on to become a global concern in the next few decades? Nash argues that the preoccupation with wilderness alongside environment and ecology grew out of a “counterculture”, as a criticism of American culture itself. Wilderness was seen as an “antipode of civilization”:

. . . the American fascination with wilderness was gaining momentum. Pushing it were broad changes in American values and priorities that we know as 1960s environmentalism, the ecological perspective and the counterculture. Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, Aldo Lepold's *A Sand County Almanac*...became a best seller, and Bob Dylan sang about changing times. The Wilderness Act became law in 1964. .... The biggest preservation fight of the century was shaping over the proposal to dam the Grand Canyon. Suddenly it seemed that wilderness was “relevant”. (Nash, 2001, vii)

Recent scholarship has however traced the origins of environmentalism outside the arena of organized mass movements to include a wide range of writing dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Drew & Connors, 1999) (Guha, 2009) (Guha, 2006) (Alier, 2002). With the rise of postcolonial critical theory, the need to reconstruct and reorient the grand-narratives of history was felt at various levels and environment gathered importance as a piece in a much wider jigsaw puzzle.

Just as post modern and postcolonial interventions are making the environment relevant often by appropriating them, environmental movements too, have not developed in isolation; they have been shaped by political, cultural, economic and geographical factors. The site of environmental protest movement therefore also becomes the site of ideological and cultural interaction. The rise of the deep ecology movement, social ecology, ecofeminism, conservation biology, pollution studies, population studies have all contributed towards promoting an ecocentric consciousness. Writers from diverse fields have protested against the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. The impact of such a dynamic and multi-perspectival approach to environmental writing has been manifested in the sheer volume and variety of literatures that have environment at its centre.

The term literary environmentalism is often used to imply literary writings which play a significant role in engendering ecological consciousness or awareness. I wish to use the term in a broader sense to include not only literary types but also other forms of writing like environmental history, travel-journals and personal memoirs that have a recognizable impact in creating environmental consciousness. In Australia the history of literary activism in general has not followed a linear pathway of protest nor has it been wholly successful in leaving lasting footprints for successive generations to trace. The literary writer's role as a public intellectual in Australia is conditioned by complex factors. Brigid Rooney (Rooney, 2009) raises a few pertinent questions about the role of the writer as a public intellectual in general. "What motivates writers to function as public intellectuals? How do writer's public interventions impact on their careers or reputations? How should we interpret their representations, and their writings, in this light?" (Rooney 2009, xxii). Given that the intellectual and the activist form "mutually exclusive categories" (Rooney 2009, xxii), she argues that "some writers are better described as intellectuals, and others better described as activists in their mode of public intervention. More often, however these categories overlap and intersect" (Rooney 2009, xxii). In her consideration of how literary writing becomes part of public life in Australia, Rooney explores some central critical conditions on which the

identity of the writer-intellectual is contingent: “The contradictory role of writers, especially of those who seek to distance themselves from market forces even as they anticipate, write for and address their readerships, is only heightened and exacerbated in Australia with its colonial history, its long standing cultural insecurity and its relatively small population” (Rooney, 2009, xxvii). Tim Bonyhady argues that even for Judith Wright, one of Australia’s “great artist activists”, the label ‘activist’ could not be applied for “historical” reasons:

When ‘activism’ emerged as a term in the early 1900s, it was used either to identify a brand of philosophy – a theory that assumed the objective reality and active existence of everything – or to describe any form of energetic action. It was only later . . . perhaps only in the 1960s, that it became a term for a form of political activity, almost always on the left, dissenting, the stuff of the fervent minority, starting it seems with union activists and anti-war activists, and followed only later by environmental activists, Aboriginal activists and even judicial activists. (Bonyhady, *Torn Between Art and Activism*, 2007, 19)

According to Bonyhady, becoming an activist “requires more direct social and political engagement” (Bonyhady, *Torn Between Art and Activism*, 2007, 20). John Kinsella (Kinsella, 2010), one of Australia’s more articulate poet-activists, is categorical about the role of the artist (poet) as activist: “‘Environmentalism’, for want of a better word, is what I do in life and in my writing. ... Rarely does one write a poem about pure anything, but ultimately, though not exclusively I try to keep the balancing in favour of the open ended lyric rather than the propagandist rhetoric” (Kinsella, 2010, 1).

Judith Wright in her essay “The Writer as Activist” argues that “partisan and activist art has been excluded from our canons. Yet it has a long and honourable history and present” (Wright 132). Wright is critical of the fact that dissident voices in Australia have by and large remained aloof from canonical discourses. Historians are generally dismissive of the scope and impact of environmental awareness campaigns which were active in Australia since the time of the European settlement (Drew & Connors, 1999). Stuart Macintyre sees the rise of environmentalism as a phenomenon of the 1970s and he argues that the reason for the rise of this “new voice” (Macintyre 2006, 278) of environmentalists was a need to put control over unmonitored immigration.

The rise of environmental movement in Australia may be seen as a later development but the role of writers in creating a public awareness about the natural world has a fairly long tradition. At least two trends are traceable. One, the tradition of literary environmentalism which cuts across several forms of literary writing including poems, fiction, memoirs and essays, and second, the rise of environmental history in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Naturewriting was a part of a larger attempt at creating awareness about an unfamiliar natural world. The beginnings of Australian nature writing in English could be traced to the early “bushwalkers” (Harper, 2008) who were highly enthusiastic about documenting the brown open country for their fellow Europeans at the continental mainland. Driven by an exploratory and antiquarian zeal, the white settler made frequent rambles into the Australian mainland since the early decades of settlement. Tom Griffiths (Griffiths, 1996) argues that much of early Australian nature writing was “haunted” by a sense of “migrant nostalgia” (Griffiths 1996, 3), dispossession, hostility and tension. Griffiths argues that the white Australian response to nature was directly and sub-consciously shaped by a desire for the “emotional possession of the land” (Griffiths 1996, 4): “These historians, nature writers, antiquarians and urban progressives who influenced popular attitudes to nature and the past in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tried to confront and overturn the melancholic strain of the local environmental and historical imagination. In doing so they had to conflate a narrative of avoidance, one that curiously conflated a vision of pastoral peace and anticipation of war” (Griffiths, 1996, 5). This view, suggested by Griffiths, imparts vital importance to early Australian nature writing. By constructing a narrative of the natural environment from a subject position conditioned by wonder, distance, violence, antiquarianism, exploratory zeal, and progressivist ethics, the early writers were engaged in a conflictual relation to the landscape. They could neither do away with their colonial notions of landscape and nature nor could they fully assimilate the new environment as part of their emerging literary culture. In an illuminating study of the development of the culture of bushwalking, Melissa Harper (Harper 2008) argues that while finding new land for production was the obvious reason for most walking expeditions, many white Australian walkers were also inspired by the aesthetic appeal of the wilderness which was part of the English Romantic movement. Usually regarded as the “early heroes of the conservation movement” (Harper, 2008, xi), the likes of Fred Eden, George Morrison, Alexander Sutherland, Percy Grainger, William Hamlet and Bill Waters (Harper, 2008), (Griffiths, 2001) were keen observers of the natural world and eager to share their thoughts with the public. Even John Monash<sup>x</sup> was an inveterate walker and climber. Many of these writers

maintained journals or diaries (Harper, 2008, p. xiii) but there was not much scope for publishing their experiences<sup>xi</sup>. For most walkers, a good way of interacting with the public and sharing their knowledge about the bush were walking clubs, nature study clubs, and ornithological societies. Between 1866 and 1914 several societies were established across Australia, which campaigned for preservation of natural species. Some of the most well known clubs were The Field Naturalists' Club in Victoria (1880), Tasmanian Ornithological Society (1888), South Australia Ornithological Society (1899), Wallaby club in Melbourne (1894), the Warragamba walking club in Sydney (1895) and Wildlife Preservation Society in NSW (1909). During this time international influences seem to be operating on Australian activists as well. In Queensland for example, R M Collins who was inspired by the Yellowstone National Park during his visit to the US and Romeo Lahey lobbied relentlessly and Lamington National Park was established in 1915. About half a century earlier, the publication of G P Marsh's *Man and Nature* (Marsh, 1864) in the USA also proved influential among Australian conservation enthusiasts (Drew & Connors, 1999, 51). The laying of railway tracks along with a growing interest in life as a bushwalker contributed to the rise of tourism (Horne, 2005) (Harper, 2008) (Griffiths, 2001). More and more Australians (and foreigners) began to venture into the newly developed tourist destinations like the Blue Mountains, Mt. Kosciusko and Southern Highlands in New South Wales, Mount Wellington, Lake District and Hartz Mountain in Tasmania, Mt. Buffalo in Victoria and so on. Later a scientific interest in the natural world led many like John Gould<sup>xii</sup> Francis Ratcliffe<sup>xiii</sup>, and others to write extensively on the species of flora and fauna in Australia.

Eric Rolls spent his lifetime in recreating a vision of Australia which seemed to have been lost under a “permanent drab coat over its loveliness” (E. C. Rolls 2002, vii). Working for the most part outside the institutionalized academia, he pursued research as one who was deeply bonded with the land he grew up in. Often seen as a “farmer-poet”, Rolls's writing falls into two major groups. His literary writings consist of poems, memoirs and reflections on the Australian landscape while his non-fictional works include at least three seminal works of Australian environmental history (E. C. Rolls 1977) (E. C. Rolls 1981) (E. C. Rolls 2000). His other environmental writings are also informed with a deep sense of history in which he attains a fine balance between man and nature (E. C. Rolls 2000), (E. C. Rolls 1993) (E. C. Rolls 2002) Rolls also wrote extensively about the history of Australia's relation with the Chinese people (E. C. Rolls 1996). How do these writings contribute to environmental activism? Or, to reframe our question, in what sense is Eric Rolls an activist?

Not stereotyped as a public intellectual, Rolls was an insider for whom nature was not a distant utopia to be worshipped and adored, but a real, dynamic entity. It is therefore difficult to classify Rolls as a literary environmentalist alone. His environmentalism, being inspired by curiosity and interest, evolved through his poetry as well as his historical writing. His activism was never allied to a definite political agenda or a particular wave of social protest, but it permeated his thoughts as a farmer, as a poet, but most strongly as an environmental historian.

Slovic studies the tradition of American nature writing with Thoreau as a reference point and explores the psychological orientation Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry and Barry Lopez. Awareness according to Slovic is central to the writings of many American nature writers: “Most nature writers, from Thoreau to the present, walk a fine line . . . between rhapsody and detachment, between aesthetic celebration and scientific explanation. And the effort to achieve an equilibrium, a suitable balance of proximity to and distance from nature, results in the prized tension of awareness” (Slovic 1996, 353). Rolls is neither “rhapsodic” nor fully detached. Instead of celebrating an exclusionary view of nature which was the subject of American pastoralism, Rolls views the environment as dynamic and constantly engaged with human agency. Rolls’s approach to environment and nature is typically Australian. Compared to early American environmentalists who were proponents of a wilderness-aesthetics that relied heavily on a pre-discursive, cultural construct rather than a realistic space shared by humans and nature, Rolls was a pragmatic writer who saw the environment as a man-nature continuum. As a result he was free from the central paradox that influenced almost all of American environmental thinking. The champions of wilderness like Thoreau and Muir promoted a “rhetoric of retreat” (Garrard 2007, 66) in their celebration of the sublime. Later literary environmentalists like William Cronon and Lawrence Buell among others were critical of this view. For Cronon the idea of wilderness is pivoted on a “central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural” (Cronon 1995, 80). Alison Byerly also points out the same paradox in American wilderness thinking. “The aestheticization of landscape”, she argues, “removed it from the realm of nature and designated it a legitimate object of artistic consumption.” “The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity, yet, “wilderness” has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it. The paradox requires that we experience the wilderness without changing its status *as* wilderness. This can only be done by constructing an aesthetic image of the wilderness that allows us to avoid confronting its reality” (Byerly

1996, 53-4). For Lawrence Buell, nature has been “doubly otherized in modern thought. The natural environment as empirical reality has been made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women and children” (Buell 1995, 21). How does this debate affect the writings of Eric Rolls in particular and Australian literary environmentalism in general? I wish to situate Rolls within a revisionary discourse of environmentalism which began in Australia only in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century even though debates about the poverty of, and limits to, Australian natural resources began in the nineteenth century and have been energetically canvassed since the 1920s (Beinart and Hughes 2007, 99). The literary environmentalism of Rolls draws heavily on the idea that the Australian landscape was already shaped and modified by thousands of years of human activity on the Australian landmass before the Europeans actually settled it. His works therefore may be treated as a counter-narrative to the plethora of descriptions by early settlers who tried to portray the Australian landscape as fresh, uncontaminated and unsettled. Also for Rolls a central axiomatic premise was that the pre-colonial environment was neither static nor was it outside the scope of regular land management policies practiced by the aboriginal people. For Judith Wright, the question of environmental exploitation by the white settlers is inextricably linked with the usurpation of land rights of the Aboriginal people (Wright 1985). Other environmental historians (Griffiths and Robin 1997) (Bonyhady 2000), (Kohen 2003), (Gammage 2012), who concur with Rolls’s views take his argument further. Bill Gammage emphatically suggests the contribution of Rolls along with that of a few others when he says that the 1788 landscape was shaped through fires: “. . . Not until the 1960s did researchers begin to sense system and purpose in Aboriginal burning. Tim Flannery develops the idea with a sense of historical continuity. He argues that both the Aboriginal peoples as well as the white settlers were conditioned by the natural environment of Australia. Timothy Doyle argues that “the subjugation of the Aboriginal people was part of one of the earliest and most central environmental issues in white Australia” (Doyle and Kellow 1997, 2). Eric Rolls understood the centrality of the issue of subjugation of the Aboriginal people without committing himself to the dualism between whites and Aborigines (E. C. Rolls 1981). As an environmental historian Rolls seeks to build a fascinating picture of the past bit by bit, trying to fit in each appropriate element in a giant puzzle. In “The Nature of Australia” (E. C. Rolls 1997, 35-45) Rolls gives us an insight into Australia’s environmental history which posits the role of humans and particularly European settlers in a new light. For Rolls the first impressions of the Europeans reveal their admiration for Australia<sup>xiv</sup>. Unfortunately, he

argues “That attitude has been lost, clouded over by later literary assessments of men like the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, who was a bad observer, or Henry Lawson who was a brilliant short story writer but who saw the land through the eyes of settlers on insufficient areas of land, trying to make a go of it with money borrowed at 20 percent” (E. C. Rolls 1997, 39). Instead of getting himself preoccupied by the vicious binary between man and nature that so consistently shaped the views of early American environment writers, Rolls recognizes the importance of interconnectedness between human activity and environmental change. Even when he is critical of the policies and practices of the colonial government, he is never cynical about the future of environmentalism in Australia. Throughout his body of work there are ample instances of this balanced critical opinion which emanates out a deep and personal engagement with the natural environment of Australia. Rolls is always conscious of the fact that he was looking at a relatively young settler society which, for all its material goals, must not be “unfairly criticized” (Powell 1991, 231).

He is equally scathing in his critique of the “ugly word de-commercialization” which suggested the implied aim of the government to “control” rabbits, not to “eradicate” them (E. C. Rolls 1981, 112).

As a historian then, Rolls contributed to the discourse of environmentalism in Australia in a way which few others could do. Positioned outside the institutionalized centers of research (from which much of Australia’s environmental history has evolved), Rolls was truly what Stephen Dovers calls “a notable exception” (Dovers 1994, 7-8). The history that he wrote was guided by broad, simple aims. “Much of the game of writing history is keeping it true” – he says (E C Rolls 1981, 7). He draws heavily on official documents, newspaper reports, travel accounts, journals and even scientific observations to reconstruct the Australia he “did not see” (E. C. Rolls 2000, 1). But he was able to keep his inferences free from the privileging of scientific or any other particular form knowledge over other perceptions of the environment. That way he could practice a brand of environmental history which was free from the imperial legacy of ascribing a privileged position to “science, (especially agricultural science) in environmental policy” (Robin and Griffiths 2004, 451). Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths contend that in Australia and New Zealand this British legacy has influenced the environmental historiography. Rolls is wary of “too many environmental impact studies” that are “carried out by dubious scientists willing to substantiate whatever is desired of them” (E. C. Rolls 1981, 405). With a historian’s insight and a relentless pursuit of knowledge, Rolls combined a poet’s simplicity of expression and an artist’s sensibility. I look

to conclude this essay with a word on these qualities as they have been quite inseparable from the research he conducted.

Speaking of the poems of Les Murray, Jonathan Bate says “To interpose his antipodean voice into the English literary canon is to force awareness of biodiversity upon us: for a reader accustomed to Keats’s autumn or the shepherds’ calendars of Edmund Spenser and John Clare, it is a peculiar and peculiarly liberating experience to read ‘The Idyll Wheel: Cycle of a Year at Bunyah, New South Wales, April 1986 – April 1987’ and discover spring coming in September” (Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 2001). When Eric Rolls wrote his first published poem at the age of fifteen, “Australian poetry”, he recalls, “was then floundering out of the tedious embrace of English poetry” (Rolls E. 1990, 2). In the course of his career as a poet Rolls continued to write about the Australian nature with ecological accuracy and a real bonding with the places where he lived. In the preface to *The Green Mosaic*, a collection of poems which evolved out of his stay at Papua New Guinea he makes a very significant admission: “Most of the poems I have experienced; some I have been told about” (Rolls E. , 1977 v). As in the case of his prose, experience lies central to the craft of his poetry too. Bioregions with their plant and animal life are primary subjects of his poetry but they are refracted through the prism of his personal experiences. Places come alive through their sights and sounds, animals and plants, people and rituals. Butterflies, caterpillars, leeches and frogs share space with tree kangaroos, rats, water lizards, and birds of paradise. But every animal is represented with biological authenticity:

Length of body and length of snout suggest bandicoot

But bandicoots would be acting in the proper manner of bandicoots.

These are certainly rats acting like rats. (Rolls E. , 1977, 26)

The perception of place is planted into the fabric of poetry. Metaphors of place carry implications of similarity between a poem and a desert flower, both of which are capable of inspiring wonder:

A poem is an immaculate *setting* of exact words

But they are not arranged to a probable pattern.

A good poem is as startling as a desert flower – (Rolls E. 1977, 1)

In a poem titled “Mosaic” the pattern of a region is compared to an endless mosaic of tiles fitting into perfect alignment. Rolls points out how appearance of places can be illusory to the

human eye and links up that illusion with a questioning of our established and normative patterns of behaviour.

The whole pattern is no pattern at all:  
There are beginnings but no endings.  
Tile fits tile haphazardly.  
The only law  
Is that each shall fit the board immovably. (Rolls E. 1977, 1)

As we move further into the poem, established images of beauty are broken up to accommodate what is real and not necessarily delicate and picturesque. The surprises of the Australian natural world are too often too violent and discordant for the reader fed on a surfeit of soft zephyrs and fragrant roses. Human actions are set against the broader scenario of the nature to be judged not in terms of human ethics but environmental ethics:

Murder and beauty abound.  
The sun spills through the leaves like blood.  
A man laughs as he kills  
For the last word of a severed head  
Is the name of his new son. (Rolls E. 1977, 2 )

The balance between rhapsodic expression and detached rendering is struck here as in many other poems.

Greg Garrard distinguishes between “poetics of *authenticity*, for which wilderness is the touchstone” and “poetics of *responsibility*, that takes ecological science rather than pantheism as its guide” (Garrard 2007, 71). If awareness building is important to the development of environmental activism, and responsibility is the key word of its future, then Rolls was someone who reiterated the values of responsible thinking and acting by humans as part of their natural environment, not as outsiders engaged in a presupposed relationship of conflict and violence with it.

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<sup>i</sup> Some of the major movements that have gained impetus and momentum through written literature are the abolition of slavery in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, African American Civil Rights Movements in the USA, the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century, the Reformation movement in Europe and particularly England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the rise of communism across the world and several localized environmental movements in several countries. All these movements have relied on written literatures to generate awareness and influence public opinion.

<sup>ii</sup> Myles Joseph Dunphy (1891-1985), architect and conservationist, was well known for his adventurous walks in the Blue Mountains area. He campaigned for several decades to prevent the Blue Gum Forest from logging and later lobbied extensively for declaring the Blue Mountains as a reserved forest area. (Meredith 1999).

<sup>iii</sup> The Chipko (literally meaning “hug”) movement took place in the 1970s in Garhwal Himalayas in Northern India. Villagers, mostly women, hugged trees and intervened with their bodies to prevent them from being cut down. It was led by many village women like Mira Behn, Sarala Behn, Bimala Behn, Hima Devi, Gunga Devi and men like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Ghanshyam Shailani and others. It later spread farther East and became active in Arunachal Pradesh. (Jain 1991, 163 ff), (Guha 2000)

<sup>iv</sup> “Narmada Bachao” was an environmental and social protest movement that took place in the 1980s to prevent from the Sardar Sarovar Dam being built on the river Narmada.

<sup>v</sup> See Qing, Dai. *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1994).

<sup>vi</sup> Jose Lutzemberger (1926-2002) founded the AGAPAN or the Association for the Protection of the Natural Environment in Brazil which marks the beginning of modern environmentalism in that country.

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<sup>vii</sup> Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), John Muir (1838 -1914), Edward Abbey (1927 – 1989), Robert Marshall, Sigurd Olson (1899 – 1982) were significant contributors of the environmentalism that celebrated a non-anthropocentric value of nature.

<sup>viii</sup> See for instance (Mongillo and Booth 2001).

<sup>ix</sup> See (Mongillo and Booth, 2001) pp188-192 and 233-238.

<sup>x</sup> Sir John Monash (1865 – 1931) “soldier, engineer and administrator” (*Australian DN*) was a great leader and inspired generations after him with his wide knowledge, resolve and visionary qualities.

<sup>xi</sup> One journal by F J Cockburn which recorded his experiences in Australia while he was on leave from his duties in India was published from Calcutta in 1856 (Cockburn 1856).

<sup>xii</sup> John Gould (1804-1881) was a zoologist who wrote illustrated literature on birds of the Himalayas, Europe and Australia.

<sup>xiii</sup> Francis Noble Ratcliffe (1904-1970), ecologist and conservationist, is most well known for his work on flying foxes in Queensland and northern New South Wales.

<sup>xiv</sup> Rolls accumulated several of these impressions of Australia by the first visitors in a fascinating anthology in support of his argument. (E. C. Rolls 2002).

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