

**BRINGING THE DINGO HOME:  
DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DINGO BY  
ABORIGINAL, COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY  
AUSTRALIANS**

By

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Merryl Parker

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Submission of Abstract for Ph.D. degree

BRINGING THE DINGO HOME: DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DINGO BY ABORIGINAL, COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIANS.

My thesis examines the discourse which has encoded the dingo since it arrived in Australia nearly five thousand years ago. While post-colonial theory has exposed the ideological structures and material practices which position indigenous peoples as “other” to the colonisers, most scholars have remained curiously silent when it comes to nonhumans. Animals now stand as the ultimate “other”, denied a subjective life of their own, for their behaviour is usually read, as Helen Tiffin argues, “as having primary (and exclusive) significance for humans.” The project of this thesis is to examine the narratives within which Australians have “trapped” their dingoes. My methodology takes as its starting point Foucault’s theories which connect discourse and power.

The thesis is divided into three sections; Colonial Discourses, Aboriginal Dreaming and Contemporary Configurations. The colonial section asks how discourse forces the dingo to represent human fears and failings. I argue that a denigrating discourse is used to justify the ill treatment of the dingo, that discourse reveals little about the “real” dingo, and that there are similarities in the discursive treatment of dingoes and Aborigines. The thesis also acknowledges the dingo’s attempts to slip through the gaps in the discourse “fence”.

The second section researches traditional Aboriginal myths of the Dreaming Dingo. By encouraging the dingo to trot back to happier times, I allow the reader to step back also and assess Aboriginal representations of the dingo, arguing that these are based on an empirical knowledge of its habits and nature. I contend that in contrast to a colonial discourse based on difference, the Aboriginal narratives assume similarities to animals and the potential for crossovers. This section argues that a pragmatic Dreaming Dingo teaches humans to live harmoniously and cautiously in an environment which is both nurturing and dangerous.

Finally the dingo returns to the trail and trots into a place where practical knowledge of wilderness is negligible. The contemporary section of this thesis argues that in their longing to claim the dingo and its wildness for their emotional and spiritual needs, urban Australians generate a confused, incompatible and ignorant mix of colonial and Dreaming Discourse. The dingo in the National Park is required to carry an impossible discourse and it fails—biting the hands which feed it.

“Bringing the Dingo Home” reflects an exciting time as one more “other” breaks “the deafening silence” described by Wolch and Emel, and demands a position in post-colonial discourse. At last the discourse of the dingo can be foregrounded and its misrepresentations can be redressed.

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