

A Travelling Colonial Architecture

**Home and Nation
in
Selected Works by Patrick White,
Peter Carey, Xavier Herbert and James Bardon**

Stephen Brock
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) (Flinders)

The Flinders University of South Australia
FACULTY OF EDUCATION, HUMANITIES, LAW AND THEOLOGY

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Stephen James Thomas Brock *June 2003*

Declaration

I believe that this thesis is properly presented, conforms to the specifications for the thesis and is of sufficient standard to be, *prima facie*, worthy of examination.

Dr Lyn Jacobs Supervisor *June 2003*

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Dedication

Angie

Compañera de vida y sueño

Abstract

This thesis is a study of constructions of home and nation in selected works by Patrick White, Peter Carey, Xavier Herbert and James Bardon. Drawing on the work of postcolonial theorists, it examines ways in which the selected texts engage with national mythologies in the imagining of the Australian nation. It notes the deployment of racial discourses informing constructions of national identity that work to marginalise Indigenous Australians and other cultural minority groups.

The texts are arranged in thematic rather than chronological order. White's treatment of the overland journey, and his representations of Aboriginality, discussed in Chapter One, are contrasted with Carey's revisiting of the overland journey motif in *Oscar and Lucinda* in Chapter Two. Whereas White's representations of Indigenous culture in *Voss* are static and essentialised, as is the case in *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves*, Carey's representation of Australia's contact history is characterised by a cultural hybridity. In White's texts, Indigenous culture is depicted as an anachronism in the contemporary Australian nation, while in Carey's, the words of the coloniser are appropriated and employed to subvert the ideological colonial paradigm.

Carey's use of heteroglossia is examined further in the analysis of *Illywhacker* in Chapter Three. Whereas Carey treats Australian types ironically in *Illywhacker's* pet emporium, the protagonist of Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country*, Jeremy Delacy, is depicted as an expert on Australian types. The intertextuality between Herbert's novel and the work of social Darwinist anthropologists in the 1930s and 1940s is discussed in Chapter Four, providing a historical context to appreciate a shift from modernist to postmodernist narrative strategies in Carey's fiction.

James Bardon's fictional treatment of the Papunya Tula painting movement in *Revolution by Night* is seen to continue to frame Indigenous culture in a modernist grammar of representation through its portrayal of the work of Papunya Tula artists in the terms of 'the fourth dimension'. Bardon's novel is nevertheless a fascinating postcolonial engagement with Sturt's architectural construction of landscape in his maps and journals, a discussion of which leads to Tony Birch's analysis of the politics of name reclamation in contemporary tourism discourses.

Introduction

This thesis takes its title from Tony Birch's essay 'Come See the Giant Koala' which identifies non-Indigenous Australians' anxieties about their imaginative hold on the country as whole towns vanished after the gold rushes of the nineteenth century.¹ National mythologies are constructed in their place through contemporary heritage and tourism practices, deploying discourses that continue to marginalise and dispossess Indigenous Australians in the denial of their histories and native title. Such architectural anxieties have always been the travelling companion of colonial nationalism, as articulated in Frederick Sinnett's lament over a lack of 'archaeological accessories' for the literary imagination: 'no storied windows, richly dight, cast a dim, religious light over any Australian premises.'²

In *White Nation* Ghassan Hage adds another dimension to Sinnett's architectural metaphor when he argues that the nation is imagined as a 'homely space' by the white nationalist, who assumes a position of managerial power in relation to the Other. This is the case for both the overt racist, who would evict the Other from the imagined national space and send them 'home', and the liberal willing to accommodate humanitarian arrivals into the national imaginary as long as they arrive in manageable numbers:

A national practice of exclusion is a practice emanating from agents imagining themselves to occupy a privileged position within national space such as they perceive themselves to be the enactors of the national will within the nation. It is a practice orientated by the nationalists' attempt at building what they imagine to be a homely nation. In this process, the nationalists perceive themselves as spatial managers and that which is standing between them and their imaginary nation is constructed as an undesirable national object to be removed from national space.³

Building on Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities', Hage highlights the fact that certain groups have more power than others to represent and stage the nation:

Given that they are 'imagined communities' that cannot be experienced empirically in their totality, and whose identity is often contested, nations cannot be understood

¹ Tony Birch, 'Come See the Giant Koala', *Meanjin*, Vol 58, No. 3, 1999, pp. 61–72.

² Frederick Sinnett, 'From *The Fiction Fields of Australia*', in Ken Goodwin and Alan Lawson (eds) *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*, The Macmillan Company of Australia, South Melbourne, 1990, pp. 415–418, p. 415.

³ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p.47.

outside the relationship of power that give certain groups the possibility of simultaneously representing, constructing and, most importantly ... staging the nation.⁴

White's *Voss*, Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* and Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* are texts selected for their status as iconographic narratives of nation in Australian literary culture. Home and architecture are integral to the staging of the nation in each of these texts: Mr Bonner's house and garden in *Voss*; the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda*; the pet emporium in *Illywhacker*; and Jeremy Delacy's Lily Lagoons homestead in *Poor Fellow My Country*. While Bardon is a new voice in Australian letters, his novel opens the way for discussion of the events at Papunya that profoundly reconstructed the staging of the Australian nation in the international visual arts arena. In *Revolution by Night*, the house is a central trope; the hieroglyphs of Papunya Tula artists speak back to the absences in Sturt's architectural construction of landscape through the windows of latitude and longitude bars of his maps and journals. I move from close readings of specific chronotopes of home and nation in the respective texts to engage with broader theoretical concerns of representations of race and culture in imagined national space.

Home and nation are key subjects of postcolonial literatures, which write back to the centre through 'nationalist assertion'.⁵ Ashcroft et al. observe in *The Empire Writes Back* that 'the construction or demolition of houses or buildings in post-colonial locations is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of post-colonial identity ...'⁶ Ashcroft and Salter identify a paradox at the heart of Australian nationalism that is symptomatic of the postcolonial condition of settler societies:

Colonial nationalism, which is born of the desire to assert difference from the imperial centre, inevitably calcifies into an authoritative discourse which replaces the one it appears to be rejecting. In Australia, nationalism has always served imperial, or in contemporary terms, 'international' interests.⁷

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 33.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷ Bill Ashcroft & John Salter, 'Australian Voices: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Australian Nationalist Debate' in Patrick Fuery (ed.) *Representation, Discourse & Desire: Contemporary Australian Culture & Critical Theory*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, pp. 70–86, p. 71.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and dialogism, which posit that nationalism is monologic and oppositional to the natural play of language and culture, Ashcroft and Salter write that:⁸

A centralising discourse like imperialism, by definition, occludes the cultural heteroglossia over which it maintains control. But nationalism in Australia, although it begins as a discourse of resistance, very quickly comes to exhibit a 'centripetal' force by imposing a unity upon the heteroglot. At the level of the ideological sign, the 'authoritative word' resists the perpetual disruption of the little languages of the heteroglossia and restabilises, dialectically, what it perceives to be a challenge to its authority.⁹

I will argue that Carey's fiction accommodates the heteroglossia of voices otherwise marginalised by the monologic conceptualisation of nation identified by Ashcroft and Salter. In contrast, Herbert and White occlude the cultural heteroglossia of nation by framing the Indigenous Other in a modernist discourse of 'the primitive'. Bardon's *Revolution by Night*, while writing back to the imperial construction of the landscape and its Indigenous owners through its representations of Papunya Tula artists, continues to frame Indigenous people in a modernist grammar of representation.

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, informed by Foucault's theory of discourse, which recognises that power and knowledge are inextricably linked, articulates the process by which Others are known and produced textually by Western institutions. Introducing his theory of Orientalism, Said writes:

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period ... It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.¹⁰

In his introduction to *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, Bain Attwood applies Said's Orientalism to the construction of Aboriginality (Aboriginalism) in

⁸ 'The problem with centralising discourses such as nationalism is that they run counter to the natural condition of language which is dialogic rather than monologic' (Ashcroft & Salter, p. 73).

⁹ Ashcroft & Salter, p. 73.

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p. 2.

academic discourse and the formation of Australian cultural identity. Attwood states:

... Europeans have forged a collective identity through a discourse which sets them apart from non-Europeans, especially 'the Aborigines'. In particular, many European Australians have constructed Aborigines as the primordial or primitive other, a paradigm of originality and antiquity. In this representational discourse, Aborigines figure as 'savages' or as 'an ancient people in an ancient land' or as 'a stone age people' ... Aborigines, or Aboriginality, thus represents a place which Europeans have left behind in order to assume 'civilisation' or enter into modernity, whereby Aborigines stand for the past, for our origins or beginnings, the childhood of mankind. As this movement can be regarded in either positive or negative terms, as progressive or regressive, Aborigines are constructed in Aboriginalist discourse in two forms, as noble or ignoble savages, as 'soft' or 'hard' primitives.¹¹

The Other is central to questions of home and nation, so this thesis examines how Australia's national mythologies are informed by racial discourses that marginalise Indigenous people and other minority groups. Formulations of home and nation in the novels of White, Carey, Herbert and Bardon all engage with these images of 'soft' and 'hard' primitives. Considerations of the respective representations of Indigenous people are a central concern of this thesis.

If White, Herbert and Carey are authors who might make the 'cricket team' of an Australian literary canon, then Bardon might struggle to fill the twelfth man.¹² The discussion of *Revolution by Night* raises wider theoretical concerns that privilege questions of political exchange and economy over aesthetics in readings of culture. Postcolonial theory, and critical theory in general, emphasises the political and ideological significance of texts over the aesthetic, edifying values of the Leavisite tradition:

The critical and theoretical lenses have changed. A shift can be observed from a *belles-lettres* tradition in which written works were valued chiefly for their beauty of language, and their emotional effects or uplifting moral sentiments, through New Critical engagement with autonomous linguistic structures, to more recent conventions which value literature mainly for the ideas, images or stories it contributes to a wider set of political conversations or discourses.¹³

¹¹ Bain Attwood 'Introduction' in Bain Attwood & John Arnold's (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, *Journal of Australian Studies* (Special Edition), No 35, 1992, pp. i–xv, pp. iii–iv.

¹² Bruce Bennett writes in 'Literary Culture Since Vietnam: A New Dynamic' that 'an early approach was to select a cricket team of authors to represent the nation. Vincent Buckley's canon of the 'best' Australian writers numbered twelve: Furphy, Richardson, Herbert, Dark, Palmer, White, Brennan, Slessor, Hope, Wright, Neilson and McAuley' (in Bruce Bennett & Jennifer Strauss (eds) *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 239–265, p. 252).

¹³ Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss, 'Making Literary History: An Introduction', in *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, pp. 1–5, p. 2.

Exploiting the creative tensions that exist between literature and critical theory, I open a space for dialogue and conversation regarding the cultural and identity politics at stake in the imagining of the Australian nation. The theorists I engage with are not only secondary sources employed to illuminate aesthetic or philosophical insights within the novels, but feature as companion texts, and at times theoretical questions are given priority. This thesis arrives at a broader understanding of Carey's revisiting of Australia's national mythologies and postmodern narrative strategies in *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Illywhacker* through a consideration of selected works by White and Herbert in the light of contemporary theoretical discussions on race, nation and culture.

Chapter One identifies a modernist discourse shaping the representations of Indigenous culture in *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves*, which posits the 'primitive imagination' as an evolutionary precursor to a postlapsarian European intellect. Voss takes his leave from the colonial space of Mr Bonner's garden, which houses the science of horticulture and the logos of the word, and travels into the 'prehistory' of the cave, in a return to the 'primitive imagination.' This Nature/culture binary culminates in the destruction of Voss's letters by the Aboriginal elder Dugald. Whereas the words of the coloniser in *Oscar and Lucinda* are appropriated and employed to subvert the ideological colonial paradigm, Voss's letters die a natural death in the outback. White's mysticism renders the desert a Gothic space that mirror's Voss's inner psychology and glosses over the unresolved political and economical issues of contested national space raised in Carey's fiction, issues that continue to dominate public debate in contemporary Australia. In addition, White shares with Herbert a confidence in speaking for the Other in his universal mysticism that posits all religions are One.

Chapter two centres on Carey's treatment of the overland journey, which Ashcroft et al. define in *The Empire Writes Back* as a characteristic genre of postcolonial texts. The title of this thesis evokes most vividly the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda* travelling down the Bellinger, and Carey shares with Birch a concern for the filtered perspectives of local histories, symbolised by the yellow-tinged glass of old Bellinger Valley farmhouses. Carey revisits the explorer genre in the transportation of the glass church, examining the architectural construction of colonial space through the panoptic technologies of observation and categorisation, disciplines applied also to the construction of Indigenous

Australians under the gaze of the Imperial eye. Drawing on the theorising of Homi Bhabha, I argue that Carey's representation of Australia's contact history is culturally hybrid. While Indigenous stories are invisible to the Imperial eye of both missionary and explorer, the words of the coloniser are appropriated by the colonised, and their authority destabilised. I reveal an intertextual connection between Carey's explorer-hero genre and Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, and place this discussion in the context of the former's use of the unreliable narrator and the planting in the text of 'historical errors'.¹⁴ The heteroglossia of Carey's text is contrasted with White's treatment of the explorer genre in *Voss*, as well as his static and essentialist representations of Aboriginality in *A Fringe of Leaves* and *Riders in the Chariot*, discussed in Chapter One. Carey's self-reflexive, postmodern narrative strategy in *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Illywhacker* problematises the telling of history, and the heteroglossia of his texts undermines any grand narrative claims on 'the truth'.

In Chapter Three the Panoptic disciplines of observation and categorisation considered in relation to *Oscar and Lucinda*'s treatment of the explorer hero genre are developed further in a Foucauldian reading of *Illywhacker*'s pet emporium. *Illywhacker* plays with architectural metaphors in the construction of national mythologies, and I argue that the display of Australian types in the pet emporium parodies the exhibition of colonial subjects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Simon Ryan argues in the *Cartographic Eye* that 'the construction of the explorer as invisible observer is a superb example of the project of Panopticism explicated by Michel Foucault.'¹⁵ Foucault holds that the origins of Bentham's Panopticon are to be found in Le Vaux's menagerie of Versailles, built in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ Hage, in *White Nation*, finds the origins of the display of ethnicities in multicultural festivals in the spatial configuration of the menagerie: 'such a tradition goes beyond the exhibition of human otherness and has its historical roots in zoos and royal menageries'.¹⁷ The caging of Australian types in the pet emporium mimics the calcification of identity in racialised national discourses, including that of multiculturalism.

¹⁴ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987.

¹⁵ Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 133.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), Vintage Books, New York, 1979, p. 203.

¹⁷ Hage, p. 151.

In Chapter Four I argue that whereas Carey treats his Australian types in the pet emporium ironically, the protagonist of Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country*, Jeremy Delacy, is depicted as being an expert on Australian types. Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* and Carey's *Illywhacker* are novels in which the central characters both find homes in a menagerie of sorts: Herbert Badgery among the Australian types on display in *Illywhacker's* pet emporium, and Jeremy Delacy among his collection of crippled animals and 'blacks' on his country retreat, Lily Lagoons. Through the trope of the menagerie Carey and Herbert both explore the dehumanisation of the disempowered subject, imprisoned and classified by the disciplines of Foucault's Panopticism. Whereas Carey's narrative is characteristically postmodern and treats its Australian stereotypes ironically, Herbert demonstrates an obsession with the fixities of racial types, his social Darwinist grand narrative perpetuating the very racism it sets out to decry. He constructs Delacy's 'hospital-cum-menagerie' on the foundations of social Darwinist anthropology. Carey questions the relevance of and need for Australia's stock of national icons in the menagerie described as the 'Best Pet Shop in the World'. Herbert represents home and belonging as distinctively racialised concepts, particularly evident in his theory of miscegenation and the Euraustralian. Both novels end in postwar Australia in the shadow of impending Japanese economic imperialism and exploitation, epitomised by the multinational company Mitsubishi. Carey's pet emporium echoes Herbert's final and apocalyptic image of the Territory and its sacred sites as a polluted theme park for tourists, as Australian culture is commodified and its citizens reduced to the simulacra of Carey's 'American Dreams'.¹⁸

I argue further that Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Illywhacker* and Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* can be usefully considered as magic realist novels. Far from being a flight from the real, magic realism is a narrative strategy used to comment on the extent to which perceived reality, particularly historical reality, is itself a construction, an elaborate fiction. In *Imaginary Homelands* Salman Rushdie emphasises the political nature of the magical real:

The damage to reality in South America is at least as much political as cultural. In Márquez's experience, truth has been controlled to the point at which it has ceased to

¹⁸ Peter Carey, 'American Dreams' in *Collected Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 1995, pp. 171–182.

be impossible to find out what it is. The only truth is that you are being lied to all the time.¹⁹

Remembering and forgetting are profoundly political. Rushdie addresses this political element to the construction of opposing views of reality, particularly when the state is playing off its own interests, arguing that:

Re-describing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized.²⁰

Illywhacker and *Oscar and Lucinda* are novels that engage politically with the construction of Australian history, re-describing the world in polyphonic narratives that celebrate the diversity of languages that constitute the nation. Magic realism in *Poor Fellow My Country* allows for a degree of heteroglossia in the imagining of the Australian nation, which, despite Herbert's social Darwinism, makes at times for a dialogic text in which Indigenous voices challenge the authoritative discourse of government bureaucrats and well-meaning social reformists.

In Chapter Five I argue that Bardon's fictional treatment of the Papunya Tula painting movement in *Revolution by Night* idealises Indigenous culture, which is seen to fulfil a lack in the national imagery not unlike that identified by Sinnett, and echoed in the works of White and Herbert. Whereas the latter authors deal in images of the 'hard primitive', with scenes of cannibalism, brute superstition and ape-like characteristics that signify the social Darwinist theory of 'The Great Chain of Being', Bardon posits that the direction of Indigenous artists 'superintends and subsumes the visual tradition of western civilisation as defined by its priorities in the twentieth century'.²¹ The hieroglyphs of the Indigenous artists are described at times in the novel as 'trophies of the Gods' and in the modernist and romantic terms of 'the fourth dimension'.²² With recourse to the theorising of Muecke, Michaels, Bakhtin and Bhabha, I explore alternative ways of reading culture by arguing that all representation in texts travels through 'the

¹⁹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, Granta, London, 1991, p. 301.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ Bardon, James, *Revolution by Night or Katjala Wananu (The Son After the Father)*, Local Consumption Publications, Sydney, 1991, p. 234.

²² *ibid.*, p. 229.

gates of the chronotope'.²³ Bardon's text is a springboard to analyse both the events at Papunya, and the location of postcolonial questions of mapping and naming in the cultural future. While acknowledging the text's unique qualities and the power of its poetic prose, my critique of Bardon demonstrates that modernist discourses of 'the primitive' continue to shape contemporary cultural debates.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that we speak and write from a middle.²⁴ My thesis is a product of the historical and theoretical discourses at work in my particular institution, Flinders University, and the society at large. The goal of this journey is to shake the colonial edifice of my own language and culture, in order to reconceptualise and deepen my understanding of home and place, and contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge and nation. And while these theoretical issues have been grounded in the texts at hand, they travel well to other texts and other sites of cultural production. Rather than attempt to speak

²³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans), University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp. 84–258, p. 258.

²⁴ 'A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo ... Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement ... But Kleist, Lenz and Büchner have another way of traveling and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing ... the middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to another and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other way, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle' (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi (trans.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 25.)

for the Other, as a non-Indigenous Australian writing from a position of privilege, I have sought to examine constructions of Aboriginality in texts by non-Indigenous authors. Each of the texts under study engages with founding mythologies of place, and in turn, contributes to the travelling colonial architecture of home and nation.

Writing Home in *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves*

In *Voss*, Mr Bonner's garden can be read as the epitome of colonial space. The garden is described as 'a natural setting for young ladies', and therefore an appropriate space for Voss's courting of Laura.¹ It also can be seen to function in the novel as a point of departure and intended return for Voss's journeying. At the conclusion of the courtship scene, Voss retires to the sofa where he remains for the rest of the evening contemplating the 'immense distances towards which he already trudged'.² Following this line is the beginning of the next chapter, which depicts the departure of Voss's expedition into the interior. Voss and Laura discuss the official journal of the expedition in the garden scene, and a number of textual metaphors are woven into the narrative and travel with Voss into the outback. These metaphors provide a link in the novel between the colonial architecture of Mr Bonner's residence, which houses the science of horticulture and the logos of the word, and the prehistoric cave of the 'illiterate' Aborigine.

Ghassan Hage argues in *White Nation* that the domestication of nature (Mr Bonner's house and garden) and the Rousseauian flight from civilisation into nature (Voss's journeying) are opposing narratives driven by the one goal of a 'perfect fit with nature', as represented by the Garden of Eden:³

¹ Patrick White, *Voss*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1962, p. 156.

² *ibid.*, p. 92.

³ White draws parallels between writing and the significance of house and garden in a letter to Frederick Glover in which he expresses what Hage identifies in *White Nation* as the fantasy for a return to a 'perfect fit' between humans and nature, through both domestication ('the shell') and a Rousseauian return to nature:

Domestication is only one of the ways, even if it has been historically the dominant way, in which the goal of recovering paradise is pursued. Another way of pursuing such a goal has been the attempt to 'return to nature', to mould the self so as to fit 'back' into nature. In this fantasy, it is the constant subjugation of nature which has led human beings to move away from the state of bliss in which they existed when they lived in paradise. Here 'civilisation' becomes the other standing between the human and the 'natural state' of 'fulfilment'. This fantasy of a return to the golden age of an 'original perfect fit' with nature has always offered the key narratives of opposition to the domesticating drive of civilisation.⁴

This logic of domestication is integral to the architectural construction of colonial space, and within this paradigm Aboriginality is constructed as nature in opposition to what might be defined as the artifice of a travelling European colonial architecture. When Voss writes home, his letters are destroyed in the outback by the Aboriginal elder, Dugald, and cease to signify for all eternity. This scene, in which a clear binary is set up between the literary space of Mr Bonner's house and garden, and the illiterate space of the 'prehistoric' Aborigine, is critiqued in the light of Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity.

Keith Garebian articulates this binary between the garden and desert, and the significance of colonial architecture as a sign of the progress of civilisation, in his essay 'The Desert and the Garden: The Theme of Completeness in *Voss*':

The garden has long been a symbol of colonization, for its existence in a new world implies the importation into the wilderness of civilizing, horticultural science. Unlike the desert, the garden is not a primeval feature of the Australian landscape, for its organization and upkeep are the material evidence of colonial progress where life can take root and prosper in hitherto uncleared wastes ...⁵

There is really no question of our selling Dogwoods. We should both be too unhappy anywhere else—in fact, I think the place means even more to Manoly, as it is to him what my writing is to me. This is something you will not be able to understand, as you have never wanted to plant lasting things ... A person who feels such a compulsion never tells himself: 'There is no point in doing it; we shall be leaving here in a couple of years.' ... We must have a shell, and a shell takes years of drudgery to make. If we gave this up I do not feel I could face making another satisfactory shell ... Just to wander about Australia in discomfort, from one empty town to another, watching a landscape slowly destroyed by a race whose most pronounced gift is that of creating ugliness would be out of the question ... If we were forced to leave Dogwoods, I feel the only thing we could do would be to leave the country, and live in Greece or Italy or Spain, or wandering between the three. There it would not matter being without a shell because one would be surrounded by natural beauty, and if man intrudes, a Mediterranean peasant, even, cannot help creating something aesthetically pleasing when he puts one stone on top of another ... And civilisation easily accessible. (David Marr (ed.), *Patrick White: Letters*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 1994, p. 155.)

⁴ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, 1998, Pluto Press, Annandale, p. 170.

⁵ Keith Garebian, 'The Desert and the Garden: The Theme of Completeness in *Voss*' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Winter 1976–77.

Voss may be considered a postcolonial novel, in so far as *Voss* turns from the colonial chronotope of Mr Bonner's mansion and garden, which is in effect a transported England, to face the Australian landscape. *Voss* is cited in *The Empire Writes Back* as a novel that contains the postcolonial theme of 'the journey of the European interloper through unfamiliar landscape',⁶ and in the process, European history is run aground 'in a new and overwhelming space which annihilates time and imperial purpose'.⁷ The shift from the logic of the official journal of the expedition in Mr Bonner's garden, to the surreal writings of Le Mesurier's anti-journal in the desert, is indicative of the breakdown in imperial purpose of *Voss*'s expedition. However, Indigenous culture remains framed in a modernist discourse of the 'primitive imagination', which fulfils a lack apparent in the decadent interiors of European culture. This evolutionary discourse informs Patrick White's representations of Aboriginality in *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves*, in which the alterity of the Indigenous Other is subjugated to the universal humanism of White's mysticism.

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 28.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 34.

The Spatial Politics of Mr Bonner's Garden: A Scene of Writing

There is a patriarchal spatial politics at work in the garden scene that confines women to interior, domestic spaces, and Aborigines to nature—a politics reinforced by Voss's journeying. In her essay 'The Journey's End: Women's Mobility and Confinement', Sue Rowley explores the spatial representation of women in colonial art and literature, and observes that:

The journey narrative is incomplete without a point of departure and return. This circularity in structure implies a spatial differentiation between the point of departure and return, and the terrain of the adventure. These spaces are represented in terms of interior and exterior space, and the boundary that delineates these spaces must be crossed and re-crossed. In the late nineteenth century, this interior space frequently takes the form of domestic space. The gender ideology of 'separate spheres' ascribed domestic space to women. Concomitantly, exterior space was constructed in terms of the masculine domain; in bush mythology, the bush is masculine and exterior space. This delineation of interior and exterior space was often strident and insistent, suggesting a degree of anxiety and conflict about the terms under which women might enter the narratives of the formation of the nation ... The journeying of men is predicated on the existence of a home: a place to set out from, a place to return to. The home is the place of women's waiting. Their virtual house arrest has been the concomitant of the masculine journey motif.⁸

Rowley argues that while young women are given limited freedom to move in the liminal spaces of the garden and verandah, as they reach maturity (motherhood) the degree of their enclosure increases further still. Rowley's discussion can be applied to a reading of the gender politics in the garden scene, the spell of which is broken when Mrs Bonner calls Laura back into the hive of interior space from the liminal zone of the verandah.⁹ White does not create the gender politics of the garden scene naively, and as he states in a letter to Huebsch in 1956, the style of the novel 'is based on that of records of the day'.¹⁰ There is a sustained exchange between Voss and Laura on the gender ideology of 'separate spheres' identified by Rowley above:

⁸ Sue Rowley, 'The Journey's End: Women's Mobility and Confinement' in *Australian Cultural History*, No. 10, 1991, pp. 69–83, p. 69.

⁹ White, *Voss*, p. 91.

¹⁰ Patrick White in David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 1991, p. 314.

'I try to visualize your life in this house,' said Voss, facing the honeycomb of windows, in some of which dark figures burrowed for a moment before drowning in the honey-coloured light. 'Do you count the linen? ... Do you make pastry? Hem sheets? Or are you reading novels in these rooms ... ?'¹¹

Laura retorts: 'Is it so difficult then, for a man, to imagine the lives of poor domesticated women?'¹² While women are confined to domestic interiors, the spatial configuration of Aboriginality with nature is more subtle. Mr Bonner's house and garden is described as follows:

As a house it was not so much magnificent as eminently suitable, and sometimes, by pure chance, even appeared imaginative, in spite of the plethora of formal, shiny shrubs, the laurels, for instance, and the camellias that Uncle had planted in the beginning. The science of horticulture had failed to exorcise the spirit of the place. The wands and fronds of native things intruded still, paperbarks and various gums, of mysterious hot scents, and attentive silences: shadowy trees that, paradoxically, enticed the eyes away from an excess of substance.¹³

The native flora encroaches still upon the European order of things, like the return of a suppressed consciousness, making of it an uncanny space. The 'native things' of Mr Bonner's garden signify an Indigenous presence that is alien to the logos of the word and the science of horticulture, both of which will travel with Voss into the interior, where the shadows come to life on the edges of his journeying.

There is something of the Garden of Eden in the above passage, as Uncle planted the camellias 'in the beginning' (evoking also *The Tree of Man*), and the native things that intrude still carry the potential of the snake, combined with the hot, mysterious scent of forbidden fruit. The 'native things' signify a suppressed fear that fills the imaginative void of the centre, and is expressed early in the novel by Laura when Voss enquires as to her knowledge of the country. Laura reveals that she does make the occasional trip into the country, after which she is always 'happy to return to this house.'¹⁴ The God-like omnipresent narrator then announces: 'She was also afraid of the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers. But this fear, like certain dreams, was something to which she would never have admitted.'¹⁵ Laura does articulate this suppressed fear in a later discussion regarding Voss's obsession with the country, where it shifts from

¹¹ White, *Voss*, p. 86.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

an individual to a collective neurosis of place, and in return, Belle expresses the cliché of the dead centre:

'Everyone is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding' ...

'I would not like to ride very far into it,' admitted Belle, 'and meet a lot of blacks, and deserts, and rocks, and skeletons, they say, of men that have died.'¹⁶

In the exchange above, Belle gives expression to a long held cliché in Australian art, literature and film, deconstructed by Ross Gibson in his essay 'Camera Natura', in which he discusses the representation of the Australian landscape in cinema:

A cliché can be a point of reference and departure: non-Aboriginal Australia is still a ludicrously young society. The country is sparsely populated and meagrely historicised. Every plot of earth, every spike of spinifex hasn't accrued a story, hasn't yet become a sign in the arbitrary system of meaning which is history. To white sensibility most of Australia is empty space, devoid of inhabitants, architecture, artefacts. It hasn't been incorporated into the symbolic order, except as a signifier of emptiness, a cultural tabula rasa, a sublime structuring void louring over all Australian culture.¹⁷

Confronted by Laura and Belle's expression of the uncanny, Mr Bonner speaks up in defence of the progress being made in the new colony, in which the architecture of home and nation is pitted against the fear of the unknown interior:

'Here we are talking about our Colony as if it did not exist until now,' Mr Bonner was forced to remark. 'Or if it has now begun to exist as something quite different. I do not understand what all this talk is about. We are not children. We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our homes and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievements of those men who are settling the land ... I do not see what there is to be afraid of.'¹⁸

Mr Bonner is the sponsor of Voss's party, and as such he sees himself being responsible 'for the historical consequences of such an expedition'.¹⁹ Voss will write history on the blank page of the empty interior, and the homes and public edifices of progress will follow.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Ross Gibson, 'Camera Natura: Landscape in Australian feature films' in J. Frow & M. Morris (eds) *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, pp 209–221, p. 211.

¹⁸ White, *Voss*, p. 29.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 155.

While Rowley identifies the gendering of interior and exterior spaces, there are further gender divisions to be found within the interior space of Mr Bonner's mansion. Voss and Mr Bonner make 'a deliberate, men's departure' into Mr Bonner's study, an inner sanctum where the map is housed. Mr Bonner asks Voss:

'I expect you will consider it imprudent, Mr Voss, if I ask whether you have studied the map?'

Here, indeed, was a map of a kind, presumptuous where it was not blank.

'The map?' said Voss.

... 'The map?' repeated the German. 'I will first make it.'²⁰

Mr Bonner then begins to 'read off the document, to chant almost, to invoke the first recorded names, the fly-spots of human settlement, the legend of rivers. Mr Bonner read the words, but Voss saw the rivers.'²¹ Voss is confident that the new country will reveal itself to him:

Unseeing people walked the sandy earth, eating bread, or sat at meat in their houses of frail stone foundations, while the lean man, beneath his twisted tree, became familiar with each blade of withered grass at which he stared, even the joints in the body of the ant.

Knowing so much, I shall know everything, he assured himself, and lay down in time, and was asleep, slowly breathing the sultry air of the new country that was being revealed him.²²

This passage reveals Voss's metaphysical quest for a true knowledge of self, to be distinguished from Mr Bonner's material ambitions that are the ostensible motive of Voss's journeying. In both the construction of the interior as empty and ripe for material progress, and as a site for personal intellectual discovery, the Australian landscape is dehistoricised and mythologised beyond the here and now of a contemporary politics of place.

Making a comparison between representations of the outback in *Voss* and John Heyner's *Back of Beyond*, which was also produced in the 1950s and contained scenes of skulls and death in the desert such as those evoked by Belle, Gibson argues:

Voss has been repeatedly and correctly judged to have been ahead of its time in the white Australian cultural context. It seems to me that *The Back of Beyond* with its refusal to take solace in a spiritual alibi, is even more 'avante garde' in as much as it

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 23

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*, p. 27.

examines the questions of how to live, here and now, with an adapted mentality. *Voss*, by contrast, evades answering the pressing secular questions even as it urgently raises them.²³

The desert in *Voss* becomes less a geographical space in which the politics of cultural difference and native title are to be negotiated, and more a theatre set that depicts the inner void of a universal human condition. Voss's quest is a modernist and Romantic one: 'White's preference for Blake accords with his general preference for the art of the solitary Romantic, the outsider who aspires to the things unseen which are eternal.'²⁴ Graeme Turner writes in *National Fictions* that:

The Romantic desire to find oneself spiritually in Nature has in Australia to deal with a material version of nature that is antithetical to Romanticism: inverted in season, in mood and meaning, the Australian landscape as mirror to the soul reflects the grotesque and the desolate rather than the beautiful and the tranquil.²⁵

In the garden scene, Laura imagines the desert as a mirror to Voss's soul before he makes his journey:

'You are so vast and ugly,' Laura Trevelyan was repeating the words; 'I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice, and, yes, even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places, in which you will find your own situation taken for granted, or more than that, exalted.'²⁶

Rather than being a cultural space, the desert functions as unmediated Nature, in a conception of wilderness that subsumes even Indigenous presence in the novel's metaphysical ambition.

The European landscape is well sign-posted, as discussed by Gibson; the Australian landscape offers the possibility of a return to Nature for the alienated European subject. In *Seeking the Centre*, Rosalyn Haynes identifies a fascinating inversion of the gendered spaces discussed by Rowley in the Gothic portrayal of the desert:

A post-Freudian reading of the Gothic as a trope for the suppressed fears imprisoned in the dark atavistic house of the subconscious is equally readily transferred to accounts of the desert. Its indeterminate space of darkness and nothingness points to

²³ Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, Bloomington Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992, p. 155.

²⁴ Helen Verity Hewitt, *Patrick White, Painter Manqué: Paintings, painters and their influence on his writing*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2002.

²⁵ Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, pp. 30–31.

²⁶ White, *Voss*, pp. 87–88.

the culturally repressed dread of alienation and the more extreme metaphysical terror of erasure of the individual through death ... In traditional Gothic the imprisoning ancestral house was a readily decoded feminist symbol for patriarchal tyranny; in the case of the desert, however, an interesting gender inversion is involved since the individuals trapped in the desert have been almost exclusively male while the land is most commonly troped as female.²⁷

In a scene that evokes the gender inversion of the Gothic desert identified by Haynes, Laura appears to Voss in the desert in masculine terms:

She, however, was quite strong and admirable in her thick, man's boots beneath the muddied habit. Her hands were taking his weakness from him, into her own, supple, extraordinarily muscular ones. Yet, her face had retained the expression he remembered it to have worn when she accepted him in spite of his composite nature, and was unmistakably the face of a woman.²⁸

Laura perhaps reads Gothic novels in the honeycombed rooms of Mr Bonner's house while Voss travels into the greater House of the desert. Voss never really leaves the discursive walls of Mr Bonner's garden, and this is apparent in the surreal shifts from garden to desert space, from the rocks of the desert to the marble of Mr Bonner's stairs.

The garden of Mr Bonner's residence is a textual space in which Voss and Laura's dialogue culminates in a grave reference to 'the official journal of the expedition'.²⁹ This discussion begins with Laura's reminiscence of a diary she kept as a child, of which she was proud of her progress until such time as 'I would stare at a blank page, and that would appear far more expressive than my own emptiness'.³⁰ Laura's description of the camellia bushes her uncle planted when he first arrived in the new country as a young man are also of a literary nature: 'It is white, but there is one branch that bears those marbled flowers, you know, like the edges of a ledger'.³¹ The camellia metaphor is elaborated as Laura strolls through the garden 'tearing them across, as if they had not been flesh, but some passive stuff, like blotting-paper'.³² Following Laura's observation of the camellias, her doubled speech narrates an already compiled record of her impressions of Voss since their first encounter:

²⁷ Rosalyn Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 185.

²⁸ White, *Voss*, p. 285.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 87.

³² *ibid.*, p. 88.

Consequently, when she did speak, the sense of inevitability that they shared made her sound as if she were reading from a notebook, only this one had been written, in invisible ink, that the night had breathed upon; and as she read, or spoke, it became obvious to both that she had begun to compile her record from the first moment of their becoming acquainted.³³

This is a scene of writing that accentuates the binary between the white, cultured spaces of Mr Bonner's house and garden, and the prehistoric, natural spaces of Indigenous Australia that are the destination of Voss's travels. As observed above, it is a binary present in the garden itself, as Indigenous Australia is already confined to the irrational, native fronds that intrude upon the science of horticulture, and signify a wider fear suppressed in the imagination of the coloniser. This darkness of the garden is set against the light emanating from the architecture of the house:

It was now possible that the usually solid house, and all that it contained, that the whole civil history of those parts was presumptuous, and that the night, close and sultry as savage flesh, distant and dilating as stars, would prevail by natural law.³⁴

In this passage the colonial binaries of light and darkness, civilisation and primitive are at work, and again the 'savage flesh' of Indigenous people is aligned to 'natural law'. Voss will travel with this colonial architecture into the darkness of the interior. However, Palfreyman's specimens (the science of horticulture) and Voss's journals and letters are ultimately destroyed in a hostile landscape. The destruction of Voss's letters by Dugald is already prefigured in the garden scene: 'I shall be followed through the continent of Australia by your prayers, like little pieces of white paper. I can see them, torn-up paper, fluttering ...'³⁵ Indeed, the entire garden scene is pervaded by a sense of foreboding. Laura informs Voss that a young man recently contracted fever in the bay nearby and died, and she herself at one point becomes 'lost somewhere in the dark of the garden' while accompanying Voss.³⁶

The doubleness of Laura's speech as she reads from the notebook of her consciousness, in an image that evokes the alternating invisibility and visibility of Freud's mystic writing pad discussed by Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, is

³³ *ibid.*, p. 87.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 88.

indicative of a linguistic hybridity that characterises White's writing.³⁷ In Laura's speech, the origin of writing is problematised and depicted as being social and historical, its meaning becoming visible in dialogue—when breathed upon by the presence of another. There is a doubleness here that echoes White's reminiscence in *Flaws in the Glass* of his terror of public speaking:

The audience was waiting mercilessly. I began. Whatever came out of my mouth seemed to have nothing to do with me. Since the day of my initiation I have reasoned that public speaking is much like writing: some other person is responsible for half of what comes out. The difference is that in writing, the act is kept discreetly private; in making a speech, or in acting a part on stage as opposed to desk, your folly is indecently exposed.³⁸

Simon During's queer reading of *Voss* in *Patrick White* also highlights the linguistic hybridity of White's language, where meanings differ according to the site of enunciation, with the homoerotic subtext intended for a particular audience:

Judd's blushing gives the game away and the sucking of the gum, somewhat oddly called a unifying 'act', leads directly to a kind of miming of a sexual act, when Judd and Harry prod the rumps of their cows.³⁹

Robert Young argues in *Colonial Desire* that Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity has built upon Bakhtin's notion of linguistic hybridity, which:

has been transformed by Bhabha into an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power. Bhabha then translates this moment into a 'hybrid displacing space' which develops in the interaction between the indigenous and colonial culture which has the effect, he suggests, of depriving 'the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity.'⁴⁰

However, despite this linguistic hybridity, and White's critique of the official histories of Empire at the end of the novel, White's representations of Indigenous culture remain essentialist and static, framed within a modernist discourse of the primitive. White's texts may be linguistically hybrid; however, this does not translate into cultural hybridity, as epitomised in the destruction of Voss's letters.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference*, Allan Bass (trans.), Routledge, London, 1990 (1978), pp. 196–231.

³⁸ Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, Jonathon Cape, 1981, p. 223.

³⁹ Simon During, *Patrick White*, Oxford Australian Writers Series, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 23.

When Voss Writes Home: Cultural Hybridity and the ‘Primitive Imagination’

In the garden scene it was observed that the blank pages of Laura’s childhood journal appeared far more expressive of her emptiness than any writing. Voss expresses a similar sentiment far beyond the logos of Mr Bonner’s garden as he prepares to write a letter for Laura. Only now the land itself has become the blank page:

Had he been in fullest possession of himself, he would have consulted his neat journal and copied down their latest estimated position. He was not, however, at that moment, self-possessed. He was sitting in the middle of nowhere. Which, naturally, was of too fantastical a nature, too expressive of his nothingness.⁴¹

Voss nevertheless writes:

there are many points of criticism in your letter that I could answer, but do not here in the circumstances in which I am placed, for those arguments appear to me rather as subjects for the tea-table, and here I have no such furniture from behind which I might make a stand. Indeed, we are reduced almost to infinity ... as I sit here alone in this immense country. No ordinary House could have contained my feelings, but this great one in which greater longings are ever free to grow.⁴²

A quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment through death by torture in the country of the mind has been the underlying motive of Voss’s journeying, beyond the domestic interiors of a decadent European culture and the feminised interior spaces which complete the Oedipal narrative of nation enacted through Voss’s journeying. As Hage argues, both the act of domestication and the flight from civilisation, enacted by Voss’s journeying, are part of the one quest for a ‘perfect fit’ with nature, which is the desire for a return to the Garden of Eden. These opposing narratives are part of the one desire to belong utterly in a place, for Voss has fled one house to find a sense of belonging in the greater house of Nature (‘no ordinary house’), which is recognisably Gothic.

Laura’s camellia metaphor also travels with Voss into the interior, blooming among the flowers of evil in Le Mesurier’s anti-journal, a book of symbolist poems that threatens Voss’s official narrative. David Marr writes in his biography of White that ‘Frank Le Mesurier, the poet on Voss’s expedition, a

⁴¹ White, *Voss*, p. 215.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 216.

man with dark thin lips, dark eyes and proud nose, emerged from White's passion for Rimbaud.⁴³ Le Mesurier has kept his journal hidden but reveals it to Voss while delirious with fever and laudanum, the drug favoured by Baudelaire:

'The book,' said Le Mesurier. 'It is in my saddle-bag. Give it to me, Mr Voss. It is the book with the marbled edges.'

Like camellias, Voss remembered.⁴⁴

Whereas in the garden scene, all is contained in the promise and potential of the official journal of the expedition and the science of horticulture, beyond the walls of Mr Bonner's garden Le Mesurier's illogical writings grip Voss's imagination, in a scene that follows the loss of Palfreyman's botanical specimens.⁴⁵ Reading the poems in the prehistoric chronotope of the cave (the walls of which are adorned by the art of the primitive imagination) Voss declares that they are 'the poems of a maniac ...'⁴⁶ In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft et al. write the following on the colonial significance of Rimbaud:

... African culture could be viewed as the liberating Dionysiac force which could shatter the Apollonian certainty of nineteenth-century bourgeois society. For the early twentieth century, Africa was an image which offered either absolute horror (of the Kurtzian variety found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) or an absolution from the decayed and destructive fragments of a 'civilization' whose bloodthirsty hypocrisies and violent contradictions had been exposed on the battlefields of the Somme and Verdun. The dying Rimbaud being carried through French Somaliland by his native bearers is the ultimate image of the simultaneous closeness and distance in the European concepts of Africa during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rimbaud's last journey, a sort of inverted and ironic version of Livingstone's, sums up the limitations of the new European response to Africa, and to the non-European world in general as the ultimate exotic setting for European culture's search for a theatrical extinction.⁴⁷

Voss's encounter with Le Mesurier's poems in the cave reinforces the modernist discourse of the primitive at work in the novel, and like Africa, the Australian continent functions in the novel as a theatre for Europe's engagement with the primitive imagination of the colonial Other.

Elleke Boehmer documents the influence of the cultures of the New World on European intellectuals in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*:

Freud and Jung looked to myths and fetish objects from other cultures to illuminate the European psyche. For modernist artists—not only Picasso, but also Henri Matisse,

⁴³ David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 1991, p. 317.

⁴⁴ White, *Voss*, p. 270.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 277.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁴⁷ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 159.

Andre Derain, and others—the masks, carvings and ceremonial artefacts which might be discovered in European collections held great potential for new aesthetic speculations.⁴⁸

Ashcroft et al. refer to Wilson Harris' analysis of '*Voss* and *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*' which posits:

The surface 'historical reality' is of a destructive and continuing imperialism, but its exploration inevitably exposes an underlying imaginative imperative towards cross-culturality, Creolization, hybridization, and catalysis. Imperialism, the prevailing political reality of these works, is thus perpetually undermined by a persisting regenerative seed, masked perhaps as intuition or dream. The implications for literary modes and forms are profound, indicating a surface realism creatively fractured by the intrusive irrational, by dream and madness.⁴⁹

Dream and madness play a significant role in the surrealist narrative shifts of *Voss*, as Laura and Voss play out their courtship through dream and hallucination. White's surrealist narrative in *Voss* can be read as a precursor to Carey's magic realist texts, in which the appropriation of Indigenous culture is developed into a culturally hybrid engagement with the Other, that results not in all sums adding up to a mystical One, but in the doubled vision of the colonial subject writing back to Empire.

Terry Goldie argues in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, that the rock art is identified with an immediate and natural sexuality in the genitalia of the kangaroo, as perceived by Turner:

In *Voss* the Aborigines are illiterate, and thus beyond the dangerous supplement of writing. When their sign making is suggested in the cave drawings, it is immediately shown to be much more natural than white ways, represented by Turner's interpretations. Their non-writing is as pure as their sexuality. Yet the ultimate purity is the Aborigine's 'arc of concentrated silence', Jackie's legend beyond the text. *Voss* employs the standard commodity of orality in the indigene, particularly in its corollary of not-writing, only in order to surpass it through the embrace of a linked commodity, that of mysticism ... As in White's other texts, no hope for logos remains.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 126.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 152–153.

⁵⁰ Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, McGill-Queen's University Press, London, 1989, p. 210.

Upon his first encounter with the rock art, in the company of his Indigenous guide Jackie, Voss articulates the binary between the logos of the word in European culture, and the mystical simplicity of pre-historic cave art:

The man was yielding himself up to the simplicity of the drawings. Henceforth all words must be deceitful, except those sanctioned by necessity, the handrail of language.⁵¹

The simpleton of the expedition, Harry Robarts, finds most affinity with the paintings, his child-like imagination and mind made malleable by hunger and exhaustion:

Harry Robarts understood immediately what the drawings were intended to convey. Privation, which has reduced the strength of his body, had increased his vision and simplicity of mind, so that he was treading through the withered grass with the horde of ochrous hunters.⁵²

Voss writes to Laura that Harry's simplicity is bordering on profound revelation: 'he could well arrive at that plane where great mysteries are revealed'.⁵³ Le Mesurier is also initiated into the Aboriginal dreaming through the sympathy of his imagination:

Towards morning, Le Mesurier was wrestling with the great snake, his King, the divine powers of which were not disguised by the earth-colours of its scales ... At one point during his struggles, the sick man, or visionary, kissed the slime of the beast's mouth, and at once spat out a shower of diamonds.⁵⁴

Voss has a mystical vision of his own in the cave. Out of the mouth of the cave of his five senses, he opens his mind to contemplate the infinite in everything—the doors of perception open in the dawn, before they close as human appetite and desire recall him to his body:

Voss went to the mouth of the cave. If he was shivering, in spite of the grey blanket in which he had prudently wrapped himself, it was not through diffidence, but because each morning is, like the creative act, the first ... The creator sighed, and there arose a contented little breeze, even from the mouth of the cave ... The infinitely pure, white light might have remained the masterpiece of creation, if fire had not suddenly broken out ... So the divine spirit fled out, into the swirl of blown rain. The man that remained continued to watch the shiny grey soup of the prevailing flood ...⁵⁵

⁵¹ White, *Voss*, p. 274.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 280.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 283.

Here is the mystical experience that Voss seeks, the metaphysical ambition of his journey. Yet such visions are attained also by Mrs Radclyffe in her garden, and by Will Pringle in his contemplation of the humble blowfly.⁵⁶ Turner observes in *National Fictions* that:

Nature does not only offer a Romantic retreat from society; it offers also a withdrawal from the political, socio-economic realities of existence—into, eventually, the spiritual or metaphysical. Consequently, the rage which John Docker et al. direct at proponents of the ‘metaphysical’ strain in Australian literature—notably the work of White and Hope—derives from the sense that it articulates an avenue of withdrawal from the material world. This withdrawal is only available to a certain elite, privileged, class group. Finding spirituality in a gob of spittle may be revelatory, but when it is paired with a view of ordinary people that infers their ultimate banality from their livingroom decore, it may seem elitist and misanthropic indeed.⁵⁷

Stripped of the superfluous words and materialism of colonial society, the cave paintings work to remind the Europeans of the essence of life itself, the Romantic contemplation of Nature, and the Romantic ideal of seeing everything as new through the eyes of the child, ‘thou best Philosopher’.⁵⁸ As Turner argues, the Romantic discourse in *Voss* avoids the difficult question of economies of exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, preoccupations central to the work of cultural theorists such as Eric Michaels and Stephen Muecke (discussed further in Chapter Five).

A natural orality and aversion to writing is associated with the Aborigines in *Voss* and is epitomised in the destruction of Voss’s letters by the Aboriginal elder, Dugald, before the latter fulfils ‘the destiny of his Aboriginal prehistoricism’ by

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 447.

⁵⁷ Turner, p. 36.

⁵⁸ William Wordsworth expounds this Romantic philosophy in ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (in M.H. Abrams (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., Vol 2, W.W. Norton & Company, London, 1986, pp. 209–214, p. 212):

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul’s immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal mind, —
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find ...

going 'away to die'.⁵⁹ Dispatched from the expedition with a bundle of letters, Dugald encounters his own people and reverts to a traditional lifestyle in an Edenic scene. Dugald's Aboriginality asserts itself in a reunion with Nature, and the white man's words are explained away to the wind via a superstitious discourse:

Remembering the white man's letters, Dugald retrieved the pocket, and took them out. The shreds of his coat fell, and he was standing in his wrinkles and his bark-cloth. If the coat was no longer essential, then how much less was the conscience he had worn in the days of the whites?⁶⁰

Culture here is essentialised as something to be put on or taken off, find or lose. Prior to his contact with Europeans, Dugald was living in a preconscious state of nature to which he now returns. Dugald proceeds to tear up Voss's letters and return to a perfect fit with nature:

With great dignity and some sadness, Dugald broke the remaining seals, and shook out the papers until the black writing was exposed ... These papers contained the thoughts of which the whites wished to be rid, explained the traveller, by inspiration: the sad thoughts, the bad, the thoughts that were too heavy, or in any way hurtful ... With the solemnity of one who has interpreted a mystery, he tore them into little pieces.

How they fluttered.

The women were screaming and escaping from the white man's bad thoughts.

Some of the men were laughing.

Only Dugald was sad and still, as the pieces of paper fluttered round him and settled on the grass, like a mob of cockatoos.⁶¹

In the image of the paper settling on the grass like cockatoos, the transition from culture to nature is complete. Goldie argues that the orality of the Indigene is a marker of Otherness:

Orality represents a different order of consciousness, one which makes the indigene so clearly Other, something far more alien than simply an older, a more primitive, a more sexual, a more violent society. Orality provides the white observer with both a manifestation of and a definition of Otherness.⁶²

Bhabha's theorising has emphasised the extent to which the written word is destabilised in the colonial context, introducing ambiguity and subverting the colonial ideological paradigm. In *Voss* however, the European letters are

⁵⁹ Goldie, p. 207.

⁶⁰ White, *Voss*, p. 219.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁶² Goldie, p. 110.

abandoned to die in a timeless and oral prehistoric landscape, ceasing to signify for all eternity.

In 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817' Bhabha expounds his theory of cultural hybridity in a postcolonial reading of an anecdote about Anund Messeh who encounters a religious sect gathered under a grove tree.⁶³ The group insists their Hindoostanee translation of the gospel was imparted to them by an Angel: 'An Angel from Heaven gave it us, at Hurdwar fair'.⁶⁴ Messeh explains that the book belongs to Sahibs, and that it is their European religion:

'These books,' said Anund, 'teach the religion of the European Sahibs. It is THEIR book; and they printed it in our language, for our use'. 'Ah! no,' replied the stranger, 'that cannot be, for they eat flesh.'⁶⁵

In the colonial context the words of the coloniser lose their authority, and are appropriated by the colonised; the ambivalence at work in such cultural exchanges creates a space for the intervention of otherwise marginalised voices and histories. Bhabha posits that:

a reading of the hybridity of colonial authority profoundly unsettles the demand that figures at the centre of the originary myth of colonialist power. It is the demand that the space it occupies be unbounded, its reality coincident with the emergence of an imperialist narrative and history, its discourse non-dialogic, its enunciation unitary, unmarked by the trace of difference.⁶⁶

When Dugald abandons his white consciousness and destroys the letters there is no interventionist possibility, or dialogic engagement, with colonial authority. Rather than an intervention or dialogic engagement with the colonisers' terms, the scene of the destruction of the letters is marked by a return to nature, and departure from the annals of history into the perpetual present of a depoliticized and prehistoric chronotope:

The old man went with them, of course, because they were his people, and they were going in that direction. They went walking through the good grass, and the present absorbed them utterly.⁶⁷

⁶³ Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817' in *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 102–122.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁷ White, *Voss*, p. 220.

In *A Fringe of Leaves* and *Riders in the Chariot* Indigenous culture is also depicted as an anachronism in the evolution of the modern Australian nation, and as in *Voss*, the alterity of the Indigenous subject is effaced by White's mysticism.

Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity is critiqued by Nikos Papastergiadis, John Docker and Young, among others, the latter identifying the etymological baggage of the term 'hybridity', in which 'the nightmare of the ideologies and categories of racism continue to repeat upon the living'.⁶⁸ Young raises the question of agency in respect to the linguistic hybridity of texts in Europe and the colonial context:

... how does the equivocality of colonial discourse emerge, and when—at the time of its enunciation or with the present day historian or interpreter? Sometimes Bhabha writes of colonial discourse only becoming ambivalent when enunciated at a certain moment of colonial history, thus implying that elsewhere, at home, it was not, or at the very least that its equivocal potential previously remained unactivated. At other times he intimates that it was in fact always already ambivalent, which suggests that such ambivalence is always already inscribed at a textual level. This prompts the question of what, if anything, is specific to the colonial situation if colonial texts only demonstrate the same properties that can be found in any deconstructive reading of European texts.⁶⁹

Young makes the salient point that Bhabha's theory of hybridity as developed in 'Signs Taken For Wonders', along with his theories of mimicry and ambivalence, have less to do with the agency of the colonial subject and more to do with the hybrid nature of language itself—the extent to which texts may contain many conflicting meanings which are impinged upon by the context in which they are read and by the minds of those who read them. Papastergiadis raises questions about unequal power relations in the contact zone, and their impacts on cultural exchange:

... if we are all hybridized subjects, but our encounters with otherness and our flexing of translation are not equal, we may well need to return to a theory of ideology to demonstrate how the gaps and slants of representation have various effects on the subject.⁷⁰

Docker and Gerhard Fischer also highlight a sense of ailing political commitment in conceptualisations of cultural hybridity that have become fashionable in postcolonial parlance:

⁶⁸ Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 28.

⁶⁹ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 153.

⁷⁰ Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 195.

Against such idealising of hybridity and such a historical assessment we might pose the experience of the 1990s: the resurgence in Europe and around the world of racial thinking, ethnic cleansing, violence towards she or he who is designated the stranger, desired purity of faith, the continuity of particularist communities; the frequent incidence of ethnic and racial murder and massacre; the expulsion of undesired populations (reminiscent of the terrible expulsions of Moors and Jews in Spanish history).⁷¹

Despite these reservations the concept of 'cultural hybridity', as developed by Bhabha in 'Signs Taken for Wonders', is useful in critiquing static and essentialist representations of culture such as those found in *Voss*. Papastergiadis maintains that:

In many ways Bhabha's strategy for understanding the formation of culture and identity by focusing on the interstitial and liminal moments of articulation and the proposal of terms like hybridity are both timely and effective counters to the essentialist views and organic models which are still common in the social sciences.⁷²

It will be argued in the following chapter that the representations of Aboriginality in *Oscar and Lucinda* are informed by the notion of cultural hybridity, as the religion of the coloniser is appropriated and reinterpreted according to Indigenous traditions. There is no such possibility in *Voss*. Rather than take on new meaning, *Voss's* words cease to signify altogether, there being no revolutionary potential in the 'black writing' of the letters, though possibly a deprecating irony on White's part.

A Classical Grammar of Representation

In his study of representations of Indigenous peoples in European culture, *Masks of Difference*, David Richards examines the depiction of the Timucuas of Florida by French artist Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues in the sixteenth century. Le Moyne's paintings were among the first illustrations of the New World peoples, published as engravings by the German publisher Theodore de Bry.⁷³ Richards shows the extent to which Le Moyne's paintings are framed by his classical understanding of 'savages', imbued with his European cultural context. His paintings exhibit alternatively both the classical Orcus and Silvanus aspects of the wildman: 'as Bernheimer explains: "To the wildman Silvanus, benefactor of fields and woods,

⁷¹ John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (eds), *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 12.

⁷² Papastergiadis, p. 194.

there corresponds the wildman Orcus, enemy of living things and of man himself ...".⁷⁴ The wildman as Silvanus represents a 'benign woodland spirit', existing in a kind of Edenic state in which he befriends both animal and man: the 'noble savage' as found in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, saving young maidens lost in the forest.⁷⁵ The Orcus aspect of the wildman, in contrast, is the cannibalistic savage, enemy of human society, and rapist of fair maidens: a wholly destructive being, found in 'accounts of travellers and scholars of the pseudo-anthropological field of "teratology", the study of monstrous races'.⁷⁶

Often it was the observed natives who were described in the harsh, Orcus aspect, while the undiscovered tribes of the imagination were depicted by Europeans as living Edenic, leisured lifestyles:

Whatever emerges can, perhaps, be best symbolised by the Manichean designation of primitive peoples commented upon by Stephen Horigan when he distinguishes between two kinds of 'primitives'. The imaginary, perpetually undiscovered races were 'soft' and led leisured lives of comfort and plenty, whereas the actual, observed peoples were always constructed as 'hard', leading a deprived, harsh, brutish existence, unclean, violent or immoral.⁷⁷

Le Moyne represents both the savage Orcus aspect of the Wildman and the 'soft' Silvanus aspect in different paintings of the same people: the Timucuas as a primitive people who in good time will benefit from European civilization, and alternatively as cannibalistic savages engaging in brutal and sodomic acts.⁷⁸

Richards makes the following observation about Le Moyne's painting, 'They Sacrifice First-Born Sons to the Chief in Solemn Rituals':

Whereas the savage has only a public function of display of socialisation, the European has a private dimension of selfhood which exceeds his role and which constitutes his 'true' significance. Dislocation, the voluntary removal of the European from his customary environment, both threatens and strengthens this sense of his unique individuality.⁷⁹

Europeans are presented as complex, individual beings, existing beyond their social role, while indigenous peoples are represented as lacking 'character' or

⁷³ David Richards, *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 40.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ See Richards' analysis of 'They Sacrifice First-Born Sons to the Chief in Solemn Rituals', p. 42, and 'The Treatment of the Enemy Dead', p. 56.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

‘personality’, or ‘depth’. This is a characteristic of representations of indigenous peoples who Richards identifies in both Le Moyne’s paintings of the sixteenth century, and other texts through to the twentieth century. In *Masks of Difference* Richards shows how this model of representation of indigenous peoples, mediated by classical literature and painting, form what he terms a ‘grammar of representation’, which still has currency in the twentieth century, and can be seen to frame, to some extent at least, White’s representations of aboriginality in *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves*.

White also applies the cartographic trope of the blank map to the state of the Indigenous mind in the characterisation of Dugald, as the latter sheds his recently acquired European consciousness in the same fashion as he disposes of his swallowtail coat. Ryan argues that the representation of the Indigenous mind as a tabula rasa ripe for the inscription of European knowledge is a common strategy of representation in the explorer journals:

space has to be regulated and rendered blank before it can be inscribed; the indigene also is constructed as a blank. James Grant, for instance, writes that ‘the mind of the Aborigine seems to be the ‘*resa tabula*’ of the philosophers; it has not been wrought upon by education; it is wax, of the purest and softest kind, fit to receive and preserve any impression’ ... —a description which seems to suggest that the Aborigines may be ameliorated or rather, entirely reconstructed by the Europeans.⁸⁰

The *resa tabula* trope is played out again in the mind of the younger Indigenous guide, Jackie. Whereas Dugald’s entry into the perpetual present of pre-history is portrayed as being relatively unproblematic, Jackie is tormented by the sharp knives of a new consciousness that splits his worlds into a schizophrenic embrace. In Dugald’s case, the words never penetrated the core of his way of seeing the world; as an Aboriginal elder, he is represented as somewhat of an anachronism in the new order of things. Jackie, on the other hand, takes Voss’s words to heart, which create in him a nascent consciousness. J.J. Healy observes:

Jackie carries with him, whether he likes it or not, the burden of a new consciousness. He has contracted this from his association with the visionary white man, who has sowed a certain magic and an obtrusive possession into the autochthonous world of the Aborigine.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 135.

⁸¹ J.J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 198.

This new consciousness works to alienate Jackie from his environment, the 'autochthonous world of the Aborigine', which White has depicted as being plagued by superstition and brute necessity:

In normal circumstances, the isolation would gradually have been reduced by the many little measures that made life agreeable and possible: by following the tracks of animals, by looking into scrub or logs, by looking for water or honey, by looking, always by looking. Temporarily, however, his eyes would not see clearly, and the loneliness was increased by these thoughts. Terrible knives of thought, sharpened upon the knives of the sun were cutting in to him.⁸²

In order to exorcise this deeper engagement with Voss's mind, Jackie cuts off the German's head. Both his knowledge of the spirit world and that of the European world exist side-by-side in his mind, but seem unreconcilable. Voss's beheading is also an act of political resistance to his imperial advance. At the climax of his expedition, Voss has not discovered new territory, rather he has been led along well established paths in a country that appears to be already mapped:

Now the party had begun to move forward over the plain of quartz, in which, it was seen, a path must have been cleared in former times by blacks pushing stones aside.⁸³

What Voss has found is more than desert abstraction in which he can realise his metaphysical ambition; he has stumbled across a community, and has become victim to their own belief systems, however much he might think of them as primitive; a community not willing to act as his 'subjects'.

When Voss beseeches Jackie to translate his call for friendship, Jackie resists with a newly found determination: "Blackfeller dead by white man,' he was prompted to say at last.'⁸⁴ Jackie's seeming betrayal exposes Voss's own delusions of grandeur:

'He will be my footstool,' he said, and fell asleep, exalted by the humility of the black's perfect devotion and the contrast of heavenly perfection ... But in the morning Jackie could not be found.⁸⁵

The sense of self that Jackie is developing realises its independence in his act of rebellion against Voss. He is turning the 'knives of thought' that Voss has given him against his master, while simultaneously trying to exorcise them. Parallels can be observed in the hacking off of Voss's head and in the letters ceasing to

⁸² White, *Voss*, p. 418.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 366.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 365.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 361.

signify—there is no chance even for Voss’s thoughts to develop, or be challenged by Indigenous knowledges.

Meanwhile, the rest of the tribe is depicted in their pre-conscious state, unnamed, their roles undifferentiated. Whereas Jackie breaks from Richard’s ‘grammar of representation’ the rest of the tribe can be seen to conform to it. They are distinguished only by their social roles (as witchdoctors, or elders), are not named individually or identified as a particular Indigenous community speaking a certain dialect. Overall they are a superstitious group, bent on survival, and there is no alternative for Jackie, who remains caught between two worlds:

the old men were every bit as unhappy. All their lives haunted by spirits, these had been of a colourless, invisible, and comparatively amiable variety. Even the freakish spirits of darkness behaved within the bounds of a certain convention. Now this great fiery one came, and threatened the small souls of men, or coiled achingly in the bellies of the more responsible.⁸⁶

Depicted only by social function, these are the Indigenous people of *A Fringe of Leaves*, who are wracked by superstition and brutality, chatter away like monkeys or hens; little more than brutish shadows of Australian history.

As much as the decision by the tribal elders to execute Voss is an act of conscious resistance, it is an expression of atavistic superstition. Like upset children, the elders express their rage and frustration at the passing of the comet, without incident, through the slaughter of the animals:

It had become obvious to the blacks that they were saved, which should have been the signal to express simple joy, if, during all those days, they had not been deceived, both by the ‘Snake’ and by the white man. So the blacks were very angry indeed ...⁸⁷

Jackie is chosen as the vehicle for Voss’s assassination, and Jackie too hopes that his sullenness will be expiated:

His left cheek bore the imprint of the bone handled clasp-knife given him by Mr Voss ... It was perhaps this sad possession, certainly his most precious, which had begun to fill him with sullenness.⁸⁸

Here again Jackie’s awakening is attributed to Voss’s influence, and his gifts of knives of thought: ‘He must break the terrible magic that bound him

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 379.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 391.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 394.

remorselessly, endlessly, to the white men.⁸⁹ Yet the magic cannot be broken, as it was so easily for Dugald, leaving Jackie to wander the Australian landscape, tormented by thought and tribal visions. As Goldie observes, Jackie's status as a legend and prophet again takes him outside of time:

So Jackie came and went. He became a legend amongst the tribes. Of the great country through which he travelled constantly, he was a shifting and troubled mind. His voice would issue out of his lungs, and wrestle with the rocks, until it was thrown back at him. He was already speaking with the souls of those who had died in the land, and was ready to translate their wishes into dialect. If no other blackfellow learned what those wishes were, it was because his fear prevented him from inquiring of the prophet.⁹⁰

Whereas Dugald is confined in the pre-historic space-time that characterises traditional museum exhibitions of Indigenous culture, Jackie as legend also inhabits a space-time beyond the sphere of a contemporary politics. Jackie's essential orality remains intact, but rather than engage in cultural translations with revolutionary potential, he merely translates from the living to the dead. His prophet status may equip him to foresee the future, but there is little potential here for bringing about political change. Frantz Fanon argues in the *Wretched of the Earth* that 'through the act of violence the colonized is capable of freeing himself from his reified status and becoming once more a human being'.⁹¹ In contrast, Jackie's use of violence, like his use of the coloniser's language, only comes to reinforce his outsider status. Rather than becoming more human, he becomes something of a ghost suspended between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Representations of Aboriginality in *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves*

White's mysticism forms a central theme in *Riders in the Chariot*, and as in *Voss*, his modernist grand narrative elides the alterity of the Indigenous other through its universal humanism. In a letter to Ben Huebsch in May, 1959, White clearly states his purpose, in which there are no qualms about speaking for the Other:

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 421.

⁹¹ Fanon in Goldie, p. 88.

What I want to emphasise through my four 'Riders'—an orthodox refugee intellectual Jew, a mad Erdgeist of an Australian spinster, an evangelical laundress, and a half-caste aboriginal painter—is that all faiths, whether religious, humanistic, instinctive, or the creative artist's act of praise, are in fact one. The half-caste aboriginal, who is diseased and degraded as a human being will be perhaps the real test—whether I can make his creative genius strong and convincing enough.⁹²

Kay Schaffer writes of *A Fringe of Leaves* in her study on the Eliza Frazer stories: 'as John Docker was to point out in a review of David Marr's biography, the problem with White is that he speaks "the truth" so assuredly always *on behalf of* others.' His willingness to speak on behalf of others, in the name of universal truths, marks a critical difference between White's modernism and the postmodern narrative strategies employed by Carey.

Healy argues that Jackie's character is developed by White into Alf Dubbo in *Riders in the Chariot*:

Jackie flows inevitably into Alf, just as Alf draws into his own fate that of the Aboriginal group he leaves behind on the river bank of his youth. He is born into a time when the autochthony of his tribal ancestors in *Voss* is at best a sentimental memory ... Dubbo is the artist as painter, who circumnavigates the treacheries of language into the traditional Aboriginal medium of paint, who finds a language of silence for a world of silence.⁹³

Healy here repeats White's binary opposition between the natural orality of Indigenous people and the aversion to the written word, which is a theme both in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*. Dubbo is a member of what are now referred to as the stolen generations:

He was born ... on a reserve to an old gin named Maggie, by which of the whites she had never been able to decide. There he would have remained probably, until work or cunning rescued him. That he was removed earlier, while he was still, in fact, a leggy, awkward little boy, was thanks to the Reverend Timothy Calderon, at that time Anglican rector of Numburra.⁹⁴

Yet despite his European education, the oral/primitive binary is seen to linger as an innate, atavistic trait, and informs his development as an artist as opposed to being a writer. This becomes apparent in the following scene, where Dubbo visits the library:

⁹² David Marr (ed.), *Patrick White: Letters*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 1994, p. 153. White makes reference to Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, sends a copy in fact, in a letter to Elizabeth Harrower (p. 376). Hesse's glass bead game is akin to White's mystical vision, in which all knowledges are one.

⁹³ Healy, p. 200.

⁹⁴ White, *Riders in the Chariot*, p. 313

Often he would take refuge by slipping into the Public Library, to look at books. But reading did not come easily; an abstraction of ideas expressed less than the abstraction of forms and the synthesis of colours ... All the readers had found what they had been looking for, the black man noted with envy. But he was not altogether surprised; words had always been the natural weapons of whites. Only he was defenceless.⁹⁵

This oral/literary binary manifests in a conflict between Dubbo's Indigenous 'instinct' and his white man/pastor's rational conscience, which evokes Jackie's torment upon receiving the gift of Voss's knives of words:

All that he had ever suffered, all that he had ever failed to understand, rose to the surface in Dubbo. Instinct and the white man's teaching no longer trampled on each other.⁹⁶

While in the above passage Dubbo does manage to harmonise these two halves in his mystical outlook, his bicultural status, as in the case of Jackie, is represented as sickness rather than revolutionary potential:

Since his guardians had taught him to entertain a conscience, he would often suffer from guilt with some part of him, particularly on those occasions when his diseased body took control, in spite of the reproaches of his pastor-mind.⁹⁷

Dubbo's innate Aboriginality, his 'instinctual' side, surfaces from 'some forgotten time' when he watches a 'quean' perform a dance in a boarding house where he resides:

Dubbo was laughing loudest and widest. He had squatted down on Hannah's carpet. If there had been space, he, too, would have danced the figures he remembered from some forgotten time. Instead, he clapped his hands. He was so glad, watching Norm strut, and flap his wings of flesh to music, while the stench of bodies caused the small room to shrink still further round the form of the primordial bird.⁹⁸

There is also something innately Aboriginal about his imagination:

Dubbo was always the abo. Nor would he have wished it otherwise, for that way he could travel quicker, deeper, into the hunting grounds of his imagination.⁹⁹

White's use of the derogatory term 'abo' is ambiguous. At times it is apparent Dubbo is being described as 'the abo' as perceived through the eyes of society, or other characters, while on other occasions he is described as such by the

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 342.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 412

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 344.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 356.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 371.

omniscient narrator: 'again the abo was forced to spit, and this time it was clearer'.¹⁰⁰ Or, in the following character description:

It was an aspect of life which did not surprise the abo since he had discovered early that almost all human behaviour is surprising: you must begin to worry only for the little that is not.¹⁰¹

Despite White's use of racist language, he does try to emphasise the common humanity beneath black and white, and the extent to which Dubbo is perceived as blackfellow rather than as a man: 'officially, of course, he was not a man, but a blackfellow.'¹⁰² Nevertheless, Dubbo's humanity is tempered by White's static and essentialist conceptualisation of the 'half-caste'. Dubbo's Aboriginality manifests itself in certain atavistic traits, somehow racially inherited rather than learned, and as During argues, 'nothing in Dubbo's Aboriginality is affirmed as part of Australia's future'.¹⁰³

It was observed in *Voss* that although Jackie developed a new consciousness, and beheaded Voss, his violence and use of language did not take on a revolutionary potential. Rather than speaking to the living, Jackie spoke to the dead. Dubbo's solipsist hieroglyphs that he develops in his painting mark a similar political failing in White's representations of Indigenous culture:

He would spend Sundays in the shade of an iron water-tank, drawing and tearing off, and drawing, until he had a whole heap of hieroglyphs which perhaps only he could interpret. Not that it would have occurred to him to attempt communication with another.¹⁰⁴

Dubbo's hieroglyphs may express a truth but it is a deeply poetical one, more akin to the poetic language aspired to by the Futurists (and discussed in further detail in the analysis of *Revolution by Night* in Chapter Five). Adam Shoemaker argues in *Black Words and White Page* that Dubbo's Aboriginality only serves as a marker of difference, so that he too can be considered among the 'burnt ones':

The Aboriginal theme is subsumed by White's exploration of cosmic illumination through isolation and rejection. The experience the author describes is a poetic and symbolic one: he addresses the dilemma of outcast humankind.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 408.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 341.

¹⁰⁵ Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1989, p. 97.

Dubbo's Aboriginality is no different from Himmelfarb's Jewishness, or Miss Hare's madness, and 'is much more a matter of his being the victim of everyday racism than of any core of Aboriginal belief'.¹⁰⁶

In *A Fringe of Leaves* White employs a language similar to that used in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot* to describe his Indigenous people:

Every head among them was raised as though functioning on sadly rusted springs, and there on a rise in the middle distance appeared one, three, half-a-dozen savages, not entirely naked, for each wore a kind of primitive cloth draped from a shoulder, across the body, and over his private parts. The natives were armed besides, with spears, and other warlike implements, all probably of wood; only their dark skins had the glint of ominous metal.

The two parties remained watching each other an unconscionable time before the blacks silently melted away among the shadows.

As soon as it was felt that the aboriginals had removed to a safe distance, the voice of speculation raised itself in the white camp ...¹⁰⁷

There is a strong mechanical element to the above description, that characterises the Aborigines as having a functional existence, with their heads on springs and metal skins, devoid of inner complexity. A number of descriptions compare the language of Indigenous people with the chatter of monkeys or roosters, an association that signifies the 'Great Chain of Being' theory:

Now at any rate Mr Roxburgh would have given thanks, in peace and quiet, after settling himself against a hummock, hand in hand with his dear wife, some little way apart from the others, had it not been for a curious noise, of animal gibbering, or human chatter, slight at first, then sawing louder into the silence.¹⁰⁸

Language is also trivialised as child's play:

A high chatter interspersed with laughter suggested a kind of game: the words tossed by the women into the cooling air could have been substitutes for a ball.¹⁰⁹

There appears to be little potential here for an inner life or spiritual development, as suggested by the following phrases: 'the women, if incapable of silence, chattered in subdued monotone like birds at roosting',¹¹⁰ and 'the monkey women snatched.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ During, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, pp. 235–236.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 242.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 258.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 243.

Schaffer argues that 'like Nolan's paintings, the novel is constructed upon a modernist mythology of Australia, involving the metaphor of man in a post-lapsarian garden, within a universal humanist perspective.'¹¹² While Mr Roxburgh represents Apollonian intellect, his primitive country lover, Ellen, of the black Cornish coast, represents Dionysian desire, and their relationship echoes the dichotomy between so called 'primitive' Indigenous people and the rationality and high culture of Europeans. According to Schaffer: 'what distinguishes her as a protagonist is that she is not of English stock but of peasant origins, and thus closer to nature. White makes this point quite early in the novel, locating her with the 'dark people' of Cornwall.'¹¹³ Ellen confesses in her journal that 'I am given to fits of drunkenness without having indulged'¹¹⁴ and makes reference to what Mr Roxburgh describes as the 'romantic streak in her nature'.¹¹⁵ And later in the narrative: 'She found herself smiling for these lesser pleasures which appealed to what Austin Roxburgh deplored as 'the sensual side of Ellen's nature'.¹¹⁶ Matthew Arnold argues in *Culture and Anarchy* that the Celtic influence on the Teutonic Saxon, associated as it was with a feminine creativity, marked the evolution into a culturally superior Englishness. His theory of miscegenation, to be discussed further in Chapter Four, can be seen to inform the racial discourse of *A Fringe of Leaves*.¹¹⁷

In order to improve and tame the nature of her unbridled passions, Ellen's mother-in-law encourages her to maintain a journal, a practice she is forced to neglect in the Antipodean wilderness. As in *Voss*, the journal exists in binary opposition to the orality of 'the primitive', and in both novels the logos of the word breaks down in the wilderness:

'You haven't—what?' Shock made the old thing forget herself.

¹¹² Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 158. In her study of influence of painting and painters on White's work, Helen V. Hewitt notes that Nolan's series of paintings, *Paradise Garden*, influenced key themes in White's *The Vivisector*:

While White was working on *The Vivisector*, Nolan was working on his huge *Paradise Garden*, 768 little paintings of botanical images in thirty-two columns which convey 'an impression of optimism and freshness at the beginning which changed at the end—a thousand images later—to reveal an air of studied caution, full of barrier against a hostile world.' White bought three of these paintings. (p. 79.)

¹¹³ Schaffer, p. 165. See also Goldie, p. 196.

¹¹⁴ White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, p. 70.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 256.

¹¹⁷ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 73.

'You haven't forgotten all you have been taught?'

'The words', Ellen could only mumble, 'seem to be falling away.' This was what she truly feared in the event of long association with the blacks.

'But are you not keeping up the journal? I only suggested it to help you learn to express yourself'.¹¹⁸

Mr Roxburgh laments the security of his journal as a rational safety net faced as he is by nature: 'Mr Roxburgh wished he was still in possession of his journal, to discuss his mood in rational terms, and thus restore a moral balance.'¹¹⁹ A binary is established between Cheltenham, the artifact of European culture where the peasant, Ellen, learns her letters, and Nature, with the 'primitive' Aboriginality of Frazer Island. For enlightenment, it is necessary for the protagonist to move beyond the superficial enclosure and class boundaries of European culture, represented by Mr Roxburgh for whom death is merely 'a literary conceit'. The primordial hunting ground of the primitive imagination provides an alternative to the artifact of European architecture.

For Ellen, this mystical experience occurs during a cannibalistic rite that unites her own peasant origins with an Indigenous cultural inheritance:

As she went, she tried to disentangle her emotions, fear from amazement, disgust from a certain pity she felt for these starving savages, her masters, when she looked down and caught sight of a thigh-bone which must have fallen from one of the overflowing dillies. Renewed disgust prepared her to kick the bone out of sight. Then, instead, she found herself stooping, to pick it up. There were two shreds of half-cooked flesh and gobbets of burnt fat still adhering to this monstrous object. Her stiffened body and almost audibly twangling nerves were warning her against what she was about to do, what she was, in fact, already doing. She had raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which her throat threatened to return. She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it.

The exquisite innocence of this forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note endlessly repeated, tempted her to believe that she had partaken of a sacrament. But there remained what amounted to an abomination of human behaviour, a headache, and the first signs of indigestion. In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again.¹²⁰

The sacramental or spiritual aspect of the scene is undercut by its physicality, as it appears hunger is perhaps the main motive of her act, and indigestion its main effect. Spiritual enlightenment is also checked by the brutality of images such as

¹¹⁸ White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, p. 259.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 226.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 272.

the burnt corpse missing a leg, and the skinned girl left on the ground like some perverse rug:

She might have remained puzzled had she not identified fingernails attached to what she had mistaken for fringes, and at one end, much as a tiger's head lies propped on the floor at one end of a skin rug, what could only be the head of the girl she remembered in life laughing and playing amongst the waterlilies.

After swallowing their surprise at the intrusion on their privacy, the initiates regurgitated; it came spluttering back as rude and guttural sounds of anger. Women rolled up the dark skin, as well as gathering the head and what she saw to be a heap of bones. It was easy to guess from the greasy smears on lips and cheeks how the flesh had disappeared.¹²¹

The scene is followed by a classical marker of the primitive, as identified by Richards in *Masks of Difference*. Richards shows how the flute signifies the 'crude musicke' of Marsyas in Titian's 'The Flaying of Marsyas', representing primitive mind and culture, as opposed to the more sophisticated lyre of Apollo:

The contest was a dispute between kinds of music. Within neoplatonic doctrine, of course, music carried an immense philosophical burden. For the neoplatonists, music was the spirit of a universal harmony and its notation embodied the mathematical relationship of all created matter. In such a context, the myth's significance lies in the imposition of Apollonian harmony upon nature. Marsyas' instrumental music was played on the pipes which hang from the tree alongside Marsyas and which robbed him of a 'voice', of poetry. Marsyas' 'muteness' was opposed by the sophisticated song of Apollo with lyre accompaniment. For Kaufmann, the dispute was 'a foregone conclusion' as it exposed the 'moral power of music' and the triumph of the superior Apollonian form over the Dionysian passion of the wild.¹²²

Ellen's sojourn among the Aborigines is principally presented as an encounter with the Dionysian other which has been suppressed from Mr Roxburgh's Apollonian intellectual outlook.¹²³ Schaffer argues that in the cannibalistic rite:

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 271.

¹²² Richards, p. 23.

¹²³ In *Can These Bones Live?* Brady makes a number of theological insights in a comparative analysis of *A Fringe of Leaves*, *Voss* and *Oscar and Lucinda*, and interprets the 'flute-note' as follows:

Ellen's awareness of a "single flute-note" of a bird—emblem for White of the transcendent—"endlessly repeated", in this way dramatising Ricoeur's proposition that the entrance to the ethical is usually by means of fear rather than love. This is not the ethic of law and order, of course, the Pharisaic ethic which makes it so easy to identify what is good and what is evil—cannibalism, even metaphorical cannibalism, is outrageous to a morality of this kind. Rather it points to what Kierkegaard calls the "teleological suspension of the ethical", the move or, better, the leap to a power beyond the self and beyond human reason, responding to a call from deep within to go beyond the self, confronting the ultimate. (The Federation Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 141)

It is not explicitly stated in White's text that the flute note is that of a bird, and this ambiguity lends it to interpretation. In any case, the point of my analysis of White is that his

the youthful Ellen's spiritual union with nature through Celtic mythology and her immersion in the black (primitive, unconscious) waters of St Hya's Well is linked to Aboriginal identifications with nature through cannibalistic ritual practices. In Ellen's case, the Celtic and Aboriginal pasts of mankind merge into an experience of the 'real' beyond the veil of social illusion. The two worlds meld into an order of sameness: one distanced from the artifice of a white culture of rational, socialised beings. Within White's imaginary, these Celtic and Aboriginal pasts belong to 'our' primordial being but exist within another realm of knowing, severed from and buried by the newer cultural trappings of Western, middle-class culture.¹²⁴

The alterity of the Indigenous subject, framed in alternating 'soft' and 'hard' images of the primitive with 'waterlilies' at one end of the spectrum and cannibalism at the other, is once again subject to White's universal mysticism.

As both Goldie and Schaffer argue, White does not treat cannibalism solely as a marker of the primitive, as Europeans also engage in the practice, albeit in a less grotesque manner. At the end of the novel *Pilcher*, another survivor of the shipwreck, reveals that the Europeans were driven by hunger to eat their weaker counterparts: 'he told her confidentially, "The blacks consider the hands are the greatest delicacy".'¹²⁵ The brutality of tribal life is not so much an essential difference as a common denominator in Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. There is a Deleuzean synchronicity between the scars of tribal Aborigines, the carefully patterned markings indicative of tribal differences, and the more brutal scars of Jack Chance, the escaped convict, which are random and senseless in their distribution but nevertheless indicative of another tribe or social caste.¹²⁶ Violence accompanies both the Indigenous sacrament and the Christian eucharist, the latter being practised in the penal colony within earshot of the cries of whipped convicts, who must worship in segregation: 'you would not see them, Mrs Roxburgh' assures the chaplain, Mr Cottle'.¹²⁷ Jack Chance is the mouthpiece in the novel for the failures of European civilisation: 'men is unnatural and unjust.'¹²⁸ Hunger is the common driver of Indigenous and non-Indigenous society, as articulated by Jack Chance: 'if we considered only what's moral we'd go 'ungry, wouldn't we? An' curl up an' die. There's too much

mysticism does not accommodate the possibility that universal fundamentals may be theorised differently by different cultures.

¹²⁴ Schaffer, p. 171

¹²⁵ White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, p. 377.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 279.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 385.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 281.

thinkin'—an' not enough.'¹²⁹ Reflecting on her experience of eating human flesh during her time with Jack Chance, Ellen is described as concluding that:

It seemed less unnatural, more admissible, if only to herself. Just as she would never have admitted to others how she had immersed herself in the saint's pool, or that its black waters had cleansed her of morbid thoughts and sensual longings, so she could not have explained how tasting flesh from the human thigh-bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the hungry spirit.¹³⁰

Ellen observes after consuming her piece of leg, that she must not think of the experience again 'in the light of Christian morality'. However, this same Christian morality is later proved wanting in the penal colony amidst the savage treatment of the convicts.

Reflecting on the kindness of her captor's children, Ellen provides an argument similar to that identified in *Riders in the Chariot*, where education is necessary to lift Indigenous people from the misery of their original condition:

'Were they good?' asked a Lovell boy.

'Well, yes—not always perhaps, but at heart.' Was it not the truth behind the scratches and pinches they administered in accordance with their parents' orders?¹³¹

A Fringe of Leaves ends with White's theme that truth is a many-sided diamond:

'He became frightened. That—I hope—was his only reason for running away. Though the truth is often many-sided, and difficult to see from every angle.'¹³²

Colonel Lovell fulfills the function of Colonel Hebden in *Voss* as a writer of Imperial history foiled by the irrational Australian landscape:

If the Commandant was not exactly nervous he appeared more hesitant than one would have expected in a man of his authority. 'As you must understand, I have my report to write for the Governor, on the circumstances of the wreck, your survival, and recovery.'¹³³

In the above scene the Commandant is represented situated within the drawing room of Europe, now translated to Australian shores, the furniture appearing strange, having travelled all that way over the seas:

He received her standing in the centre of a room which might have impressed had she been more impressionable, and had she not suffered the same fate as the furniture, of

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 294.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 273–274.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 379–380.

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 378.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 361.

covering great distances and ending up battered, scratched, dusty, though still with a hint of having enjoyed more pretentious circumstances.¹³⁴

Ellen attempts to convey to the Commandant the limitations of words, be they those of Mr Roxburgh and her mother-in-law, or the words of the Commandant:

‘It’s by hearing different versions of the same incident that we arrive at the truth, Mrs Roxburgh, in any court.’

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘I was never in court. Perhaps that’s why I was never sure whether I’d arrived at the truth—whatever the incident, Captain Lovell. For all that, I survived.’¹³⁵

Her new-found knowledge will travel back with her to England, where she is restored to her class situation through a propitious marriage: ‘Mrs Roxburgh suspected that what she understood had little to do with words, in spite of tuition from Mr Roxburgh and his mother. So it would be throughout her life.’¹³⁶ As in the case of Colonel Hebden’s history, the findings of Captain Lovell’s report remain inconclusive: ‘it is difficult to arrive at the truth either in the account offered by Mrs Roxburgh, or that of Pilcher the unfortunate second mate’.¹³⁷

Pilcher, in an act of faith and an effort to restore the moral balance following his experience of cannibalism among the primitives, builds a ‘small, unconsecrated chapel’. The chaplain informs Ellen that: ‘Soon after his arrival here, he started working, in his own time and with his own hands, to build this chapel, which some might call a folly. It is not commendable as architecture, but I do not doubt the sincerity of the builder’s intention’.¹³⁸ Pilcher’s folly evokes the folly of Oscar and Lucinda’s glass church, and both appear to be equally unholy, despite the good intentions of their dreamers. The comparison is compounded by the imagery of Ellen’s first sighting of the church: ‘she was arrested by a glimpse of something which at first suggested floating, flickering light rather than any solid form: it was such a refractive white ...’.¹³⁹ Whereas Ellen failed to find spiritual solace in the official place of worship on the settlement—not a church but a ‘hall at the prisoners’ barracks’ in earshot of convicts being subject to the whip—she does have something of a spiritual encounter in Mr Pilcher’s

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 362.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 364.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 396.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 386.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 389.

‘primitive chapel’.¹⁴⁰ Schaffer, Goldie and During all observe that Ellen’s partaking in the cannibalistic sacrament marks a passing of one culture into another. In the description of Pilcher’s chapel there exists a similar cultural cross-over, in which the ‘primitive’ is incorporated into the house of God:

... nobody barred her entrance into the primitive chapel. The interior was bare, except for a log bench and a rough attempt at what in an orthodox church would have been the communion table, on it none of the conventional ornaments or trappings, but an empty bird’s-nest which may or may not have reached there by accident. Above the altar a sky-blue riband painted on the wall provided a background to the legend GOD IS LOVE, in the wretchedest lettering, in dribbled ochre ... Birds flew, first one, then a second, in at a window and out the opposite. There was little to obstruct, whether flight, thought, or vision ... At last she must have cried herself out: she could not have seen more clearly, down to the cracks in the wooden bench, the bird-droppings on the rudimentary altar. She did not attempt to interpret a peace of mind which had descended on her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let the silence enclose her like a beatitude.¹⁴¹

The spirituality of the scene symbolised by the flight of the birds is tempered by the physicality of ‘bird-droppings’, just as the message ‘God is Love’ is undermined strangely by the ‘wretched lettering’—the dribbling ochre of the words emphasising the ‘primitive’ and ‘aboriginal’ nature of the church.¹⁴² Veronica Brady writes that Ellen’s sense of freedom in the church ‘comes not ... from the accumulation of possessions or from social power, but from its opposite, suffering and dispossession’.¹⁴³ As in *Voss*, enlightenment is to be found through humility, suffering and personal endurance.

The cracks in the architecture of the church evoke the cracks in the architecture of Xanadu in *Riders in the Chariot*, as the inside and outside of nature and culture are broken down in the Australian landscape. During observes that ‘for White, houses can more easily shelter authentic being in the world when

¹⁴⁰ The Chaplain attempts to placate Ellen with a Kafkaesque response: ‘Captain Lovell is humane by comparison with his predecessor. But punishment must be administered, in certain cases, when it is due’ (ibid., p. 387).

¹⁴¹ ibid., pp. 390–391.

¹⁴² John McLaren states in *Writing in Hope and Fear* that:

White sees the world in very much the same terms as Milan Kundera, who has observed that any view that does not allow for shit is mere kitsch, and that the existence of shit is incompatible with the kind of belief in God and goodness found in orthodox Christianity of the kind embraced by such of White’s characters as the Reverend Timothy Calderon. If God is not in the shit, or in Stan Parker’s much cited gob of spittle, then He is nowhere. But if we can see God immanent in the world, including its shit, spittle and semen, then He also transcends the limitations of His creation and our perceptions of it. (John McLaren, *Writing in Hope and Fear: Literature as Politics in Postwar Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 176.)

¹⁴³ Brady, p. 144.

they begin to rot away, as if reality can be most effectively encountered and accepted in the cracks in the walls, the overgrown gardens.¹⁴⁴ In *Oscar and Lucinda*, however, the cracks in the travelling architecture of the glass church result in Oscar's horrific death by water. The personal mystical vision of White's outsiders gives way to Carey's theme of dispossession and a concern with the unresolvable inherent tensions and contradictions that drive the historical and political forces of colonialism. *Oscar and Lucinda* parodies the hastily constructed marriage at the end of *A Fringe of Leaves*, as Oscar marries the wrong woman and Lucinda loses her fortune; there is no individual enlightenment, only a play of racial and colonial differences that will inform an Indigenous cultural future.

Conclusion

Voss concludes, in a similar fashion to *A Fringe of Leaves*, with the British historian of Empire trying to piece together a factual history of events. In both novels words are elusive, and White posits in postmodern fashion that the writing of history is inevitably shaped by the subjectivities of author and the impossibility of rendering a multifarious truth whole. Redemption may be found, however, through a mystic truth beyond the plane of human reason—something akin to Aldous Huxley's perennial philosophy in which all religions and belief systems may work as transcendental step-ladders, if one only knows how to get on (or indeed, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*).¹⁴⁵ In a variation on the theme of Voss's journey, Hebden sets out to retrace Voss's footsteps, also finding that the intractable Australian landscape resists his rational account of things:

Sometimes at sundown he could not bring himself to write in his journal the firmly rational account that it was his custom to write ... Even Colonel Hebden had been made to look ridiculous by that most irrational country; the resistance of his human dignity was being broken down.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ During, p. 61.

¹⁴⁵ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Flamingo, London, 1994 (1946). Marr notes in his biography of White that:

Critics would spend a good deal of time guessing which writers had influenced White as he worked on *Voss*. 'Most of the time, I'm afraid, it leads up the wrong tree!' T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* were cited but White had not yet read them, nor *The Golden Bough*, nor Dante except a little in the translation by Dorothy Sayers. All these were said to have influenced *Voss* ... He rather regretted not having read some of those whose influence was detected in his work ... (p. 317).

¹⁴⁶ White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, p. 422.

Hebden's failure to discover Voss's fate as he comes agonisingly close to the remains of certain expedition members, is characteristic of a larger Australian failure to dominate the landscape in a manner that evokes the tragedy of Burke and Wills. He engages Laura in a dialogue that articulates White's thesis on the limitations of the logos of the word:

'But history is not acceptable until it is sifted for the truth. Sometimes this can never be reached.'

'No, never,' she agreed. 'It is all lies. While there are men, there will always be lies. I do not know the truth about myself, unless I sometimes dream it.'¹⁴⁷

The history of Voss and his expedition is immortalised in the unveiling of his statue, as he is appropriated into the official national imaginary:

Johann Ulrich Voss was by now quite safe, it appeared. He was hung with garlands of rarest newspaper prose. They would write about him in the history books. The wrinkles of his solid, bronze trousers could afford to ignore the passage of time. Even Miss Trevelyan confessed: it is agreeable to be safely dead.¹⁴⁸

The presence of Judd, and his muddled version of events, only further serves to mystify Voss, and results in the following exchange between Hebden and Laura:

'All truths are particoloured. Except the greatest truth of all.'

'Your Voss was particoloured. I grant you that. A perfect Magpie!'¹⁴⁹

Laura's 'greatest truth of all' is not to be found in the idle conversation of drawing rooms, or by those who clasp too dearly to maps:

Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps only true knowledge comes of death by torture in the country of the mind.¹⁵⁰

The truth that Laura is alluding to is a mystical one, that of the miracle of existence to be found in everything—a Blakean mysticism: 'How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?'¹⁵¹ Willie Pringle expresses a similar sentiment: 'The blowfly on its bed of offal is but a variation of the rainbow. Common forms are continually

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 440.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 444.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 446.

breaking into brilliant shapes. If we will explore them'.¹⁵² Pringle's speech reminds one of Huxley's novels, the realisation by his most developed characters of the one in everything. Belle's meditation on the cabbage tree at the bottom of her garden is a rewording of the Buddhist adage; 'Buddha is the hedge at the bottom of the garden' (according to Huxley, a little LSD makes this quite obvious). It is this mystical level which the simpleton Harry taps into, along with the Aborigines, a preconscious, pre-rational state of mind.¹⁵³ The great truth is the oneness of everything, which Stan feels shortly before his death in the *Tree of Man*: 'It was clear that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums'.¹⁵⁴

Voss, *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves* are of a common colonial architecture that confines Aboriginality to Nature and pre-history. White's representations of Aboriginality are subject to a modernist discourse in which Indigenous culture is rendered as an example of the primitive imagination which, just as Picasso made use of African masks, may reinvigorate the European quest for spiritual enlightenment. Schaffer discusses the perceived role of the modernist artist to fulfill a cultural void in the imagining of the Australian nation

¹⁵¹ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in M.H. Abrams (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., Vol 2, W.W. Norton & Company, London, 1986, pp. 60—71, p. 63.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁵³ Turner holds in *National Fictions* that:

It is the land that sets the terms for co-existence. The 'hero' is never given any special powers other than a humility of perception (selflessness) that provides access to the land's quality. (This assumption of an instinctive communion with the land's substance is not confined to Romantic ballads, either; it also surfaces in Stan Parker's relation to the land in *The Tree of Man*, and in White's endowing of his simpleminded characters—Harry Robarts in *Voss*, and Bub Quigley in *The Tree of Man*—with supra-normal perceptions). (p. 50)

¹⁵⁴ Patrick White, *The Tree of Man*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, p. 477. Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector*: 'Now he was again acknowledging with all the strength of his live hand the otherwise unnameable I-N-D-I-G-O' (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 617). It is interesting to note that Duffield's final vision of the infinite is comprised of word and paint. Dutruc's monograph in *Revolution by Night* addresses the attempts by Russian expressionists to paint words, in a desire to bridge the gap between word and image, something the hieroglyphs of the western desert painters achieve. Hewitt provides the following interpretation of this final scene in *The Vivisector*:

Like White, and Hurtle, [Stanislaus] Rapotec belonged to no church but was drawn to religious enquiry. He painted huge abstracts in dark blues, blacks and browns, with no preparation except meditation before he started the work with bold, swinging strokes. Hurtle's equally huge and loosely stroked final paintings are executed in sombre colours and the 'never-yet-attainable blue', the secret code of 'extra indigo' ... The compressed implications of 'indigo' and of the final word in the book, 'indi-ggodd' suggest, in William Sheick's exploration, the godlike individual who, tired at last of subjective consciousness, returns into God: indigo. Indigo is also an anagram of God-in-I. (p. 78)

in the face of a decadent European culture, as is the function of the 'primitive' imagination in *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves*:

Lattas maintains that modern intellectuals position themselves, and are positioned by others, as 'having the redemptive task of caring for the nation's soul, and saving the nation from the terrible nothingness overtaking the world.' But for many Australians, as he is quick to point out, Australia is not a culture caught in a meaningless void; rather, it is a diverse and contradictory culture full of significant meaning. Further, the story of cultural decay, the search for a lost soul of the nation, keeps problems of national identity on the agenda—the search for an identity which denies internal contradictions as well as racial differences. These voices are heard at the time when women, migrants, Aborigines, the unemployed, and other of the nation's 'fringe dwellers' have challenged its assumptions and assurances of a common identity, a unified history, a myth of mankind's primordial existence.¹⁵⁵

These excluded voices threaten to break down the walls of the pet emporiums at the end of *Illywhacker*, in an image of a wave crashing down that evokes the destruction of the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda*; in the colonial context the centre does not hold. Where Bhabha's theorising demonstrates the extent to which the authority of the coloniser's discourse is destabilised in the estranging colonial context, creating a site of intervention for Indigenous knowledges and politics, the possibility that fundamental truths may be theorised differently by different cultures is beyond the frame of White's narratives. Confined to prehistory in an evolutionary narrative of nation, Indigenous people have no relevance in the cultural future, or in the reassessment of a colonial history.

¹⁵⁵ Schaffer, p. 174.

Oscar and Lucinda: The Explorer Hero Revisited

This chapter re-visits the terrain of *Voss* in its focus on the transportation of Oscar and Lucinda's glass church, a travelling colonial architecture born of an anxiety surrounding non-indigenous Australia's imaginative hold over the Australian landscape. Carey reveals that the novel was inspired by the removal of a church from the country town of Bellingen:

... I was living in Bellingen in the country. And the little church was down the road, and they wanted to take it away, zip: and I looked at that landscape and I thought—only 200 years ago this was a landscape that was full of Aboriginal stories. So I thought about a moment when that church that I knew, which was being removed from my landscape, might have arrived. I wanted it to arrive intact, whole. And I thought it would come on a barge. And, this is a totally irrational thought, it's like a dream. I wanted this church, a wooden church, just what I saw, a church in that valley, to come along the Bellinger River on a barge gliding like a dream into the landscape.¹

In *Oscar and Lucinda* there is no end to travelling for the glass church, as the novel is narrated in the parenthesis of its removal from Gleniffer on a 'low-loader',² evoking the removal of miners' cottages in Birch's essay 'Come See the Giant Koala'.³ All that is left of the church are the wheel ruts that signify an absence in the landscape of the architecture that has featured prominently in the narrator's family history and connection to place. The church travels over a terrain that differs greatly from the Gothic landscapes of *Voss*. Metaphysical

¹ Peter Carey in Sue Gillett's '*Oscar and Lucinda: Shattering History's Self-reflection*' in Patrick Fuery (ed.) *Representation, Discourse & Desire: Contemporary Australian Culture & Critical Theory*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 194–210, p. 195.

² Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988, p. 509.

³ Tony Birch, 'Come See the Giant Koala', *Meanjin*, Vol 58, No. 3, 1999, pp. 61–72.

questions give way to secular motivations, as unreconcilable colonial tensions render asunder the dream of the glass church. Carey's fantastical narrative facilitates a culturally hybrid discourse in which European and Indigenous mythologies coexist without necessarily effacing each other: a characteristic of magic realist novels.⁴ By undermining the realist writer/reader relationship Carey draws attention to the extent to which all representations of reality in written texts are constructs, be they official journals, histories, realist novels or maps.

In *Oscar and Lucinda* Mr Jeffris is hired by Lucinda to lead the overland expedition across uncharted territory for the purpose of transporting the glass church of Oscar and Lucinda's extravagant wager to a remote settlement on the Bellinger River. Oscar's terror of water puts the usual sea route out of the question, enabling Jeffris to exploit the terms of Oscar and Lucinda's gamble to his advantage by living out his explorer hero fantasy. Through his journal and watercolours Jeffris proceeds to construct the landscape in Eurocentric terms, rendering space into place through mapping and naming. Paul Carter argues in *The Road to Botany Bay* that the watercolours and descriptions of place in explorer journals facilitated the process of colonisation by creating a country inhabitable for the colonial imagination.⁵ Mr Jeffris can be read as the antithesis of Carter's deconstruction of the explorer journal genre in *The Road to Botany Bay*. A passage in the novel that the narrator attributes to the memoirs of Jeffris' alter ego, Major Mitchell, in actual fact belongs to a letter written by Matthew Flinders, to his cousin, John Franklin, and appears, with a few differences, in *The Road to Botany Bay*. I argue that the revisiting of the explorer-hero genre, and the characterisation of Mr Jeffris, appears to be influenced by Carter's theorising in *The Road to Botany Bay*.

⁴ Suzanne Baker, 'Binarisms and Duality: Magic Realism and Postcolonialism', *Span*, No 36, October, 1993, pp. 82–87.

⁵ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987.

Peter Carey and Paul Carter

Invisible to Oscar, who sails up the Bellinger 'like a blind man', the Aboriginal stories and readings of the landscape are merely a blank space on a map for Mr Jeffris.⁶ Modelling himself on Major Mitchell, Jeffris approaches exploration with a militaristic vigour. Versed in the classic authors read by Mitchell, and trained as a competent surveyor and water colourist, Jeffris is fully equipped to excel in the explorer journal genre. He even arranges his wardrobe to Mitchell's tastes. Ultimately, Jeffris is an actor preparing for his role as heroic explorer and founding father. The donning of Mitchell's robes is symbolic of Jeffris' culturally determined way of seeing, of his desire to enter what Carter refers to as the stage of Imperial history:

Imperial history's mythic lineage of heroes is the consequence of its theatrical assumption that, in reality, historical individuals are actors, fulfilling a higher destiny.⁷

As an actor living up to the demands and expectations of the explorer journal genre, Jeffris envisions the outcomes of his journey along prescribed lines of plot:

There would be pain in this journey, and most likely death. Mr Jeffris saw it now. He felt the axe in his hands, the cut scrub, the harsh saw-teeth of mountains giving up their exact latitude to his theodolites.⁸

Justifying his tyrannical treatment of Oscar, Jeffris describes their travels thus far in a romantic manner, totally divorced from the reality of the expedition itself:

He had seen things no Sydney clerk would ever dream of seeing: life, death, savages. He had eaten snake and played the missionary ... They had guaranteed his place in history.⁹

The narrative conventions of the explorer genre can be seen here to be driving the outcomes of Jeffris' expedition. Jeffris is an actor caught in a culturally determined narrative. Ryan argues in *The Cartographic Eye* that:

There is no doubt that the explorers did feel the burden of exploration history. The effect of the strategy of constructing the self through the canon of the explorers, however, is not simply to display this burden, nor does it only work to include the

⁶ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 492.

⁷ Carter, p. xvii.

⁸ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 441.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 473.

explorer within this canon; rather it leaves the persona of the explorer incomplete—he is explicable only in so far as he is a repetition of others.¹⁰

Mitchell, Carter argues, maintains ‘a culturally coherent view of his spatial—and hence historical—responsibilities’,¹¹ and in similar style, Jeffris partakes in the cultural construction of the landscape, with his ‘triple artillery of map, sketches and journal’.¹² The ‘I’ of Jeffris is the collective ‘I’ of the Eurocentric gaze; that of Mary Louise Pratt’s all ‘seeing man’.¹³

Jeffris’ adulation of Mitchell is made clear from the outset of his preparations to lead the expedition: ‘all of his adult life had been spent in preparation for the day when he should survey unmapped country, have a journal, publish a map’ in emulation of ‘his hero, Major Mitchell’.¹⁴ It is in this context that the passage attributed to Mitchell’s *Memoirs* is introduced into the novel. Jeffris has copied the extract out painstakingly in ‘his admirable copperplate’ and hung it above the bed as a kind of mission statement intended to maintain his focus on developing his explorer credentials. The passage Jeffris hangs above his bed reads as follows:

A little mathematical knowledge will strengthen your style, and give it perspicuity. Study the writings of great men. I would place Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* at the top of any list, but would advise you not to neglect Pliny, Plutarch, Sallus and Seneca. Study these writings both for the subject and the manner in which they are treated. Arrangement is a material point in voyage writing as well as in history: I feel great diffidence here. Sufficient matter I can always furnish, and fear not to prevent anything unseamanlike from entering into the composition: but to round a period well, and arrange sentences so as to place what is meant in the most perspicacious view, is too much for me. Seamanship and authorship make too great an angle with one another.¹⁵

However, that Mitchell should write in a ‘self deprecating style’ is uncharacteristic, to say the least, considering his reputation as ‘ruthlessly ambitious, as self-publicist not averse to distorting the truth in order to heighten his esteem in the public assessment’.¹⁶ He was also something of a literary man, having published a translation of Camões’ epic poem of exploration, the *Lusiads*,

¹⁰ Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 26.

¹¹ Carter, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 134.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 113.

¹³ The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the ‘seeing-man,’ an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess’ (Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 7.).

¹⁴ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 403.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 404.

in 1853. Paul Carter argues that such was Mitchell's admiration of the structure and style of the *Lusiads*, he 'modelled his own journals on Camões' epic example'.¹⁷ As for the allusions to seamanship, Mitchell made his name in the interior.

The same passage appears, in slightly different form, in Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, published the year before *Oscar and Lucinda*, as an extract from a letter written by Flinders to John Franklin, later Sir John Franklin, and from 1837-1843 lieutenant-governor of Van Dieman's Land. The self-deprecating style of the letter can be attributed to Flinders' doubts at the time about his ability to write up the final drafts of his journals for publication. Originally it was intended that the job would be handled by a 'literary man'.¹⁸ Franklin was present on the *Investigator* voyage, through Flinders' influence, as a midshipman, at the age of fifteen. When it came to the writing up of the journal years later, Flinders evidently felt that Franklin might have been better suited to satisfy the tastes of the literary establishment. Flinders writes: 'I am now engaged in writing a rough account, but authorship sits awkward upon me, I am diffident of appearing before the public, unburnished by an abler hand'.¹⁹ He suggests that if Franklin were interested in following up a literary career the writing up of the *Investigator* voyage would make for a propitious start, and offers him some advice as to how he might best prepare himself:

A little mathematical knowledge will strengthen your style, and give it perspicuity. Study the writings of different authors, both for the subjects, and the manner in which they are treated. Arrangement is a material point in voyage writing as well as in history: I feel great diffidence here. Sufficient matter I can easily furnish, and fear not to prevent anything unseamanlike from entering into the composition; but to round a period well, and arrange sentences so as to place what is meant in the most perspicuous point of view, is too much for me. Seamanship and authorship make too great an angle with each other: the farther a man advances upon one line the farther distant he becomes from any point on the other.²⁰

Where the two extracts differ most is the inclusion by Carey of the 'great men', authors whom Mitchell did read. Surprisingly enough, this list of authors, in the same order, also appears in *The Road to Botany Bay*. Discussing Mitchell's 'Notebook C21', Carter lists the authors referred to therein, who have influenced

¹⁶ Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984, p. 115.

¹⁷ Carter, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 123.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁹ Matthew Flinders in Carter, p. 176.

Mitchell's approach to journal writing: 'At one time or another, Mitchell read Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, Pliny, Plutarch, Sallust and Seneca'.²¹ If we take our trig points at this double textual encounter, we would not be too far off track in deducing that Carey does owe some unacknowledged debt to Carter in his postcolonial treatment of the explorer/hero genre. At the very least, these textual conjunctures demonstrate the postcolonial cultural milieu out of which Carey was writing *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Carey's historical 'error' might be attributed to the unreliable narrator, who, like Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, is engaged in the telling of 'memory's truth', this being a postmodern narrative strategy which problematises the subjectivity of all texts.²²

postmodernism establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past. It both installs and then subverts traditional concepts of subjectivity.²³

When Saleem mixes up the date of Ghandi's death in *Midnight's Children* he poses the following question which is relevant here:

Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything—re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others.²⁴

Saleem's 'error' is only one of a minefield of historical 'errors' that have been planted in the narrative by Rushdie. These errors inform Saleem's biased perception of reality, which, rather than being a flawed vision, is represented as symptomatic of the human condition.

In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie recounts how after the publication of *Midnight's Children* his readers pointed out other unintentional historical errors, which far from detracting from the intent of his novel, worked to reaffirm its recurring theme:

human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of the phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Carter, p. 116.

²² Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1981, p. 207.

²³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 1988, p. 18.

²⁴ Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 164.

injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved ...²⁵

The unreliable narrator subverts the god-like perspective of the omniscient narrator which characterises both the traditional realist novel and the 'grand narrative' of histories to which Mr Jeffris' journal subscribes. Intertextual echoes, such as those between *Oscar and Lucinda* and *The Road to Botany Bay*, are also a feature of what Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* defines as 'historiographic metafiction':

Historiographic metafiction shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured, and in the process manages to broaden the debate about the ideological implications of the Foucauldian conjunction of power and knowledge—for readers and for history itself as a discipline.²⁶

Flinders' letter is an instruction in the artifice of journal writing; this is not so much a task of translating one's experience on to the blank page as a discursive journey through the dominant discourses of the colonial paradigm, discourses which have worked to dispossess and marginalise Indigenous people.

The extent to which the narrator of *Oscar and Lucinda* is an unreliable one is borne out in the ironical context of the misquoted extract, for he goes on to inform the reader that:

He would have copied more had the sheet of paper he had begun with been sufficient, for there was something of the actor in Mr Jeffris, and when he wrote the words of his hero on this piece of paper he felt himself become their author whose own frock coat (in an engraving date 1835) bore a striking similarity to the one that Mr Jeffris had made in 1864.²⁷

The 'more' may be read as the ellipted clause following the colon in Flinders' original passage: 'the farther a man advances upon one line the farther distant he becomes from any point on the other'. Having established that there is something of the author in Jeffris as well as the actor, the narrator expounds on his aversion to incompetence and sloppy scholarship, being able to 'quote from Scripture to support his view'.²⁸ Targeted by this criticism are the bogus 'intellectuals' with whom Jeffris is forced to socialise in the colony:

²⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*, Granta, London, 1991, p. 12.

²⁶ Hutcheon, p. 120.

²⁷ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 404.

²⁸ *ibid.*

He sat down with them at dinner. They drank too much wine and put their arms around each other. They imagined they discussed philosophy and Great Issues when they could barely pronounce the names of the men they misquoted.²⁹

While adding further layers of meaning to the text, the identification of the appropriated extract also tests the reader's faith in the written word, questioning the general naivety with which readers take on board realist narrative conventions. The *authority* of the written word is undermined; the binary associations of written history with fact, and legal truth and oral history with myth and fiction, are destabilised.

This instance of unreliable narration is consistent with the opening passages of *Oscar and Lucinda* in which the narrator warns the reader to distrust local history. The narrator undermines the veracity of his mother's account of the history of the local church at Gleniffer: 'There was an excess of emotion in her style. There was something false'.³⁰ He continues in this vein to question, also, the kind of history practised by his local Historical Society:

I learned long ago to distrust local history. Darkwood, for instance, they will tell you at the Historical Society, is called Darkwood because of the darkness of its foliage, but it was not so long ago you could hear people call it Darkies' Point, and not so long before that when Horace Clarke's grandfather went up there with his mates—all the old families should record this when they are arguing about who controls this shire—and pushed an entire tribe of aboriginal men and women and children off the edge.³¹

At the end of *Oscar and Lucinda* the old, weatherboard church is finally removed from Gleniffer, and with it go the plethora of Christian stories and their significance to the life of the narrator. Their removal echoes the destruction of the culture and religion of the traditional Indigenous owners of the area, as told above in the etymology of Darkwood, and also gives rise to an anxiety surrounding non-Indigenous connections to place.

Magic realism is a narrative strategy used by Carey to facilitate the accommodation of Kumbingiri Billy's oral history into the text, as it 'contests the restrictions of colonial space by opening up a "dual spatiality," thus making problematic any notion of a single unified world-view of reality'.³² A succinct

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 405.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Baker, p. 87.

definition of magic realism can be found in Chanady's insightful study of the genre, which goes to some length to distinguish it from the fantastic and mythic:

Since exclusive validity is not claimed for the conventional norms of logic and reason, supernatural phenomena do not threaten the harmony of the established world order. The rational and the irrational are not presented as antinomic by the narrator of a magic-realist work. They are both part of a fictional reality. The supernatural appears as normal as the daily event of ordinary life.³³

Although the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda* is by no means supernatural, it is nevertheless a fantastic construction. Chanady argues that a magic realist novel does not necessarily have to narrate supernatural events, even the highly unusual qualifies.³⁴

In accordance with Chanady's definition, the fantastical presence of the glass church floating down the Bellinger sits seamlessly alongside more historically grounded material such as the references to Mitchell, Philip Henry Gosse and George Eliot. Bruce Woodcock explores the magic realist connection at some length in *Peter Carey: 'Márquez ... has argued that "everyday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things" and asserted that "there is not a single line in my novels which is not based on reality"'*.³⁵

Woodcock sums up Carey's responses to the magic realist tag as follows:

at first he found it "a lovely way to describe the sort of writing one finds in *Illywhacker*" but gradually felt it becoming "a sort of cheap cliché", which led him to become "wary of being labelled a magic realist." Nevertheless, he went on to insist, almost in the manner of Márquez, "if I am going to have something extraordinary happen [in a fiction], I want it to be real ... If a ghost comes into the room, then you believe it because everything is so real".³⁶

Carey opens *Illywhacker* with a quote from Mark Twain reading Australian history as 'beautiful lies'. As one progresses through the novel Twain's observation takes on a tragic irony in the references to the themes of dispossession and the original lie of *terra nullius*. Less a fantastical voyage than a political one through Australia's colonial history, the glass church episode in *Oscar and Lucinda* resonates with the same themes of dispossession and the ongoing denial of the dark(wood) side of the Australian dream. *Illywhacker* and *Oscar and Lucinda* are both historical novels, and the fantastic or supernatural is

³³ Amaryll Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1985, p. 101.

³⁴ Chanady, p. 55.

³⁵ Bruce Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, p. 11.

presented as a critique of the construction of historical texts and 'factual' writing. Rather than viewing the fantastic as a flight from the everyday, Carey and Márquez use it to highlight the mystery and superstition that often underlie popular perceptions of reality.³⁷

Carey's appropriation of Flinders' letter to Franklin, which, it has been revealed here, is derived from Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, is an historical error in the novel which may be understood in terms of the unreliable narrator. Coupled with his use of magic realism, in which the real and fantastical exist side by side in a relationship which unsettles the reader's expectation of realist narrative conventions, the unreliable narrator highlights the discursive strategies involved in the writing of history and fiction alike. This makes way in the text for the appreciation of underprivileged histories and other world views, such as the oral history of Kumbaingiri Billy, which have been marginalised by the palimpsest of imperial history writing, epitomised in *Oscar and Lucinda* by the journal of Mr Jeffris.

Inventing Country

Through mapping and naming, Jeffris is inventing a country to live in and following in the footsteps of Mitchell as he renders space into homely place, enacting a spatial history. The power of the map lies in its apparent objectivity, its universal appeal that effaces any one point of view, its illusion of transparency. Whereas the explorer, despite the employment of a tone which gives 'no indication of the peculiarities of his personality',³⁸ can never quite extricate his subjectivity from the text of his journal, or the perspective of his water colours, in the map his point of view vanishes.³⁹ What we are left with is a ubiquitous, god-

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Hassall describes *Illywhacker* as 'something of a cross between Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Furphy's *Such is Life* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, as well as an act of homage to *One Hundred Years of Solitude...*' (Anthony J. Hassall, *Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994, p. 87).

³⁸ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 472.

³⁹ Ryan, p. 99.

like perspective, in which the land is unveiled for all in a seemingly indisputable manner.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the map is a successful tool of imperial knowledge-compilation because it convinces people that it represents 'the' world and that, except for improvements in accuracy and the development of thematic maps, there are no other worlds that can be depicted.⁴¹

All other interpretations of the landscape can then be safely relegated to the realm of 'myth' or 'imaginary geography'.⁴² The depiction of Australia as a blank space on the map is an invitation for the inscription of European myth and culture. In *Heart of Darkness*, these blank spaces inspire Marlow to a life of adventure and exploration, in a passage which also emphasises the nexus between exploration and the literary imagination:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in all the stories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there ...⁴³

Coupled with the *terra nullius* ruling, the blank map becomes an argument for the uninhibited selling of lands for cultivation and profit making:

Another cartographic trope was the southern continent as blank, awaiting colonial inscription; this is also a semiotic construction of a continent, which justifies, indeed urges, European intervention.⁴⁴

Jeffris sees the land in this teleological manner, as a blank map, beneath which he is to discover European name places, mountains and rivers, a way of seeing which mimics both that of Mitchell and the explorer journal genre in general.

The close relationship between mapping and military campaigns is highlighted by the placement of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* on the top of 'Mitchell's list of "great men"' quoted above. Mapping and surveying techniques are all offshoots of military technology and Mitchell himself had served as one of Wellington's surveyors in the Peninsular War.⁴⁵ At the time Mitchell undertook his expeditions, the military campaign 'as a metaphor of exploration' was in

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin Books, London, 1988 (1902), p. 33.

⁴⁴ Ryan, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Carter, p. 102.

currency, and this influenced both his approach to surveying and his use of place names:

As a stylist, as an artist, as a map-maker, he worked to translate the language of war into a metaphor of cultural invasion; and, in the process, he made himself a man fit to found not merely find places.⁴⁶

Jeffris dresses his men in uniforms which ‘provided a military appearance’, and disciplines them as though they were soldiers: ‘you can be raging boys at night, but, by God, you will be soldiers in the day’.⁴⁷ Unfortunately for all those who crossed his path ‘his hand was never far from pistol or sword’.⁴⁸ His men even address him mistakenly as the ‘captain’, and in a sly, dishonest manner Jeffris lets this ‘misunderstanding spread’.⁴⁹ As the expedition takes leave of Sydney the people in the streets ‘wanted to know if he was Captain Stuart’ and ‘Mr Jeffris did not deign to answer them’.⁵⁰ As described by Mr d’Abbs, Jeffris is ultimately ‘an actor’, the explorer hero *par excellence*, and his map-making is a violent art.⁵¹

Ryan’s study of the evolution of European map making out of a context of ever-shifting power relations highlights the extent to which the map is ideologically loaded:

Woodward notes that the thirteenth century Ebstorf map of the world, the central structure of which is the body of Christ, has Christ’s left hand reaching out to embrace even the twenty-four monstrous races of the antipodes.⁵²

Although cartographers representing the Australian continent were driven more by positivist enlightenment values, their project was shadowed by the global missionary enterprise of mapping souls: ‘their primary task was neither to convert nor to protect: it was to census’.⁵³ *Oscar and Lucinda* and *The Road to Botany Bay* both depict the explorer’s map-making gaze as cutting through a network of indigenous meaning. Reading the land as a blank map, Jeffris’ intention is to cut through the chaos of nature and reveal an order that will accommodate the expansion of empire:

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 448.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 437.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 442.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 433.

⁵² Ryan, p. 104.

⁵³ Carter, p. 332.

These sheets would cut a new path in history. They would slice the white dust-covers of geography and reveal a map beneath, with rivers, mountains, and names, the streets of his birthplace, Bromley, married to the rivers of savage Australia.⁵⁴

Carter employs a cutting metaphor when deconstructing the explorer journal: 'the journal is not an objective slice through geographical reality, but a critical equivalent of the explorer's spatial experience'.⁵⁵ It is used again in his depiction of the contact zone in which different concepts of space and history collide and fragment, much in the manner of a glass church exposed to the stresses of the new colony:

All too quickly the brittle criss-cross of the newcomers' gaze sliced up and fenced off what had formerly been imagined. The result was the collapse of aboriginal space, its flight inwards into isolated objects, its fragmentation into farms. The tension of history which held the country open like a book closed up.⁵⁶

Filling up the spaces of a blank map, with compass directions and place names, is an act of interpretation: 'travelling was not primarily a physical activity: it was an epistemological strategy, a mode of knowing'.⁵⁷ It was a mode of knowing that continues to deny other conceptualisations of place, cutting through them and marginalising them in the official imagining of nation.

The slippage between the representation of the land (as map) and the land in itself is a common one in explorer narratives. Ryan makes the following analysis of a passage in Sturt's journal of his 1844–45 exploration. Sturt wrote:

Let any man lay the map of Australia before him, and regard the blank upon its surface, and then let me ask him if it would not be an honourable achievement to be the first to place the foot at its centre.⁵⁸

Deconstructing this use of the cartographical trope of the blank map, Ryan argues:

There is a slippage here between map and reality that attests to the peculiar authority that maps possess: there can be few representational objects that are so often confused with the things they are meant to represent.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 441.

⁵⁵ Carter, p. 74.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 344.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ Sturt in Ryan, p. 101.

⁵⁹ Ryan, p. 101.

In Mitchell's writings this slippage occurs with frequency. The economic incentive underlying the construction of the land as a blank map is made clear in his statement that:

this territory, still for the most part in a state of nature, presents a fair blank sheet, for any geographical arrangement, whether of country divisions, lines of communication, or sites of towns.⁶⁰

Rather than an innocent reflection of a gap in European experience, the 'blank map' trope of cartography worked to exclude native title, and advance the capitalist interests of the new land-owning elite.⁶¹ There is a good example of the trope of the land as a blank map in Thomas Worsnop's *History of the City of Adelaide*, 1878:

It is not, however, merely the fact that Stuart has crossed from shore to shore, which entitles him to be placed amongst the heroes of discovery;—of still greater significance is the fact that he, and he alone, wrested from the interior its long hidden secret. What was the map of Australia in our school-days? What was it ten years ago? It was a vast blank, having no line traced upon it, no mark, even conjectural, by which an opinion might be formed of the nature of the vast interior. The coast was dotted with settlements, and its principal features were mapped down, but it was a mere fringe of description marking the edges of a vast desolation, as sea-weed marks the margin of the ocean. The interior of Australia was *unknown*. Many were the speculations as to its possible nature. Was it a region of burning mountains, a desert of shifting sands, an unapproachable expanse of rocks and chasms? Was it a sea, or a lake, or a forest, or a fruitful country? Was it a region of eternal solitude; was it the domain of wild beast; was it the home of savage tribes? Did the rains of heaven fall upon it, or was it doomed to eternal sterility and drought? Who could answer these questions? No one: but Stuart said *he would go and see*, and he went and returned to tell us.⁶²

The image of the Australian continent with markings on the edge of a vast desolation like 'sea-weed' evokes the trope of the interior as sea-like, an undifferentiated landmass to the European eye. In the passage the power of the act of 'seeing' comes through, emphasised in italics by the author, as an act of possessing landscape, as the European explorer wrests the 'hidden secret' from the veiled interior.

The process of mapping the land is an alienating one in itself, involving the cutting down of trees on hilltops in order to take trig points. To some extent, it alters that which it seeks to represent. Mitchell's trigonometrical approach

⁶⁰ Mitchell in Ryan, p. 125.

⁶¹ Ryan, p. 104.

⁶² *History of the City of Adelaide: From the Foundation of the Province of South Australia in 1836, to the end of the Municipal Year 1877*, by Thomas Worsnop, Town Clerk, facsimile edition, the Corporation of the City of Adelaide, 1988, (1878), p. 191.

involved the incessant clearing of vantage points: 'it was desirable to clear the summit, at least partly, of trees, a work which was accomplished after considerable labour—the trees having been very large'.⁶³ Jeffris also makes much of his axe, and the desire to arrange the topography to his particular visual and spatial needs: 'they would carry axes and they would be razor-sharp at all times, for there is nothing a surveyor despises more than a tree that obscures his trig point'.⁶⁴ This passage occurs in the chapter 'A Man of Authority'. Its imagery is steeped in the violence of the gaze of the all 'seeing man': 'an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess'.⁶⁵ Mapping does violence to the landscape, and a cultural violence to already existing name places and knowledges of country. More than a tautology, or cultural oversight, the map is an ideological instrument of occupation. Coupled with the Linnean project of classifying all plants, animals and humans, to which we will now turn, it is an essential part of a cultural strategy of domination. The cartographical trope of the blank map reinforces both the *terra nullius* fallacy, and the European notion of the *tabula rasa*.

Employing the cartographic trope of the blank map, Mitchell saw the southern continent as an 'empty page' onto which he would set down the beginnings of the first chapter of the land's history.⁶⁶ He saw himself as a kind of antipodean Adam, gathering the chaotic nature about him into the folds of history: 'Of this Eden it seemed I was the only Adam; and it was indeed a sort of paradise to me'.⁶⁷ Linnaeus was also described as a kind of Adam, naming the things of his world so that they could be incorporated into his universal 'Systema Naturae': 'for Linnaeus, says Daniel Boorstin, "nature was an immense collection of natural objects which he himself walked around as superintendent, sticking on labels. He had a forerunner in this arduous task: Adam in Paradise"'.⁶⁸ Linnaeus' extensive exercise in nomenclature was in itself a mapping of the continent, only much more thorough in its naming: 'the finite totality of these representations or categories constituted a "mapping" not just of coastlines or rivers, but of every

⁶³ Mitchell in Ryan, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 438.

⁶⁵ Pratt, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, p. 88.

⁶⁷ Mitchell in Gibson, *South of the West*, p. 88.

visible square, or even cubic, inch of the earth's surface'.⁶⁹ Jeffris is sure to employ the services of a botanist and a collector of animals as the systematic categorisation of flora, fauna and animal life became a standard requirement of travel narratives.

Linnaeus' system of plant classification revolutionised the role of the explorer and traveller, and contributed to what Pratt refers to as an evolving 'planetary consciousness': 'marked by an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history'.⁷⁰ No explorer journal was complete without the inclusion of learned speculation and classification of plant and animal life:

In the second half of the eighteenth century, whether or not an expedition was primarily scientific, or the traveler a scientist, natural history played a part in it. Specimen gathering, the building up of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known ones, became standard themes in travel and travel books.⁷¹

The scope of this scientific universal naming project rivalled the zeal of Christian missionaries in their 'global labour of religious conversion'.⁷² Pratt describes the categorisation of nature in terms of the 'anti-conquest', an indirect form of appropriation that 'naturalises' European occupation and ownership: 'claiming no transformative potential whatsoever, it differed sharply from overtly imperial articulations of conquest, conversion, territorial appropriation, and enslavement' that 'created a utopian, innocent vision of European global authority'.⁷³

Plants, animals and places were not the only things to be named. It was Linnaeus who coined the term 'Homo sapien', and part of his universal naming project incorporated the classification of Homo sapiens into six categories: Wild Man, American, European, Asiatic, African, as well as a category for 'monsters', which included dwarfs, giants and eunuchs.⁷⁴ Pratt argues 'one could hardly ask for a more explicit attempt to "naturalise" the myth of European superiority'.⁷⁵ Linnaeus' system coincided with the enlightenment encyclopedic project, in which all forms of knowledge were classified and brought together in the one

⁶⁸ Pratt, p. 32.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

text. Thus we find in Flinders' journal geographical coordinates of the continent juxtaposed with measurements of an Aborigine's nostrils: 'while the left-hand page is dominated by two columns of anatomical measurements of an Aborigine ... the right-hand page deals with the latitude and longitude of Bald Head at the entrance to King George's Sound'.⁷⁶

Emulating Adam in the universal Garden of Eden, Jeffris names all that comes his way:

He had put names to several largish creeks. He had set the heights of many mountains which had previously been wildly misdescribed. He had established a reputation for courage, having led his party through places inhabited by desperate blacks. His journal recorded that he had 'given better than we took' from the 'spitting tribe'. Also: '6 treacherous knaves' from the Yarra-Happini had been 'dispatched' by their guns. He has also successfully defended the party from the 'murderous Kumbaingiri'. He recorded all this in a neat and flowing hand which gave no indication of the peculiarities of his personality. His sketches of the countryside, the long ridges of mountains etc, were as good as anything in Mitchell's journals.⁷⁷

Conducting an expedition to find the junction of the Darling and the Murray, Mitchell encountered an Indigenous community which he named 'the spitting tribe', along with others such as the 'red tribe', the 'puppy tribe' and 'the Fourt Bourke tribe'.⁷⁸ Mitchell was forced to turn back due to hostile encounters with these communities. Carter argues that 'by dramatising their irregular appearance and habits and then harmonising them within his masterly narrative Mitchell possessed the Aborigines as he could not possess their country'.⁷⁹ These types of eponymous names reveal little about the tribes themselves and tell more about the Eurocentric epistemological enterprise of colonisation:

They belonged to an Enlightenment project, not to engage the world dialectically, but through the procedures of classification and taxonomy to reduce its otherness to the uniformity of a universal knowledge.⁸⁰

Oscar, too, engages in naming of his own, calling Billy's aunt 'Mary'. However, in contrast to Jeffris' monolithic narrative, which echoes that of Mitchell, and the explorer genre in general, *Oscar and Lucinda* is a polyphonic narrative in which the named speak back.

⁷⁶ Carter, p. 87.

⁷⁷ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 472.

⁷⁸ Carter, p. 125.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 331.

Explorers do not ‘discover’ the landscape, rather they create it in their own image, as does Jeffris when he strives to cut through the chaos of nature and bring into being an ordered universe the colony can call home. The landscape does not precede the traveller, rather, the traveller brings it into being:

The traveller, be he black or white, reads the land into being within his own cultural terms: the country did not teach him to read. Rather, he found there what he was looking for. And what he, the nomad, black or white, symbolised when he wrote or danced or simply made tracks, was not the physical country, but the enactment of a historical space.⁸¹

Names preserve something of their history, and it is this historical space which the explorers sought to recreate, a space to be made habitable in the European mind. The construction of the Australian landscape in maps, journals and watercolours is more than a cultural misreading of what is ‘there’. It is part of a process of preparing the country for colonisation. Where Mitchell was accused of embellishing the landscape through idealised water-colours, or of claiming to discover rivers and lakes which were found to be not there by settlers, Carter argues he was fulfilling his historical role of preparing the country for habitation: ‘he had conquered precisely because he had not kept to the “barren facts”, but instead had invented a country for others to live in’.⁸²

According to Carter, Mitchell’s panoramas and maps are advertisements designed to attract future colonists: ‘The fact is that neither Mitchell’s view of Martin’s Range nor Mitchell’s engraving of the River Salvatore is a naïve representation of the geographical matter contained in the text: both are advertisements, enticing the prospective settler to an imaginable country.’⁸³ Mitchell is depicting a home for Europeans to live in, rendering space into recognisable and liveable place:

Mitchell was not compiling a lexicon of interesting facts. His journals, like the survey, like his names, were planned as instruments of persuasion. Their elaborate preparation, their ornate style and picturesque illustration brought into being a country that readers could imagine, and therefore inhabit. In this sense Mitchell’s reports were blueprints of the movement of people; they provided, not simply the maps, but the rhetorical incentives to travel. They made places where people could settle, could imagine settling.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 349.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 120.

Reality and fiction are blurred when some of Mitchell's more imaginative features come to life in the colony, and linger in the minds of colonists for future generations. According to Carter, Mitchell's 'Lake Salvatore' proved illusive to those who followed in his steps. However, such was the power of Mitchell's representation, and the need for the colonists to justify their selection of home, that belief in the lake persisted. Carter quotes Finlayson: 'So compelling has been the myth that Mitchell started that it has been accepted unquestioningly by all who have subsequently been associated with the area.'⁸⁵ Carter goes on to speculate as to how this could possibly be:

But did Mitchell dupe them? Were they the unwitting victims of a cruel geographical joke? Could it not be that the settlers wanted to believe in Mitchell's country? Without his myth there would have been no pretext for setting out, nowhere to settle. Without his lake, there would have been nothing to explain why they had chosen so barren a stretch of country or why they had failed. From the point of view of colonization Mitchell's imaginary country was more real than any empirical one. It had, after all, provided a legend from which history could flow.⁸⁶

Through contemporary heritage and tourism practice, such legends continue to flow, and be reinvented, as Birch reveals in his analysis of the inscribing onto landscape of the town of Heatherlie. The name of the town itself is evocative of Carey's fiction. Birch informs us that although the town was planned, it was never realised. However, this did not stop the heritage workers from inscribing it on to a landscape on which the colonial imaginative hold appears tentative to say the least:

Even more unusual, the Heatherlie installation takes the tradition of using fiction to create colonial space and history to an extreme. Shortly after the quarry opened, the township of Heatherlie was planned for the site. The cartographer's eye took control of the landscape, streets were surveyed and maps were made. A facsimile of the map is on display at the entrance to the site. A school building was transported to the site in 1888, but when no-one came to the proposed town, it was packed up and headed down the highway to another mining town a year later. The late-nineteenth century dream of a pioneer town within the wilderness failed. But it is not enough for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to encourage visitors to reflect on this failure—in order to ensure that the land surrounding the industrial site is imagined as a colonial possession, installations assert there the names of streets and places that did not exist in any physical form. Visitors are invited to stand on the corner of Galbraith and Watkins streets, or stroll through the mythical town of Heatherlie itself. Even within an otherwise Indigenous landscape, where colonial history was tenuously brief or did not exist at all, fiction must prevail.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Finlayson in Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 135.

⁸⁶ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 135.

⁸⁷ Birch, 'Come See the Giant Koala', p. 67.

The relationship between mapping, naming and the imagining of the nation has a powerful resonance in *Oscar and Lucinda*: Carey's use of magic realism and the fantastic, as well as the implanting of historical errors discussed above, emphasises the role of the imagination in shaping the world.

Birch explores the anxiety between naming, mapping and reality in his essay 'The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture':

It is when names are restored to recognise earlier histories and cultures that the threat to ownership occurs. Imperial history cannot recognize the existence of indigenous histories. A history of dominance is seen as the history of a 'nation'. An attempt to recognize the history of indigenous people creates insecurity, paranoia, even hysteria. It 'wipes out over one hundred and fifty years of [British] history and 'takes away that heritage'. Existing names are 'recommended for consignment to the scrapheap of history'. The features themselves can actually vanish: 'Ayers Rock is no longer'; 'GRAMPIANS, ARE THEY GONE?'; 'Familiar places or landmarks ... would disappear from the map.'⁸⁸

Carey's fascination with the power of fiction, and the extent to which fiction shapes popular perceptions of Australian history and political reality is explored further in his short story 'Do You Love Me', where the country begins to disappear literally:

There were certain sections of the Halverson Ranges, vast stretches of the Greater Desert, and long pieces of coastline which had begun to slowly disappear like the image on an improperly fixed photograph.⁸⁹

There is insecurity in both narratives about the imagining of the Australian nation. Australia is in itself a construction, an 'imagined community', and it is the function of the cartographers and census makers in 'Do You Love Me?' to fix country in the minds of inhabitants. The Cartographers parody the role of explorers in Australian history, being canonised as founding fathers, working as an arm of government, and claiming the land through their representations of it. Carey depicts the cartographers as a nomadic priesthood, whose mission is a sacred one for the nation:

the role of the Cartographers is perhaps the most important, for our people crave, more than anything else, to know the extent of the nation, to know, exactly, the shape of the coastline ...⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Tony Birch, 'The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture', *Meanjin*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1992, pp. 229–246, p. 235.

⁸⁹ Peter Carey, 'Do You Love Me?' in *Collected Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 1995, pp. 1–11, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

Both the Cartographers and the census makers assist the people of the nation to know 'exactly where we stand'.⁹¹ It is the annual task of the census makers to create 'a total inventory of the contents of the nation' through their Aristotelian 'passion for lists'.⁹² By linking the results of the census to the 'Festival of the Corn' Carey informs the cartography and census gathering with a religious fervour.

Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities* that nationalism has evolved out of the cultural systems which preceded it; 'the religious community and the dynastic realm', and that nationalist icons such as the 'tomb of the unknown soldier' invest it with a religious sensibility.⁹³ He defines the nation as:

an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign ... It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.⁹⁴

He argues that the rise of print capitalism in Europe in the eighteenth century, and its counterparts, the novel and newspaper, played a critical role in the emergence of the modern nation state. Both the novel and the newspaper require thinking along the lines of 'empty, homogenous time'.⁹⁵ The ritual reading of the newspaper by the masses has become a substitute for morning prayers, making its reading an:

extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction ... performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull.⁹⁶

It is this religious characteristic of nationalism, and the intense emotions it inspires and the immense sacrifices it calls on its people to undertake, emotions framed and invested in the representation of the land, the sovereignty of the map, which Carey explores in 'Do You Love?'

Confronted by the disappearance of the nether regions, the Cartographers employ the sophisticated technology of the 'Fisherscope' to keep the nation's

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1995, p. 10.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁹⁵ Anderson argues that this is a Foucauldian discontinuity from the medieval concept of 'simultaneity-along-time', which is 'a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present', framed by a religious world view (p. 24).

frame intact: 'not unlike radar in its principle and ... able to detect the presence of any object, no matter how materialized or insubstantial'.⁹⁷ This technological breakthrough in the representation of the land is as significant to the Cartographers as the chronometer was to eighteenth century exploration:

Ever since John Harrison's 1761 invention of the chronometer, which made possible the precise calculation of longitudes, the entire planet's curved surface had been subjected to a geometrical grid which squared off empty seas and unexplored regions into boxes.⁹⁸

The squared boxes become something to be discovered and filled in, bringing the geographical unknown into existence in the European cultural mindscape. The anxiety and sense of purpose surrounding the filling in of these boxes is mimicked in 'Do You Love Me?': 'to have returned with blanks on the maps would have created such public anxiety that no one dared think what it might do to the stability of our society'.⁹⁹ As the land disappears it becomes real only through its representations, in the same way as maps reconstruct the landscape within a particular epistemological discourse:

A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent ... The discourse of mapping was the paradigm which both administrative and military operations worked within and served.¹⁰⁰

A cartographic paranoia characterises the disappearing of the landscape, as the people's faith in the Cartographer's representations is stronger than their own connection to, and understanding of, the land itself.

In Carey's short story the uncultivated land disappears first, 'uninhabited, unused for agriculture or industry', a description which evokes *terra nullius*, the land being considered uncultivated when in fact it was a product of thousands of years of husbanding, replete with cultural signs and meaning. That the Cartographers cannot read these signs makes the land in some ways culturally invisible. Carey highlights the way in which other interpretations of the landscape have been written over, and denied as inferior, or irrelevant. If the land has not previously been surveyed and mapped by the European eye, then it has not existed for anyone else either:

⁹⁶ Anderson, p. 35.

⁹⁷ Carey, 'Do You Love Me?', p. 3

⁹⁸ Anderson, p. 173.

⁹⁹ Carey, 'Do You Love Me?', p. 3.

'As you know,' he said, 'the nether regions were amongst the first to disappear and this in itself is significant. These regions, I'm sure you know, are seldom visited by men and only then by people like me whose sole job it is to make sure that they're still there. We had no use of these areas, these deserts, swamps, and coastlines which is why, of course they disappeared. They were merely possessions of ours and if they had any use at all it was as symbols for our poets, writers and film makers. They were used as symbols of alienation, lovelessness, loneliness, uselessness and so on.'¹⁰¹

Carey also parodies the extent to which representations of the centre of Australia, or the bush, inform public nationalist sentiment, while people live out their lives in the coastal regions, along with the academic industry this subject generates.

As buildings and people also begin to disappear, scholars wax metaphysical about the nature of this altered universe. One of the three most popular theories espoused lays blame on 'the sloppy work of the Cartographers and census takers'.¹⁰² Anderson emphasises the role of the census, along with the map and museum, which do more than represent reality, but create that reality through their political discourse:

The 'warp' of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable.¹⁰³

It is the map itself which provides the grammar for the creation of the colonial state: 'map and census thus shaped the grammar which would in due course make possible 'Burma' and 'Burmese,' 'Indonesia' and 'Indonesians'.¹⁰⁴ 'Do You Love Me?' deconstructs ways in which the nation is imagined by inverting the relationship between representation and reality.

The great map of the Cartographers in Borges' parable 'On Scientific Rigor' resembles a colonial 'totalizing classificatory grid', as identified by Anderson. As in Carey's narrative, reality and representation are to a degree inverted:

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied a whole City, and the map of the Empire, a whole Province. In time those Enormous Maps no longer sufficed and the Colleges of Cartographers raised a Map of the Empire that was the size of the Empire and coincided with it

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, p. 173.

¹⁰¹ Carey, 'Do You Love Me?', p. 7.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰³ Anderson, p. 184.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 185.

exactly. Less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, the Following Generations understood that that expanded Map was Useless, and not without Impiety they relinquished it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and of the Winters. Disintegrated Ruins of the Map remain in the Western deserts, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Country there endures no other relic of the Geographic Disciplines. Suárez Miranda: *Viajes de varones prudentes*, fourth book, chapter XLV, Lérida, 1658.¹⁰⁵

Foucault states in his forward to *The Order of Things* that he was inspired by Borges' 'Chinese encyclopaedia', in which the exotic system of classification highlighted the arbitrary nature of Western systems of organisation and thought.¹⁰⁶ In Borges' 'On Scientific Rigor', a similar critique is at work, as reality is altered by representation, the ruin of the map itself forming part of the landscape and providing shelter for the local inhabitants. Baudrillard takes Borges' parable in *Simulacra and Simulations* and inverts the relationship between reality and representation:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—*presence of simulacra*—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself*.¹⁰⁷

Baudrillard then concedes 'even inverted, the fable is useless,' as it is no longer a question of maps or territory, leading his readers into the ambivalent world of simulation and hyperreality.

In Birch's essay, the town of Heatherlie is an example of hyperreality, or simulation, a site for consumption by the tourist that shares in common the tenuous relationship between reality and the represented identified by Umberto Eco's 'Travels Through Hyperreality'. Eco documents America's fascination with the fake.¹⁰⁸ However, significantly, there is a reality underlying the lie of Heatherlie: that of the stolen children and the dispossessed Indigenous heritage. This acknowledgement is what gives Birch's essay a localised commitment, absent in much postmodern thought, and often glossed over by the broader canvas of postcolonial theory. Birch argues that there is a history beyond the

¹⁰⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, 'El Hacedor', Steven Hutchinson (trans.) in Steven Hutchinson's *Cervantine Journeys*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1992, p. ix.

¹⁰⁶ José G. Merquior, *Foucault*, Fontana Press, London, 1991, p. 35.

¹⁰⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster (ed.), Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 166.

gigantism of the Giant Koala otherwise accessible to the intelligent tourist, to borrow Horne's phrase.¹⁰⁹ In doing so, Birch emphasises the extent to which certain narratives of place are privileged over others and continue the work of colonialism in the present.

Cultural Hybridity in Oscar and Lucinda

The contradictory tensions between the missionary goal of spreading the word of God to convert heathen souls and the secular motivations of the colonial enterprise are contained in Oscar and Lucinda's glass church. As Jeffris reasons: 'Churches are not built by choirboys ... Neither has the empire been built by angels ...'.¹¹⁰ When Lucinda opens the envelope Oscar has left her, six days after his departure, she realises: 'She had not cared about the church. The church had been conceived in a fever. It was not a celebration of sacred love, but of their own.'¹¹¹ Sue Gillet argues that the glass church is a metaphor for a mistaken realist belief in the transparency of modes of representation, such as a map or a journal, or a Christian belief in the transparency of the Biblical word of God as a truth unto itself:

This faith in transparency makes Oscar attempt to use the glass to carry his meaning, intact, across unexplored regions of New South Wales to reach its goal, Lucinda's heart ... However, once the journey begins, the instability and contradictoriness which belies its deceptive appearance is manifested in the series of displacements suffered by its meaning according to changes of context: from Lucinda to Miriam; from Heaven to Hell; from spiritual love to physical lust; from wholeness to fragments; from gift to weapon. Instead of transparency reflecting Oscar and Lucinda's pure love the glass church leads to fornication. Instead of bringing the virtues of Christianity, civilisation, Heaven to New South Wales it brings murder, savagery, Hell. In so radically missing its intended targets, the glass church functions as symbol for the deconstruction of symbols, for the undermining of correspondence theories of representation.¹¹²

A central claim to the colonial project is that of bringing civilisation, which the church is shown to represent in the novel: 'it came up the river, its walls like ice emanating light, as fine and elegant as civilization itself'.¹¹³ Civilisation entails the secular idealism of democracy as envisaged by the Greek state—barbarians

¹⁰⁸ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, Picador, London, 1986.

¹⁰⁹ Donald Horne, *The Intelligent Tourist*, Margaret-Gee Publishing, McMahon's Point, 1993.

¹¹⁰ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 473.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 446.

¹¹² Gillet, p. 203.

¹¹³ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 490.

being associated with a lack of civil organisation—and the Christian ideal of the word of God.¹¹⁴ Amidst the devastation of colonialism, however, these ideals so much at home in Europe, fracture and fragment (the centre, as in the image of the Rupert's drop, does not hold), and the contradictions are all too evident to the colonised.

It is through the insertion into the narrative of Kumbaingiri Billy's oral history, 'How Jesus come to Bellingen long time-ago', told to the narrator as a small child, that *Oscar and Lucinda* represents an Indigenous perspective that exposes the discursive bias of Jeffris' Eurocentric journal. Oscar's Christian bias is reflected in his own blindness before a landscape replete with Indigenous signs:

My great-grandfather drifted up the Bellinger River like a blind man up the central aisle of Notre Dame. He saw nothing. The country was thick with sacred stories more ancient than the ones he carried in his sweat-slippery leather Bible. He did not even imagine their presence. Some of these stories were as small as the transparent arthropods that lived in the puddles beneath the river casuarinas. These stories were like fleas, thrip, so tiny that they might inhabit a place (inside the ears of the seeds of grass) he would later walk across without even seeing. In this landscape every rock had a name, and most names had spirits, ghosts, meanings.¹¹⁵

The colonial authority of the word of God is challenged and undermined by the presence of these Indigenous stories which are more ancient and more at home in the landscape than Oscar's old world mythologies, encased as they are in the impractical invention of the glass church. Kumbaingiri's oral history is testimony to the survival of Indigenous traditions, despite the extent to which they have been destroyed and written over by the scribes of empire such as Mitchell. Oscar's death in the sinking glass church at the end of the novel is symbolic of the limitations of his colonial vision. The destruction of the glass church, which echoes the impending doom of the pet emporium in the final pages of *Illywhacker*, gives way to the imagining of a possible postcolonial Australia.

Kumbaingiri Billy's oral history is an example of transculturation, in which the minority culture has absorbed myths and materials from the dominant one, resulting in a hybrid narrative, which lives into the present:

¹¹⁴ 'The *Theogony* posits a dominant antithesis between political rule and barbarity, civility and incivility, law and custom, *physis* and *nomos*. The poles are not Greek and "other races" unless we mistakenly interpret barbarity and incivility for race and collapse the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*' (Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington D.C, 1996, p. 23).

¹¹⁵ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 492.

ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone.¹¹⁶

While White represents traditional Indigenous culture as an anachronism in the modern Australian nation, Carey represents Indigenous culture as a dynamic force engaging with the colonisers on their own terms. In place of White's Gothic landscapes and universal mysticism, Carey represents the conflicting voices and narratives of a heterogeneous Australian nationalism. Whereas Voss achieves something akin to enlightenment before his death, having learnt a necessary Christian humility, Oscar's death is nothing short of terror and fragmentation. Veronica Brady observes that Carey 'makes Oscar sink, literally, not just metaphorically, under the burden of his guilt for the crimes committed against Aborigines by his expedition.'¹¹⁷

Kumbaingiri Billy is introduced into the narrative in chapter 98, titled 'An Old Blackfellow'. The chapter is situated in the present lifetime of the narrator, and begins with a digression on the nature of the sand used by Lucinda's glassworks, now established at Bellingen:

It produces a glass with a faint yellow tinge, the effect of which, in the windows of old Bellinger Valley farmhouses, is to make the kikuyu pastures a particularly dazzling green.¹¹⁸

This introductory passage prepares the reader for a change in perspective, and comments on the bias of local histories. Through the colonial architecture of the farmhouse windows the landscape is framed according to a Eurocentric aesthetic. In addition, Jeffris' history-making glass, cutting through 'virgin' territory, has now been coloured and shaped by the local environment.

Carey uses the Indigenous perspective to highlight the prevalence of myth and story-telling in European culture, the extent to which Australia's history is infused with and driven by Christian myth. The rationalist tone of Jeffris' narrative, which seeks to speak in terms of cultural difference, is brought to ground by a congruence of European and Indigenous story telling:

¹¹⁶ Pratt, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Veronica Brady, *Can These Bones Live?*, The Federation Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 131.

¹¹⁸ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 466.

The Reverend Mr Hopkins told the Narcoo men the story of St Barnabas eaten by a lion. He told them the story of St Catherine killed with a wheel. He told them the story of St Sebastian killed with spears.¹¹⁹

Displaced thus in the Australian wilderness these stories take on new possibilities of interpretation, particularly that of St Sebastian. Like Jesus on the banks of the Bellinger, these stories are relocated into a shifting cultural context, their signs left open to reinvention. The displaced sign facilitates a hybrid discourse:

Doubling repeats the fixed and empty presence of authority by articulating it syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its 'identity' and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power.¹²⁰

The church has been dismantled and broken up into small packages. One falls off the wagon. Its contents are both fragile and sharp. They are open to loss, displacement, they are exposed to the ebb and flow of other narrative times. 'Packed in boxes' the white man's dreaming threatens to spill out and take on new patterns of meaning:

One thing they did not understand was the boxes on the wagons: they got the idea these boxes were related to the stories. They thought they were sacred. They thought they were the white man's dreaming.¹²¹

Ultimately the broken glass leads to death and destruction. Odalberree, one of the two Narcoo men Jeffris recruited, regrets his role in the dissemination of the white man's dreaming, which has led to the massacre at Sandy Creek, among other deaths:

He cut himself. He brought glass with him, wrapped in a possum skin. He was sick to have caused such death. He cut himself not only on the chest, but on the arms. He did this with the glass ... In a short time Odalberree was very sick. No one could cure him. Before too long he died ... That glass was kept a long time by the elders of the Kumbaingiri, but it was not kept with the sacred things. It was kept somewhere else, where it would not be found.¹²²

Despite the cultural hybridity in Carey's text, this passage does appear to underestimate the extent to which technologies such as glass were rapidly

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 469.

¹²⁰ Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817' in *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 102–122, pp. 119–120.

¹²¹ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 469.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 470.

incorporated into the cultural practices of traditional communities. In an archaeological dig at Swan Reach in South Australia, Steve Hemming provides examples of Indigenous uses of glass:

Men also used pieces of glass for butchering game and making wooden artefacts. Aboriginal woodcarvers from the region still use glass to finish their artefacts. A number of what appeared to be glass tools with obvious retouching were obtained from the mission house site.¹²³

Pratt observes that magical realism tends to exoticise Europe's cultural others, and Carey's emphasis on parallels between Christian mythology and Indigenous knowledges can be seen to trivialise the latter. For example, parallels might also be established between Indigenous philosophies and the postmodernist play on perspective in the novel itself, drawing parallels at the high end of theorising.

Through Kumbaingiri Billy's narrative the reader learns that the black woman being raped in the tavern was actually his aunty. The victim is here given an identity, a family, a history. Her role in covering up the murder of Jeffris is an empowering one. Kumbaingiri Billy's aunt's conversion to Christianity is marked by cultural appropriation, as she reinterprets the Christian experience:

This was when my aunty saw glass. My word, she was tickled by it. She had only seen glass in booze bottles until that day. She saw glass could be good. She had not thought this before. When she saw this glass church built she became a Christian. This was the day Jesus first came to the Bellinger. She saw Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Paul and Jonah—all that mob she never knew before. She saw your great-grandfather was a brave man. She saw he had a halo like one of those saints. She saw that when it was night he shivered—not from cold, but from a sort of holy happiness. He told her: "You will live in paradise." He christened her Mary, for Magdalene. It was a damn silly name for a Kumbaingiri and if you want my opinion, Bob, it was ignorant to talk to us Kooris that way.'¹²⁴

She is not converted by the orthodox means, rather she sees Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Paul and Jonah, just as Saint Paul saw Jesus in a vision and fell off his donkey. The narrator is named by Kumbaingiri Billy as, 'Bob', in an exchange of dialogue, as he narrates his oral history. Kumbaingiri Billy's true name remains a mystery: 'I do not know his real name'. Kumbaingiri Billy's history is titled 'How Jesus come to Bellingen long time-ago'. This title in itself is an appropriation of European religious myth, and evokes Homi Bhabha's 'Signs Taken for Wonders', discussed in Chapter One. Bhabha argues that the displacement of the sign in the colonial

¹²³ Steve Hemming, Vivienne Wood & Richard Hunger, 'Researching the past: oral history and archaeology at Swan Reach', in R. Torrens & A. Clarke (eds) *The Archaeology of Difference: Negotiating cross-cultural engagements in Oceania*, Routledge, London, pp. 331–359, p. 349.

context leads to ambivalence and the undermining of the dominant culture's ideology:

In estranging the word of God from the English medium, the natives' questions contest the logical order of the discourse of authority ... The natives expel the copula, or middle term, of the Evangelical 'power=knowledge equation', which then disarticulates the structure of the God-Englishman equivalence. Such a crisis in the positionality and propositionality of colonialist authority destabilizes the sign of authority.¹²⁵

Just as Kumbaingiri Billy's narrative challenges Jeffris' naming, and subverts the importance of his map making activity, so too does his use of Christian myth in this story subvert the authority of Oscar as missionary and sole bearer of spiritual truth. The European stories have been appropriated into an Indigenous discourse.

The authority of the missionary, of his claim to absolute truth and salvation, is challenged by the proliferation of stories and myths that surround the glass church. Floating up the Bellinger, Oscar is like 'a blind man going up the aisle of the Notre Dame'. This metaphor parallels the sacred in the two cultures, which sometimes combine into a hybrid discourse and elsewhere pass over one another on different planes of meaning. Their very existence, however, challenges the English claim to have a monopoly on the spirit world:

There were bush-flies inside the church. They did not understand what glass was. There were also three blue-bellied dragon flies. For one hundred thousand years their progenitors had inhabited the valley without once encountering glass. Suddenly the air was hard where it should be soft ... They had the wrong intelligence to grasp the nature of glass. They bashed against 'nothing' as if they were created only to demonstrate to Oscar Hopkins the limitations of his own understanding, his ignorance of god, and that the walls of hell itself might be made of something like this, unimaginable, contradictory, impossible.¹²⁶

The limitations of Oscar's Eurocentric vision are all too obvious. Oscar's faith is culturally specific and has no claim to a unitary truth before the heteroglossia of Indigenous voices suppressed under colonialism. This leads to his crisis of faith, in which Oscar falls upon 'that other voice', the existential gambling spirit of chance, which has turned against him. There is little comfort in Oscar's fate:

Shining fragments of aquarium glass fell like snow around him. And when the long-awaited white fingers of water tapped and lapped on Oscar's lips, he welcomed

¹²⁴ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 488.

¹²⁵ Bhabha, p. 119.

¹²⁶ Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, p. 494.

them in as he always had, with a scream, like a small boy caught in the sheet-folds of a nightmare.¹²⁷

Bound as he is by the dogma of Christian historicism, he dies an aquarium-like death.¹²⁸ Oscar is seen, but does not see: 'Oscar could not see the blacks watching him'. He is subject to the gaze of the Other. The limitations of Oscar's cultural framework do not let him see the Indigenous stories, however sympathetic his gaze may be. Rather than enlightenment, the Christian infrastructure brings frustration, and a clash of cultures. The stories cannot be read by Oscar, and he in fact drifts up the river under total observation by Indigenous people, like a specimen in a glass case.

Conclusion

The extravagant architecture of Oscar and Lucinda's church embodies the 'failed heavens and real hells' of the colonial project.¹²⁹ It is a travelling colonial architecture that evokes the technological and spiritual optimism of those who have gambled all to live in a new country, but comes aground on the contradictions of Australia's convict origins and the destruction of Indigenous societies.¹³⁰ Carey's use of the unreliable narrator and culturally hybrid representations of Indigenous culture make for a polyphonic narrative that questions the underlying assumptions of White's universal humanism. The architecture of the prison is the focus of the next chapter, as the panoptic technologies of observation and categorisation that invented a country to live in are applied to the construction of Australian types in *Illywhacker's* pet emporium.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 511.

¹²⁸ It is interesting how the flooding church echoes that of another unChristian landscape, in *The Tree of Man*: 'There were fish swimming in the church ... And the books were floating. The water was moving, you see. Everything was floating and moving' (*The Tree of Man*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1967, p. 95).

¹²⁹ Discussing the work of Manning Clark in *Writing in Hope and Fear*, McLaren observes: When he concluded his second volume with the prophecy that in Australia 'men, freed at last from the stain of the Old World, freed too from the convict's clanking chain, might see that heaven and hell were priests' inventions, and come to trust the brotherhood of man', he knew that the future he would trace in succeeding volumes held only failed heavens and real hells. This contradiction of hope by reality was the source of the tragic vision that illuminated his work and forced reviewers into fresh appraisals of the nature of Australian history. (p. 171)

¹³⁰ Elleke Boehmer writes in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* that 'the business of colonization meant gamble and experimentation, with lives, with funds, above all with meanings', which is an apt summary of the key themes in *Oscar and Lucinda* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 13).

Both novels end with a colonial architecture under seige by the voices of the marginalised, as home and nation is reinvented and renegotiated according to a postcolonial politics of the future.

Pet Shop Pantheon: *Illywhacker* and the Architectural Construction of Australian Types

Illywhacker is narrated by the delinquent Herbert Badgery from the confines of the pet emporium, which is built over the tank stream: 'the site of the first European prison in Australia'.¹ Herbert Badgery is one of a number of 'Australian types' displayed alongside the animals of the more traditional pet shop out of which the pet emporium originally evolved.² The 'Australian types' include the shearers and squatters characteristic of the 'bushman legend', the Bondi surf life-savers, who carried that legend on into the 1930s, and Australian Aborigines eternally engaged in circumcision ceremonies and dot painting.³ These national stereotypes parody privileged discourses in the imagining of the Australian nation that have worked to dispossess Aborigines and marginalise other minorities.

This chapter draws parallels between the construction of 'Australian types' in Carey's pet emporium and the construction of the delinquent in Foucault's theory of Panopticism. Foucault posits in *Discipline and Punish* that the structural origins of Bentham's Panopticon are to be found in the King's menagerie of Versailles.⁴ I argue that Carey has placed his 'Australian types' back among the animals in the pet emporium, where the central power of the king is substituted

¹ Anthony J. Hassall, *Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994, p. 115.

² Peter Carey, *Illywhacker*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1985.

³ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), Vintage Books, New York, 1979.

by that of Mitsubishi. Read thus, the pet emporium is a postmodern pastiche of stereotypes and their intellectual and cultural origins, a carnival of Panopticism and an architecture that showcases the cogs of Foucault's disciplines.

Foucault's theory of Panopticism holds that a science of man has been made possible by the classificatory and panoptic disciplines of the medical and prison systems. The nationalist obsession for the ideal 'Australian type' was driven by social Darwinist theories of race, and here 'the ethnography of the convict' will be contrasted with that of Aborigines subject to the gaze of the Imperial eye. Displayed in cages representing their natural habitat, these Australian 'types', Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, also parody the exhibition of Indigenous peoples in the European trade-fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which placed them in an ethnographic discourse of evolutionary European Imperial superiority. While the Australian 'types' on display in Carey's pet emporium are meticulously observed and classified by scientists, they also provide a spectacle for the public that ritually enacts the discourse promoted by Mitsubishi through their participation as observers.

A Foucauldian Reading of Illywhacker's Pet Emporium

Originally designed by Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon became a blueprint for the modern prison system, in which an emphasis was placed on observation rather than mere incarceration: 'in short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon',⁵ placing the prisoner in the 'glass house of the Greek philosopher'.⁶ Bentham's Panopticon was an architectural break-through that had ramifications for not only the prison system, but for any institution that sought to exercise its power and control over a large number of individuals. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault sums up the workings of the Panopticon as follows:

All that is needed then is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.⁷

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 200.

This description alludes to its quality as model for power relations that can be replicated in any institutions, be they mental institutions, hospitals, prisons, factories or schools.

The 'captive shadows' resemble the shadows of Plato's cave, as each institution manufactures its necessary truths. Panopticism is the sum total of these disciplinary mechanisms that are replicated throughout all levels of society:

'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology.⁸

The technology of power is replicated in the working of Carey's pet emporium, as the 'Australian types' are subject to the observation and classification of both the tourist and the man of science.

Foucault conjectures that the cages of Bentham's Panopticon may have been inspired by Le Vaux's menagerie at Versailles:⁹

the first menagerie in which the different elements are not, as they traditionally were, distributed in a park... At the centre was an octagonal pavilion which, on the first floor, consisted of only a single room, the king's salon; on every side large windows looked out onto seven cages (the eighth was reserved for the entrance), containing different species of animals ... one finds in the programme of the Panopticon a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping and the king by the machinery of furtive power.¹⁰

He goes on to argue that the 'Panopticon also does the work of the naturalist', observing and categorising individuals according to the nature of their crimes.¹¹ The placement of the King in the menagerie has parallels with Pratt's 'imperial eye'. New technologies of observation are pertinent both to the Panopticon and to the construction of Aboriginality in the explorer journal genre, discussed in Chapter Two:

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁹ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) defines menagerie as: '1. A collection of wild animals in cages or enclosures ... a. place or building in which such a collection is kept. b. A collection of strange or outlandish people.' The Best Pet Shop in the World is a menagerie in all senses of the word. Before carrying out his revenge, Hissao describes his family as 'an ugly menagerie as evil as anything you might ever see' (Carey, p. 594).

¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 203.

¹¹ *ibid.*

Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens, and the light beam, which were an integral part of the new physics and cosmology, there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure art of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man.¹²

Pratt's 'all seeing man' is a product of Enlightenment thinking, and the overlap between Linnaeus' classification of plants and animals with 'Homo sapiens' is here reflected in the origins and praxis of the Panopticon. In this context, the 'glass house' of the philosopher which was to become the domain of the criminal is not unlike the glass church which comes to imprison and display Oscar in a postmodern inversion of the colonial gaze.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* refers to Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer's trope of the glasshouse, which he uses to depict the way in which colonial societies construct their domains, and subjects, through the triple artillery of map, museum and census:

It is an image as powerful as Bentham's Panopticon, of total surveyability. For the colonial state did not merely aspire to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this 'visibility' was that everyone, everything, had (as it were) a serial number. This style of imagining did not come out of thin air. It was the product of the technologies of navigation, astronomy, horology, surveying, photography and print, to say nothing of the deep driving power of capitalism ...¹³

These processes are also at work in the 'pet emporium', the imperial eye now being that of the Mitsubishi Company, which constructs a museum for Australian identity, and in doing so, a version of Australian history which excludes the voices of those who may provoke a conflict of interests.

Examining the work of eighteenth century Enlightenment reformers of the penal system, Foucault documents the emergence of a taxonomy of crimes based on naturalist and anthropological models of organisation:

Natural history ... offered the most adequate schema: the taxonomy of species according to an uninterrupted graduation. One sought to constitute a Linnaeus of crimes and punishments ...¹⁴

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow (ed.), Penguin Books, London, 1984, p. 189.

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1995, pp. 184–185.

¹⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 99.

This shift from the spectacular punishments of the scaffold to the more calculated and refined penalties of the eighteenth century marks a shift from the application of power on the body of the condemned to that of the 'soul'. The codification and regulation of crimes would eventually lead to the construction of 'homocriminalis', the 'ethnography of the convict' who is to become a kind of teratological subspecies to be codified and regulated by the extended penal apparatus of the human sciences.¹⁵

Where the prison system has failed to reform criminals, it has had marked success in the creation of the 'delinquent':

This other character, whom the penitentiary apparatus substitutes for the convicted offender, is the delinquent ... The penitentiary operation, if it is to be a genuine reeducation, must become the sum total existence of the delinquent, making of the prison a sort of artificial and coercive theatre in which his life will be examined from top to bottom.¹⁶

Rather than being a body of 'objective truth' the delinquent is a product of the penitentiary system and its quest to create a body of knowledge that will perpetuate its existence. The delinquent is also 'Othered' in the fashion of ethnographic subjects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

The delinquent, this strange manifestation of an overall phenomenon of criminality, is to be found in quasi-natural classes, each endowed with its own characteristics and requiring a specific treatment, what Marquet-Wasselot called in 1841 the 'ethnography of the prisons'; 'The convicts are ... another people within the same people; with its own habits, instincts, morals'.¹⁷

The 'artificial and coercive theatre' of the prison cell is reproduced by Carey in *Illywhacker's* pet emporium, which utilises the same disciplinary technologies of observation and classification to construct Aboriginality and other 'Australian types', parodying ways in which colonial subjects are 'known' and imprisoned by their representations as 'Other' in Western discourse.

Foucault postulates that the humanisation of the penal system and the sciences of man do not merely overlap but have evolved out of the one technology of power that places an emphasis on the observation and objectification of the individual, epitomised in the workings of the Panopticon:¹⁸

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 251–252.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 25.

The cradle of the sciences of man, he surmises, is perhaps to be found in 'the "ignoble" archives' of clinical and penal observation; panoptic methods in the disciplinary society have made a science of man possible; 'knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation.'¹⁹

Rather than coercing individuals from above in a 'them' and 'us' dialectic, Panopticism is a model of power relations reproduced throughout society both in institutions and the minds of individuals.²⁰ It is a productive process that does not merely oppress criminals but, through the extended penal apparatus of 'educationalists, psychologists and psychiatrists', Others them and fabricates them anew as 'delinquents'.²¹

Frantz Fanon provides a psychological insight in *Black Skins and White Masks* as to what it is like to be 'Othered' and known while walking down the street, in a description that signifies the panoptic disciplines of the 'human sciences' through its use of scientific imagery:

I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!²²

Just as the inmate is fixed in his cell, and known as the delinquent, Fanon is fixed as Negro in the street, as 'Other', the product of the same technology of power at work in the humanising of the penal system and the development of the 'human sciences'. Fanon is produced as his double in the eyes of the white subject. Trapped under the microscopic gaze of the Other, fixed in the cold slide of cultural imperialism, Fanon asks; 'Where am I to be classified?'²³ The panoptic technology of power is also at work in the pet emporium as the 'Australian types', fixed in their cages, are both objects placed before the eye of professional scientists, and spectacles for the fee-paying public.

¹⁹ José G. Merquior, *Foucault*, Fontana Press, London, 1991, p. 95.

²⁰ 'What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression' (Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977: Michel Foucault*, Colin Gordon (ed. & trans.), Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, p. 119.

²¹ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, p. 30.

²² Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1968, p. 116.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 113

Foucault uses the workings of the Panopticon as a departure to make a Nietzschean critique of the manufacture of truth in all the human sciences:

We should admit ... that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations ... In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.²⁴

It was argued in the introduction that the unreliable narrator draws attention to the speaking position from which all histories are written. Badgery's history of Australia contains its own antithesis, or its own critique, with the insertion of Leah's voice late in the narrative. Similarly, Foucault argues, with reference to social Darwinism, that rather than dismissing rationalist thought outright, it should always be accompanied with a rational critique of its limitations:

One should not forget—and I'm not saying this in order to criticize rationality, but in order to show how ambiguous things are—it was on the basis of the flamboyant rationality of social Darwinism that racism was formulated, becoming one of the most enduring and powerful ingredients of Nazism. This was, of course, an irrationality, but an irrationality that was at the same time, after all, a certain form of rationality ... This is the situation that we are in and that we must combat. If intellectuals in general are to have a function, if critical thought itself has a function, and, even more specifically, if philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers.²⁵

Illywhacker is a novel concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge in the writing of history, and the imagining of the Australian nation. This chapter will now turn to an analysis of the 'Australian types' in the pet emporium, with reference to Richard White's *Inventing Australia*.

Exhibiting Australian Types

Illywhacker is narrated in the parenthesis of the scientific eye, which, as has been established, is one of the corner-stones of Foucault's theory of Panopticism.

²⁴ Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 175.

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 249.

Herbert Badgery introduces himself on the first page of the novel as a subject of scientific discourse:

Independent experts have poked me and prodded me and scraped around my foul-smelling mouth. They have measured my ankles and looked at my legs ... When they photographed me I did not care that my dick looked as scabby and scaly as a horse's ... Apart from this (and it is all there, neatly printed on a chart and not three feet from where I lie) I have also been written up in the papers ... I think I'm growing tits. They stuck their callipers into me and measured them ...²⁶

The focus on Badgery's genitalia, his scabby horse dick and tits, evokes the sexualisation of the racialised other. In 'Black Bodies, White Bodies' Sander L. Gilman traces the linkages between the 'icon of the Hottentot female and the icon of the prostitute' in nineteenth-century art, literature and medicine, focussing on the 1810 exhibition of Saartjie Baartman, more popularly known as the 'Hottentot Venus'. The Hottentot female was considered to be on the lowest rung of the great chain of being and was compared in scientific literature to the highest ape: the orangutan.²⁷ Saartjie Baartman's protruding buttocks and the

²⁶ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 11.

²⁷ Sander L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature' in James Donald & Ali Rattansi (eds) *Race, Culture & Difference*, Sage Publications, London, 1992, pp. 171–198, p. 179. Gilman's article is a much quoted one, and appears also in Stuart Hall's (ed.) *Representation*. It is interesting to note that Joseph Banks in his *Endeavour Journal* treats such theories of the Hottentot with a sceptical tone in his account of the 'Cape of Good Hope, April, 1771':

'There remains nothing now but to say a word or two concerning the Hottentots so frequently spoken of by travellers, by whom they are generally represented as the outcast of the Human species, a race whose intellectual faculties are so little superior to those of Beasts that some have been inclin'd to suppose them more nearly related to Baboons than Men. (J.C. Beaglehole (ed.) *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768–1771*, Volume 11, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1962, p. 256)

As J.C. Beaglehole points out in his footnote to this passage, Banks 'does not repeat the conventional travellers' tales to which he refers.' In addition, Banks suggests the possibility that the 'Clytoris' of the Hottentot female 'does not exist in those women at all more remarkable than in Europeans':

In regard to the Sinus Pudoris, that grand Quaere of Natural historians, Many whom I ask'd both Dutch and Malays declar'd positively that it did not at all exist, and several of these Assurd me that they had during intrigues with Hottentot women had an opportunity of knowing which they had made use of. One however declar'd that something he had met with but what it was he could not tell; and above all a physician of the place declar'd that he had cur'd many Hundred Hottentot women of venereal Complaints, and that he never saw one without what he describ'd to be fleshy or rather skinny appendages proceeding from the upper part of the Labia, in appearance somewhat like Cows teats but flat which hung pendulous; these were various in length, in some scarce half an inch, in others three or four; that those, which were the only particularities he knew of in those women, he apprehended to be what a[u]thours have call'd *sinus pudoris*, tho some have describ'd it as a large skin equal to a garment for all purposes of decency, and others have thought it to be no

form of her genitalia were read as signs of the 'primitive' other, a mark of her inherent, biological difference:

The audience which had paid to see her buttocks and had fantasized about the uniqueness of her genitalia when she was alive could, after her death and dissection, examine both, for Curvier presented to 'the Academy the genital organs of this woman prepared in a way so as to allow one to see the nature of the labia'.²⁸

The fetishised genitalia of the Hottentot Venus remains on display to this day in the Musee de l'homme in Paris.²⁹ The last of the live exhibits of colonised peoples was staged in 1924 at Wembley in the British Empire Exhibition.³⁰

It is not until the last page that the true circumstances from which Herbert Badgery is narrating the novel become apparent, where he literally 'lies' as he spins out his narrative:

Naturally they come to see me, not just the men with callipers and bottles, but the ordinary visitors. They journey up the aluminium walkways, they brave their vertigo, they grasp the rail, they tremble to see what a human being can become.³¹

Whereas the 'men with callipers and bottles' represent the disciplines of Panopticism working toward a science of knowable man, a social Darwinist discourse underlying the obsession with Australian types at the turn of the century, the ordinary visitors evoke the spectacle of live exhibits in the trade fairs. This is the non-committal eye of the tourist, consuming the subjects of other cultures through their powerful gaze, without making a moral engagement in the relationship. It is a performance of Australian history and mythology, a discourse in which the actors become trapped by their representations, and are spoken for rather than speaking for themselves.

more than an elongation of the Clytoris in those women, which does not exist in those women at all more remarkable than in Europeans." (p. 260.)

Although Banks' treatment of the Hottentot can be identified as belonging to an evolutionary discourse of the primitive, it nevertheless displays a degree of ambivalence towards such theories, a scepticism that contemporary discourse analysis can tend to underestimate. Readings such as Gilman's become over-riding discourses in themselves, repeated in cultural studies text books and becoming a common point of reference for academic scholarship. The emphasis on discourse analysis at times fails to recognise the revolutionary potential of the Romantic subject to intervene and critically engage with the dominant ideas of any particular epoch.

²⁸ Gilman, pp. 179–180.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁰ Henrietta Lidchi, 'The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures' in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, pp. 151–222, p. 196.

³¹ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 599.

There is continuity between the callipers of the pet emporium and the callipers of Rankin Downs prison, where Herbert Badgery finds himself at the end of *Book 2*. Badgery is observed, categorized and ultimately reinvented by the prison system, as it constructs the biography of the delinquent, the soul of the criminal. Subject to both international visitors and the bureaucracy of Rankin Downs, Badgery becomes an object of knowledge:

Doctors from America detoured via Sydney to meet me and then talked about me as if I was not there... they wrote your name on index cards, folders, assembled pieces of blue paper that you might occasionally glimpse peeking from a stained manilla folder on the Boss's desk ... I had a man from Poland. He was there to look at my gums, but when he was left alone with me he measured my head with callipers.³²

This is the environment in which Badgery 'gets' his education. In what is perhaps a play on Nietzsche's interrogation of the motives of all philosophers, motives which shape their respective truths, Badgery is more honest than most: 'you may judge, of course, that my motives were the wrong ones for the proper study of any subject, let alone History'.³³ All Badgery wants to do is spend affable afternoons at the Kaletskys, and impress them with his erudition.

Badgery's education begins with the fictional M.V. Anderson's famous history of Australia, which opens with a disclaimer to the truth of the histories written by our forebears, and is a microcosm of the thesis of the novel in general:

Our forebears were all great liars. They lied about the lands they selected and the cattle they owned. They lied about their backgrounds and the parentage of their wives. However it is their first lie that is the most impressive for being so monumental, ie., that the continent, at the time of first settlement, was said to be occupied but not cultivated and by that simple device they were able to give the legal owners short shrift and, when they objected, to use the musket or poison flour, and to do so with a clear conscience. It is in the context of this great foundation stone that we must begin our study of Australian history.³⁴

This passage speaks back in an ironical manner to Twain's epigram about Australian history being made up of the 'most beautiful lies'; here, it is revealed, the lies are only too true, and too sordid. Undermining the colonial tone which pervades Twain's epigram (similar to that of Carpentier's notion of the 'Marvellous Real' which reduces the new world to something of a novelty for the European sensibility), Carey's ironical reworking is thoroughly post-colonial, infused with the harsh, political realities of dispossession. Badgery would emerge

³² *ibid.*, p. 453.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 455.

from Rankin Downs well versed in Australian history, specialising in ‘the role of lies in popular perceptions of the Australian political fabric’, this being a central theme in *Illywhacker* itself.³⁵

The callipers also signify the intellectual climate that facilitated the birth of the Bushman figure as a ‘national type’. White argues that the concept for national types evolved out of Linnaeus’ eighteenth century system for the classification of plants and animals into ‘types’. In the nineteenth century the notion of ‘type’ was to take on the meaning of ‘the general form or character’.³⁶ Coupled with rising nationalism in Europe, inspired in part by the French revolution, the obsession for a national type became an international phenomenon.³⁷ With the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, and the consequent rise of social Darwinism, the bushman figure came to symbolise the evolution of the British stock into an ideal national type, shaped profitably by the Australian climate.

Illywhacker’s pet emporium parodies this process, parading the ‘national types’ alongside animal types out of which the obsession for observing, classifying and fixing evolved, Linnaeus having coined the term ‘Homo sapien’, as discussed in Chapter Two. Carey employs the noun ‘type’ to describe Hissao’s project:

And you can say it is simply hate that has made Hissao put so many of his fellow countrymen and women on display. Yet he has not only fed them and paid them well, he has chosen them, the types, with great affection.³⁸

The pet emporium places these ‘Australian types’ back into the milieu of their intellectual origins, in a spectacle which invokes the live exhibits in the trade fairs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and America, and their ties with the emerging science of ethnography.

The pet emporium can be read as a trade fair of sorts, the ‘Australian types’ being placed in a discourse of new power relations as the Yen supplants the dominance of the American dollar in postwar Australia. In the trade fairs such as the Exposition Universelle of Paris and the British Empire Exhibitions, the living primitive exhibits were displayed in their ‘natural habitats’, so that their ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ customs could be observed by civilised Europeans.³⁹

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 456.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 488.

³⁶ White, p. 63.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁸ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 599.

³⁹ Anne Maxwell writes that:

These subjects were objectified in an evolutionary discourse that reflected the underlying colonial power relations of the day, exhibited as they were alongside products such as Coleman's Mustard and Goodyear India Rubber.⁴⁰

Ethnography emerged as a science at the height of Britain's colonial power, and the cross over between the spectacle of these live exhibits and their study by anthropologists demonstrates a merging of popular and scientific discourses:

... a Foucauldian model allows one to argue that being able to 'see' these native villages and their constituent populations was clearly neither a 'natural' process, nor an accidental one, but a socio-historical one, which was associated with and reinforced standard museological representations of peoples through ethnographic artefacts. The argument which connects museological representations with spectacular ones is supported when it becomes clear that certain of the ethnographic collections featured in the colonial, national or international exhibitions, or the photographs of these visitor peoples, were often incorporated into the ethnographical collections or archives of established museums.⁴¹

The merging of scientific and public discourses is epitomised in the selling of postcards in which photographs of these 'primitives' were replete with anthropological measurements.⁴² In *White Nation* Hage finds in the colonial world fairs a discourse that informs the exhibition of ethnic subjects in multiculturalism: 'colonial world fairs were far more important when tourism was not as generalised a practice as it is today. It is, in fact, in those fairs that we find the roots of multicultural exhibitism.'⁴³

In *Inventing Australia*, White deconstructs a number of popular Australian mythologies, and exposes the underlying economic relationships that have aided their production and promotion. Several of these mythologies are signified in the pet emporium, particularly that of the bushman legend which promoted a white and wholesome Australian national identity. Through the trope of the pet

the attendances were as spectacular as the events themselves. To cite only a few examples, in Britain 6 million visitors attended the Crystal Palace Great Exhibition of 1851 and 27 million the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924–25; the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 drew 32 million spectators and the Exposition Universelle of 1900 in the same city 50 million; in Chicago the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893–94 boasted an attendance of 28 million, while the Century of Progress exposition in 1933–34 drew 49 million visitors ... these international exhibitions played an important part in diffusing the ideology of progress and the early forms of mass consumerism among the denizens of the west. (*Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the Making of European Identities*, Leicester University Press, London, 1999, p. 1)

⁴⁰ Lidchi, p. 195.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 196.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*, 157.

emporium, *Illywhacker* can be seen to be speaking back to White's classic study, which deconstructs privileged discourses in the imagining of the Australian nation. *Inventing Australia* ends with the prediction that it will be mining companies and multinational corporations that dictate the manufacture of future Australian stereotypes:

In 1980, a convoy of trucks, escorted by a substantial force of police, stormed up the highway from Perth, driving through all resistance, in order to set up a drilling rig for an American company on Aboriginal land at Noonkanbah. Just as irresistibly, and with the same corporate and government backing, a new image of Australia will emerge, rich in resources, selling herself cheaply to the world. One of the most recent efforts at inventing Australia, Geoffrey Dutton's *Patterns of Australia*, was commissioned by Mobil Oil; Utah supports the Australian Opera; the Australian Mining Industry sponsored a television series on Ned Kelly; MacDonald's Hamburgers advertise their commitment to young Australians, Mount Isa Mines their recreation of 'the Australian Way of Life' in their mining towns. Mining companies and multinational corporations will be central to the formation of a new Australian identity.⁴⁴

Add to this list the Mitsubishi Company and we arrive at *Illywhacker's* pet emporium, which follows White's thesis to its logical conclusion, and then, as one would expect from Carey's fiction, takes it over the edge. The shearers and Bondi lifesavers are icons of Australian identity, along with the museum piece representation of Aborigines eternally acting out their circumcision ceremonies and making dot paintings.

White dedicates a chapter of *Inventing Australia* to the deconstruction of the 'bushman' myth, which is signified in the pet emporium by the presence of 'the shearers' who 'exhibit that dry, laconic anti-authoritarian wit that is the basis of the Australian sense of humour'.⁴⁵ He critiques Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*, in which an attempt is made to locate the origins of the bushman myth in the culture of the 'nomadic' tribesman of the outback—the shearers, drovers and shepherds who wandered the bush in search for work. White argues that just as important as the nomadic bushman themselves, if not more so, is the cultural and economic milieu out of which the contributors to *The Bulletin* were working.

An important aspect of the 'bushman myth' is the anti-authoritarianism that is said to characterise the 'typical Australian', articulated famously by Ward:

According to the myth the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others ... He is a

⁴⁴ White, p. 171.

⁴⁵ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 599.

fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen.⁴⁶

In *Illywhacker* the 'anti-authoritarian wit' of the shearers is subject to the larger irony of the pet emporium which is foreign owned, and in which they are imprisoned. In an interview, quoted here by Woodcock, Carey revealed that the pet shop was the seminal image for the novel as a whole, and through it he sought to express Australia's dependence on others:

I began with the image of my country as a pet shop, people living in cages, being well-fed, thinking they are happy, but denying the nature of their prison' ... since 'one of the great lies Australians tell themselves is how proud, free, independent and anti-authoritarian they are.'⁴⁷

Nowhere more telling was Australia's continued dependence on Britain than in the Whitlam dismissal of 1975:

We think of ourselves as a proud and free and anti-authoritarian people, and that's ludicrous. Why did everyone do nothing when Whitlam was fired. The Headmaster said he'd been a naughty boy, so he must have done something wrong. It wasn't the response of a freedom-loving, questioning people who hate authority. It seemed to me one of a people who really love authority.⁴⁸

In *A Secret Country* Pilger compares the Whitlam dismissal to that of Allende in Chile, two years earlier.⁴⁹ CIA money was used in both cases to fund the propaganda of opposition groups. The damage to reality in South America of which Rushdie speaks is not so unlike that of Australia; both continents have been subject to US imperialism, and a dependence on foreign capital.⁵⁰

The history of Charles' pet shop reads as a history of Australia's dependence on other nations, and its ongoing exploitation of natural resources; 'it was one of those great Australian enterprises that generate wealth while making nothing new'.⁵¹ Charles' pet emporium soon becomes dependent on American interests during the Second World War; 'it was a time when the Americans were making their first big push into Australian industry', taking over the parental role of

⁴⁶ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1960, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Carey in Bruce Woodcock's *Peter Carey*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, p. 64.
⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ John Pilger, *A Secret Country*, Cape, London, 1989.

⁵⁰ A theme explored further in Carey's *The Unusual Life of Tristram Smith* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994.)

⁵¹ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 561.

Britannia. By the end of the war, Nathan Shick has moved in on Charles' business, as Badgery observes:⁵²

It was a beautiful thing—a hundred per cent pure Australiana—and you would never guess that the emporium it advertised was owned thirty-three per cent by Gulf & Western and twenty-five per cent by Schick & Co.⁵³

Part of a wider phenomenon of foreign owned companies masquerading as true blue Australian, the pet emporium floats among the other, brightly lit neon mythologies of Sydney:

ALCOA AUSTRALIA it said ... it was both beautiful and enigmatic hanging there in the sky, not bothering to explain how it could be both Alcoa and Australia at the same time ... I pretended to myself that they amused me, these visions as fantastic as flying saucers.⁵⁴

Ultimately, it is the foreign owners of the pet emporium who force Hissao to export the golden shouldered parrot that comes to grief against the grinding crutch of a first class amorous encounter: 'Hissao did not weep easily, but he wept there, in that aeroplane, with the last of the golden-shouldered parrots dead inside his trousers'⁵⁵—just as Australia's environment has been literally fucked by imperial dollars.

Carey satirises ways in which the bushman myth has served economic interests, with the shearers in the pet emporium kept by Japanese yen. In the 1890s the myth served the interests of the labour movement, as 'mateship' symbolised the virtues of socialism, and the bushman himself represented the male Australian of British stock.⁵⁶ As Marilyn Lake argues:

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 556.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 545.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 544.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 593.

⁵⁶ Side by side with the stories which celebrated the outback, and the nomadic way of life of the bushman, existed also the dark side of the dream in the form of *The Bulletin's* declared political policies, published on the 17th of June, 1893, cited in *The Australian Legend*:

A Republican form of Government.

One Person one Vote...

A United Australia and Protection against the World.

Australia for the Australians—The cheap Chinaman, the cheap nigger, and the cheap European paper to be absolutely excluded ... (in Ward, p. 208)

One of the chief objects of the labour movement in Australia was the exclusion of 'cheap labour' in the form of Chinese, children and women. Independence was considered the privilege of the white man.⁵⁷

The wool industry profited from the promotion of the bushman myth as it signified its economic relevance in the face of the rising manufacturing industry. There is also the imperialist aspect of the myth, as the bushman myth celebrated the frontiersman who opened up the alien landscape for imperial gain, while serving heroically in the battles of empire.⁵⁸ Outside the pet emporium the voices of those marginalised by the discourse of the bushman myth, and the other stereotypes, threaten to break in and be heard. In a final image that evokes Oscar drowning in the glass church, Badgery asks: 'Did I hear crashing glass, the sound of the first wave breaking as it enters the ground floor'.⁵⁹

At the time of Federation, the Federal Immigration Restriction Act, the so-called White Australia policy, was the first act to be passed by the newly formed national parliament. Anglo-Saxon culture and race was the driving force of Australian nationalism. The emphasis on assimilation resulted in the destructive and tragic removal of Indigenous people of mixed descent from their parents and country to be placed in white families and institutions where they were forced to abandon their Indigenous cultural and linguistic heritage. Government policy centred on the 'smoothing of the dying pillow' of the Indigenous race which was seen as having no place in the future of a white Australia. In 1901, 98% of Australians were of British stock. In this context, the bushman figure was the White Australia policy incarnate. White argues that 'the last popular addition to the (Australian) type was the cult of the Bondi lifesaver, which was particularly strong in the late 1930s'.⁶⁰ In the pet emporium 'the boys from the Bondi Surf Life Saving Club' inevitably grow older in their cages until they are fired from their positions. The White Australia policy, which the Bondi life savers carried proudly on their bronzed shoulders, applied not only to immigration but also to the control of the Aboriginal population. As the Bondi lifesaver reached its apotheosis as the ideal Australian type, government officials influenced by the

⁵⁷ Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context' in Penny Russell & Richard White (eds), *Pastiche 1: Reflections on 19th Century Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, pp. 263–280, p. 270.

⁵⁸ White, p. 103.

⁵⁹ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 600.

⁶⁰ White, p. 154.

science of eugenics were busily engaged in the breeding out of Aborigines of mixed descent. It was believed that the full blood Aboriginal population was a doomed race, destined to die out, and that controlled breeding programs would assist the disappearance of the Aboriginal race altogether. This history will be explored in further detail in the following chapter.

Those trapped in the pet emporium are spoken for. Leah tries to convince the tourists that 'the sign is a lie ... the exhibition is based on lies'. She speaks from her cage, in which she has been labelled and represented as a 'Melbourne Jew', highlighting the parallels between the persecution and oppression of Jews and Indigenous people.⁶¹ But the 'visitors prefer to believe the printed information'.⁶² Here the power of the printed word, of the official history sanctioned by power and authority, vanquishes Leah's oral testimony, trapped as she is by her representation. All of Hissao's countrymen and women are bound by the discourse of the pet emporium, represented and spoken for. Their own voice carries no authority in the light of the printed word, which is 'written and signed by independent experts'.⁶³

Ghassan Hage demonstrates in *White Nation* that zoological discourses inform the imagining of nation in contemporary Australia, finding parallels in the display and spectacle of otherness in multicultural fairs to be consumed by the normalised White subject.⁶⁴ Speaking of the fairs and exhibitions that incorporated animal and human exhibits as discussed by Gilman above, Hage writes:

Through such 'exotic people' was exhibited the greatness and the colonising, taming and domesticating power of the nation exhibiting them ... there was a relation of exteriorisation between the exhibiting colonial power and the exhibited colonised such that the latter operated as a technology of the colonial power. At the same time, the exhibited otherness was presented as an extension/part of that colonial power (the empire).⁶⁵

Hage argues that the exhibited other is at once included and excluded from the imagined national space. Included as an extension of the exhibitor's power and cultural capital, and excluded in that the price of inclusion in the exhibit means the loss of an originary meaning or identity. The identity of the exhibited is given

⁶¹ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 599.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation*, Pluto Press Australia, Annandale, 1998.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 159.

over to the collective meaning of the exhibition itself, 'and derives its meaning from its difference within the collection rather than from its history and the value of its initial use'.⁶⁶ The collection is brought into being through the power of the organiser, or organising principle, in this case Mitsubishi (substitute for British and then American imperialism). Bhabha's concept of 'cultural difference' over 'cultural diversity' is a useful one in moving beyond the caging effects of multicultural discourse. As McLaren argues in *Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Australian and Southern Asian Literature*, 'In Bhabha's Third Space, culture is produced neither as tradition nor as other, but as a new way of social being in which the unhomed can make their home'.⁶⁷

Trapped in the discourse of the pet emporium at the end of the novel, Badgery's redemption lies in the fact that it is ultimately his scheme, for he is the story teller, spinning out his narrative with the trickery of the Spider God. Hissao, who has enslaved Badgery in the pet emporium, is metafictionally caught in the latter's narrative web:

It would be of no benefit for him to know that he is, himself, a lie, that he is no more substantial than this splendid four-storey mirage, teetering above Pitt Street, no more concrete than all those alien flowers, those neon signs, those twisted coloured forms in gas and glass that their inventors, dull men, think will last forever.⁶⁸

Badgery is writing back to those who have imprisoned him in their own system of representation. He is taking on the 'dull men' and reinventing the world, which is a liberating process. Writers of fiction, and history, are all liars to some degree, fabricating worlds and epochs out of elaborate systems of representation. Etymologically, text has evolved from the Latin 'to weave' and *Illywhacker* is a tapestry of lies and truth in which Badgery warns us at the outset 'to not waste your time with your red pen, to try and pull apart the strands of lies and truth, but to relax and enjoy the show'.⁶⁹ Those seeking any solid truths will be left chasing their tales, as Badgery himself is Carey's pet fiction.

Writing, or lying, can be both a liberating or imprisoning process. As much as the nation is imagined through writing, it is imagined through its architecture.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ John McLaren, *States of Imagination, Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Australian and Southern Asian Literature*, Prestige Books in association with Australian Scholarly Publishing, New Delhi & Melbourne, 2001, p. 35.

⁶⁸ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 600.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

Badgery observes that Hissao ‘built like a liar, like a spider’.⁷⁰ Carey draws out the element of dream and imagination that surrounds our lives in the architectural forms of the city. Hissao’s quest for an authentic Australian architecture is driven by the possibilities of the imagination:

He knew gas and glass could be broken, the gas set free, the glass bent into other shapes and that even the city itself was something imagined by men and women, and if it could be imagined into one form, it could be imagined into another.⁷¹

There is something of *Oscar and Lucinda* in this passage, in which the technology of glass and architecture will be applied to the imagining of the New World, a new society, a more liberating faith. However, ultimately, ‘liberty is practised’ and Hissao’s dream of liberation is subverted by hate and vengeance, and becomes the prison of the pet emporium.⁷² Badgery liberates himself through the narrative, as Carey finishes the novel by extolling the power of fiction; power exercised too by magic realism and tempered by the unreliability of the narrator.

Toward the end of *Illywhacker*, at a point where the reader has become comfortable with the parameters of Badgery’s world, with his lies and deceptions, the frame of the novel is blown open with the insertion of Leah Goldstein’s voice. Hitherto, she has been represented in Badgery’s history of their lives, and at this point she speaks for herself, beginning: ‘Dear Mr Badgery, my name is Leah Goldstein’.⁷³ Her version of events contradicts Badgery on a number of points, and revolutionises the way in which the reader perceives Badgery’s world. In short, he is more mendacious than one supposed. Leah is apologetic about her interloping: ‘It is not polite of me to write in your book. But vandalism begets vandalism ...’, the irony being that it is still Badgery’s book.⁷⁴ Leah concludes that: ‘you have treated us all badly, as if we were your creatures’, the characters of *Illywhacker* being represented and imprisoned in the menagerie of Badgery’s text.⁷⁵ Metafictionally, Badgery is, of course, Carey’s own creature, and lying works as a metaphor for the creative act of writing itself.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 597.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 561.

⁷² Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 245. This fate is shared by the architect of Carey’s short story, ‘Kristu Du’, whose democratic monument becomes a machine for enslavement and dictatorship (in *Collected Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 1995, pp. 15–38).

⁷³ Carey, *Illywhacker*, p. 549.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 550.

‘American Dreams’

In both *Illywhacker* and Carey’s short story, ‘American Dreams’, the protagonists are imprisoned in a national discourse driven by multinational capital. Just as Charles has exploited Australia’s natural resources, imprisoning and exporting its rare animals, the townspeople of ‘American Dreams’ have treated their country ‘like a whore’: ‘we have left big holes all over the countryside from which we have taken brown coal and given nothing back’.⁷⁶ Charles Badgery’s original patriotic dream of creating the ‘Best Pet Shop in the World’ is subverted and exploited to work against the people of the country it seeks to celebrate. In a similar fashion, Gleason’s model town comes to imprison the lives it sought to give expression to, an imprisonment the people entered into willingly, chasing their ‘American dreams’.

Gleason’s model can be interpreted as a work of art, inspiring beauty and awe in its audience, thereby fitting in with Aristotle’s classical definition of art, which is to inspire emotion. The narrator describes the town’s first vision of the model in ecstatic terms:

I think that at that moment everyone was overcome with a feeling of simple joy. I can’t remember ever having felt so uplifted and happy.⁷⁷

This feeling soon falls to guilt and fear when the infidelity of Mrs Cavanagh is unroofed. Hence the model also fulfils the critical function of art, applying an uncensorious mirror to society, giving a voice to that which is suppressed. Thus Gleason’s hermiticism and alienation from the town can be read as that of the ‘mad artist’, his speaking position on Bald Hill signifying that of the prophet on the mountain. It is of the narrator’s father’s opinion that Gleason’s intention is to ‘let us see the beauty of our town, to make us feel proud of ourselves and to stop the American dreams we were so prone to’. In a parody of academic discourse, the narrator disputes his father’s interpretation of the model as being ‘sentimental’, and alludes to the existence of certain papers that will prove this. Despite these retrospective deliberations as to Gleason’s original intent, the

⁷⁶ Peter Carey, ‘American Dreams’ in *Collected Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 1995, pp. 171–182, p. 172.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 177.

model town becomes the vehicle by which the town is exploited, and its culture sanitised, and ultimately, made static.

The state of the townspeople reflects that of the Australian 'types' caught in the pet emporium. Both become imprisoned by their representations, unable to speak for themselves. Badgery's boredom in the pet emporium echoes that of the narrator in 'American Dreams': 'to tell the truth most of us are pretty sick of the game.'⁷⁸ Inevitably, the tourists have come to 'prefer the model'. Modelled as a boy, the narrator is trapped by his representation, as the tourists do not let him grow up. Worrying that he is not authentic, they protest: 'but this is not the boy ... this is not the real boy. The real boy is younger.'⁷⁹ Trapped by his representation, unable to grow and develop, along with the entire town, the narrator has become a slave to his representation.

Leah's protests against the grammar of representation in the pet emporium are reiterated by the narrator's father in 'American Dreams': 'often they remember the model incorrectly and try to get my father to pose in the wrong way. Originally he argued with them, but now he argues no more.'⁸⁰ Tourists view the townspeople through the frame of Gleason's model, which works as a grammar of representation. Paid for and promoted by American dollars, the model is sanitized, and constructs the townspeople in a way that is beyond their control. Conflicts between the reality of the model and that of the townspeople, inevitably arising through the passing of time, result in a doubting of the authenticity of the townspeople themselves: such is the power of representation. For the model is official, and sanctioned by the government authorities, and endlessly promoted through tourist brochures and maps.

This process mimics ways in which Aborigines have been trapped by their traditional representations, replicated and endlessly promoted through the tourist trade, to the point at which 'non-traditional' Aborigines, or those whose culture somehow differs from the popular grammar of representation, are challenged as being non-authentic. Trapped in this 'prehistoric past', museumized, their culture pushed back into a mythological space-time, their culture is deemed irrelevant to the national body politic. In *The Wretched of the*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

Earth, Fanon discusses the virtues of a hybrid Indigenous culture which uses the forms of the past to engage with the contemporary political reality:

The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically towards the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilised once and for all. But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.⁸¹

The Aboriginal 'types' represented in the pet emporium are static, museum piece stereotypes which deny the hybrid, political engagement of continually evolving Aboriginal cultures in Australia. Both Gleason's art and Aboriginal art have been appropriated and exploited, and have resulted in the museumizing of culture through the expectations of the tourist trade.

Conclusion

In his discussion of name reclamation in the Western District of Victoria, Birch makes reference to Carey's 'American Dreams' in his depiction of the commodification of Koori culture in contemporary tourism and heritage discourse. Birch writes:

In denying a Koori history, the people of the Western District have also conveniently denied their own history. This is a form of radical conservatism: the history is not unknown, but is repressed by building monuments to murderers ...

The tourist dollar chases the 'niche market'. The marketers may one day target a Western District town as a 'Sovereign Hill'—perhaps Stawell, which has a gold-mining history. Its citizens may become artefacts, performing behind colonial facades, stuck in a local version of 'American Dreams' ...

Koori culture is not a commodity. It must be interpreted in an educative fashion by those who live it—Koori people. To assist in this process the Koori names of landscapes in the region should be fully restored, not presented in tokenistic fashion, or as a 'dead tongue'.⁸²

The pet emporium is a colonial monument that represses the violence of Australian history beneath the facade of popular mythologies such as those deconstructed by White. Being a 'shop', the pet emporium also mimics the commodification of Aborigines and Indigenous culture, and can be seen to

⁸¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, p. 181.

critique the way in which citizens are positioned and framed in commercial culture. Baudrillard argues in *A System of Objects* that individuals are hierarchised in relation to objects by their power to consume, and in *Consumer Society* posits:

Just like the Roman Pantheon, where the gods of all countries coexisted in a syncretism, in an immense “digest,” the super shopping center, our new pantheon, our pandemonium, brings together all the gods, or demons of consumption.

This is the world of Carey’s pet shop pantheon, where the gods of Australian identity are consumed by the gaze of the tourist, which in the architecture of the panopticon is the eye of power that orders the landscape and its inhabitants according to an imperial aesthetic. Birch’s reference to Carey’s ‘American Dreams’ highlights parallels in their work, such as the notion of a travelling colonial architecture, as both authors foreground questions of mapping and naming in the politics of the present and in their hope for a cultural future. The menagerie and questions of race are revisited in the following chapter on Herbert’s *Poor Fellow My Country*, in which Jeremy Delacy, the archetypal manager of white national space and expert on Australian types, expounds his social Darwinist vision of the true Commonwealth.

⁸² Tony Birch, ‘The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture’, *Meanjin*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1992, pp. 229–246.

Nation and Miscegenation in *Poor Fellow My Country*

Poor Fellow My Country and *Illywhacker* are novels both concerned with Australian types and the machinations of truth and power in nationalist discourses.¹ There is a significant difference in the narrative structure of the two novels, and it is in their respective portrayals of Australian types where these differences become most poignant. Linda Hutcheon writes that:

Historiographic metafiction espouses a postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference; 'type' has little function here, except as something to be ironically undercut.²

In *Poor Fellow My Country* Jeremy Delacy is considered an authority on the Australian type, and at one point he is even called upon by the highest ranks of the British intelligence to explain it:

'You may not be typically Australian, but you do deal in Australian types ... and I must know this Australian character.'

So they sat again till midnight.³

In *Illywhacker*, on the other hand, which I argue can be characterised as a historiographic metafiction, the notion of Australian types is employed in a parodic and ironic fashion in the pet emporium. As much as Herbert criticises

¹ Xavier Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, Fontana Books, Sydney, 1976 (1975).

² Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, New York, 1988, p. 114.

³ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 672.

Australia's racist bureaucracy and draws parallels with Nazi Germany, he shares something in common with those scientists who 'disagreed with the extremes to which the Nazis took their racial ideology [but] were not prepared to launch an attack on racial science itself'.⁴ Carey's historiographic metafiction, by contrast, manages to broaden the Foucauldian critique of truth and power by reflecting on the nature of its own construction.

Herbert nevertheless brings to *Poor Fellow My Country* an acute sense of the technologies of power at work in the oppression of Aboriginal people, as the health authorities work in unison with the police and government officials to round up 'half-castes' and to perpetuate the 'injustice system'. The intertextuality between Herbert's work and the anthropological literature of the thirties, forties and fifties gives rise to the prevalence of social Darwinist discourses in the representations of Aboriginality in *Poor Fellow My Country*. De Groen argues in *Xavier Herbert: A Biography* that 'whereas in *Capricornia* an apparent cultural relativism had contested and masked Herbert's latent social Darwinism, now, influenced by the social theorists he read during the 1940s and 1950s, it emerged undisguised'.⁵ Herbert's social Darwinism manifests itself in Jeremy Delacy's application of the language of the stockyard to the 'breeding' of Indigenous people, and his theories of miscegenation and the Euraustralian.⁶

There are parallels in Herbert's treatment of the 'overland journey genre' in a series of expeditions from the Lily Lagoons homestead to the Painted Caves, and the overland journey in *Voss* and *Oscar and Lucinda*. Jeremy Delacy finds in the art of the Painted Caves the '*Espiritu de Terra Australis*', which is to form the basis of his Jindyworobak-style nationalism. Indigenous art is to be appropriated into the evolution of the white nation to fill the lack of European mythologies and architectural ruins. Delacy and Voss find the same solutions to modernist dilemmas in their flight from a decadent, imported European civilisation in Indigenous rock art that provides a return to the 'primitive imagination'. Voss' journey into the outback from the architecture of Mr Bonner's house and garden resembles Delacy's travels from his Lily Lagoons homestead, where the Other is domesticated in his menagerie, to the art of the Painted Caves, the perfect fit

⁴ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 202.

⁵ Frances DeGroen, *Xavier Herbert: A Biography*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1998, p. 196.

with nature. While in *Oscar and Lucinda* Mr Jeffris models himself on his alter ego, Major Mitchell, the anthropologist come explorer hero, Fabian Cootes, models himself on Napoleon in a similar parody. As in *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Illywhacker*, magic realism works to juxtapose radically different ontologies of place, and highlights the supernatural inherent in European and Indigenous mythologies. In an analysis of magic realism and readings of Indigenous rock art in *Poor Fellow My Country*, I argue that Herbert maintains a degree of cultural relativism in the novel despite its social-Darwinist traits.

Theories of Race and Miscegenation in *Poor Fellow My Country*

Poor Fellow My Country opens with a description of the Indigenous protagonist, Prindy, setting the tone for the rest of the novel in so far as it is concerned with race relations and Australian types. The language has a decidedly anthropological bias:

The small boy was Aboriginal—distinctly so by cast of countenance, while yet so lightly coloured as to pass for any light-skinned breed, even tanned Caucasian. His skin was cream-caramel, with a hair-sheen of gold ... Then his eyes were grey—with a curious intensity of expression probably due to their being set in cavernous Australoid orbits where one would expect to see dark glinting as of shaded water. His nose, fleshed and curved in the mould of his savage ancestry, at the same time was given just enough of the beakiness of the other side to make it a thing of perfection. Likewise his lips. Surely a beautiful creature to any eye but the most prejudiced in the matter of race.⁷

Prindy is the grandchild of Jeremy Delacy, and as the latter's voice coincides closely with that of the author, his propensity toward extensive monologues makes for an interesting exercise in deconstruction.⁸ Jeremy is introduced ten pages later acting as a stock expert and veterinarian, overseeing the separation of

⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 56.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ Laurie Clancy writes in *Xavier Herbert* that 'it needs to be insisted upon that despite the occasional criticisms Herbert makes of his spokesman, passages in the authorial voice are extremely similar both in tone and attitudes to those in which Jeremy's consciousness is being rendered' (Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1981, p. 117). In *Capricornia & Poor Fellow My Country* John McLaren acknowledges the affinity between the authorial voice and that of Delacy, while emphasising the critical distance between the two: 'there are times ... that Jeremy seems to be talking for the author, but in general the novelist knows him better than Jeremy knows

starveling calves from their mothers: 'the black children were separating small calves from mothers'.⁹ John McLaren observes that although the separation of the calves is for their own alimentation, 'the emphasis of the writing is on the separation rather than on its healing purpose'.¹⁰ Hauntingly, the stockyard is described as 'standing away from the rest of the homestead, like a jail or madhouse outside of town'.¹¹ It is here that Prindy literally runs into Jeremy, having narrowly escaped the horns of a bull:

He looked up from where he lay naked in the dust. He was in a small yard beside the railed alley called the crush. There were not cattle here, only a group of humans, four of them white, and all staring at him hard.¹²

Delacy, who is referred to affectionately by Prindy as Mullaka ('more akin to patron than boss'), dresses the boy's wounds before setting him on his way again. After disappearing, the new government stock inspector inquires after Prindy's lineage:

The green-eyed young man said, 'Nice cut of a kid ... not a full-blood with that hair and those eyes, though is he?' When no one answered, he looked around, surprised.

Mullaka broke the awkward little silence, saying in a dry tone, 'The genus *Homo sapiens*, despite its variety of breeds, doesn't excite much interest among cattlemen ... at least around these parts, you'll find, Mr Bishoff. Let's get on with our bovines, to get 'em finished before dark.'¹³

Yarded in the stockyard, Prindy is momentarily subject to the scientific eye of Delacy, veterinarian and stock expert, and Bishoff, the green-eyed government stock inspector. The descriptions of the stockyard as a 'jail' or 'madhouse', and the presence of 'the butchering-hoist that stood dimly in the swirling dust like a gallows-tree', evoke Foucault's Panopticism.¹⁴ Prindy's capture in the gaze of authority can be seen to signify his status as 'ward of the state', subject ultimately to the power of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, the eugenicist Dr Cobbity, and his policy of separating 'half-castes' from their mothers.

himself, which is the crucial difference between fiction and autobiography' (Essays in Australian Literature, Shillington House, Melbourne, 1981, p. 17).

⁹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 18.

¹⁰ McLaren, p. 18.

¹¹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 18.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18. John McLaren writes in *Capricornia & Poor Fellow My Country* that 'the mood is set by a "butchering-hoist that stood dimly in the swirling dust like a gallows-tree", which, closer-up, "could be seen to blossom with buzzard-kites and crows, awaiting dead eyes to pick."' (p. 18)

Herbert's first hand experience with the bureaucracy in Aboriginal affairs while working at the Kahlin Compound in Darwin gives him a unique insight into the machinations of truth and power in the knowledge production of Indigenous people. Throughout the novel the interlocking discourses of anthropology, medicine and law can be seen to combine in the government's administration of Aboriginal affairs to oppress and control the nation's Indigenous subjects. Herbert was Superintendent at Kahlin from 1935 to 1936, working for the eugenicist Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines. Cook was one of the main proponents of the stolen-generation policies. He is quoted articulating his eugenicist perspective on the 'Aboriginal problem' and the breeding of the nation's stock by Russell McGregor:

'Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population.' To buttress his proposals, Cook drew on the scientific theory of the Caucasian affinities of the Aboriginal race. He drew more heavily on the anecdotal observation that apparent Aboriginal features faded rapidly with successive accessions of European blood. Most heavily of all, he drew on the fear that White Australia was under threat from the growth of a coloured community within the nation.¹⁵

Cook is caricatured by Herbert in *Capricornia* as Dr Aintee and in *Poor Fellow My Country* as the cold and bureaucratic Dr Cobbitty.¹⁶ Herbert writes about his characterisation of Cook in a letter to his wife, Sadie, dated 2 March 1965:

'I said I felt the next thing to do is to make characters of White & Cook & others ... Bigger Cook! Let me say that the Director of Native Affairs & Director of Medical Services are one. That wasn't Cook's title—he was Chief Medical Officer & Chief Protector. *Capricornia* was surely libellous enough, if he'd dared get after me ...'¹⁷

Thirty years before the writing of *Poor Fellow My Country*, on 27 August 1937, Herbert had written to Arthur Dibley: 'Imagine what a monster the Protector will be in my next book, what a nit-minded toad the Administrator.'¹⁸ Fergus sums up Cook's approach to Aboriginal Affairs in *Poor Fellow My Country*: 'the new deal for them is much the same as Cobbitty's old one ... breed 'em out,

¹⁵ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, 1997, p. 161.

¹⁶ Frances de Groen, *Xavier Herbert: A Biography*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1998, p. 103.

¹⁷ Herbert in Frances de Groen & Laurie Hergenhan (eds), *Xavier Herbert: Letters*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2002, p. 279. Arthur Dibley worked for P.R. Stephenson & Co., and took part in Herbert's secretive attempts to have *Capricornia* published in London (p. 460).

¹⁸ Herbert in De Groen & Hergenhan, p. 108.

make 'em white'.¹⁹ While Herbert's attitude to Cook was an ambivalent one depending on his audience and the interests at stake, in *Poor Fellow My Country* Cook is not spared criticism.²⁰

Cook subscribed to the popular theory that the Aborigine was actually of Caucasian type, being of the same stock as the European. In his article, 'An Aboriginal Caucasian: Some uses for racial kinship in early twentieth century Australia', McGregor argues that the Caucasian theory was used to support the absorption of 'half-castes' into the white majority of Australians.²¹ According to the theory, there would be no regression to 'Aboriginal type' among the descendants of European/Aboriginal hybrids, as opposed to the descendants of Negroids and Whites, thereby making the eugenicist goal of 'breeding out the colour' all the more practicable. The theory is articulated crudely by Andy in *Capricornia* as he preaches to Norman about the 'half-caste's' potential for 'civilising':

The blackfeller aint a Negroid type. His colour's only skin-deep. Three cross-breedin's and you'll get the colour right out with never the risk of a throw-back. You're an example of what can be done with the crossin', Sonny.²²

Tindale's *The Half-Caste in Australia* (1941) provided charts predicting the success rate of absorption for individuals with differing proportions of Aboriginal blood.²³ It is a text that reflects anthropology's promotion of itself at the time as a discipline of practical import in solving Australia's 'Aboriginal problem'. McGregor documents the intimate relationship between functionalist anthropology and the administration of Aboriginal affairs: 'functionalist anthropologists insisted that their studies were pragmatically useful in the administration of Empire.'²⁴ This power/knowledge paradigm is represented in *Poor Fellow My Country* through the characterisation of the anthropologists Professor St Clair and Fabian Cootes, and the persecution of Prindy and the Jewish refugee, Rifkah.

¹⁹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1089.

²⁰ De Groen p. 59. For examples of Herbert's opportunistic positioning, see his letters to Cook and others during the period 1935–38 in De Groen & Hergenhan, pp. 35–135.

²¹ McGregor, Russell, 'An Aboriginal Caucasian: Some uses for racial kinship in early twentieth century Australia', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1996, No. 1, pp. 11–20.

²² Xavier Herbert, *Capricornia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1975, p. 327.

²³ McGregor 1997, p. 159.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 103.

The eminent Professor A.P. Elkin, on the other hand, defined the ‘Aboriginal type’ as being of Australoid origin, and this is the theory to which Herbert appears to subscribe in his depiction of Prindy—one that can be understood in the context of his critique of Cook’s eugenicist program. Herbert corresponded with Elkin while working at the Kahlin Compound in Darwin, in his efforts to secure employment as an Aboriginal Patrol Officer.²⁵ At the time Elkin was the Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University and the adviser to the Commonwealth Government on Aboriginal affairs.²⁶ In a letter to Arthur Dibley during this period Herbert expresses his desire to further his anthropological pursuits, and to pose to Elkin as ‘one long learned in Anthropology’.²⁷ Herbert did manage to impress Elkin with his knowledge of Aborigines, and the latter wrote a letter of recommendation to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to support the former’s application for the position of Patrol Officer.²⁸

In Elkin’s view Herbert had ‘a better understanding of the Aboriginal social organization and outlook than any other untrained person of whom [he] had any knowledge’.²⁹

Elkin depicts differences between Aborigines and Europeans as being largely social and cultural, while entertaining a degree of biological determinism that informs his use of the term Australoid:

The Australian Aborigine differs from the various groups which are included in the European division, in skin colour, form of the nose, shape of the head, face and mouth, thickness of the bones of the brain-case and in the average amount of brain matter or size of the brain cavity which is, on average, about twenty per cent less than in the case of Europeans.³⁰

²⁵ See Herbert’s letters during the period 1935-38 in De Groen & Hergenhan, pp. 35–135.

²⁶ De Groen, p. 105.

²⁷ De Groen & Hergenhan, p. 65.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁹ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 217. See also Suzanne Saunders: ‘Another Dimension: Xavier Herbert in the Northern Territory’, Saunders, Suzanne in *The Journal of Australian Studies*, May, 1990, pp. 52–65, p. 60, and DeGroen, p. 105.

³⁰ A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974 (1938). Elkin writes:

“ARE THERE ANY OTHER AUSTRALOID GROUPS?”

The answer to this question is yes; that is, there are other human groups sufficiently like the Australian Aborigine to be classified with him in the Australoid division. These groups are found as small remnants in the lands from Australia to southern India. Evidence suggests that there have been some Australoid folk in New Guinea and the Celebes, and archaeology points to their former presence in Java. The Sakai of the Malay Peninsula, the Veddas of Ceylon and the aboriginal hill-tribes of southern India are regarded as variants within this division. The impression some of these make on a person who is familiar with the Australian Aborigine, is that they are fundamentally the same stock; thus during a visit to Suva, Fiji, I was struck by the appearance of an Indian in the street; without

Despite the biological differences entertained by Elkin, he maintains that Indigenous people are generally capable of evolving from 'a primitive to a civilised race', given the implementation of appropriate government policy.³¹

In *Black to White in South Australia*, the Berndts also argue that Australoid is the most appropriate term to describe Australian Aborigines.³² In addition, they employ 'that useful phrase "people of Aboriginal stock", which includes all Aborigines and part-Aborigines in whatever state of assimilation'.³³ The Berndts inform their readers that 'it is only within recent years that any serious attempt has been made to develop a coordinated and rational policy for people of aboriginal stock'.³⁴ Interestingly, they share with Elkin an admiration for Herbert's anthropological knowledge, writing that *Capricornia* was one of the few works of fiction on the matter 'worthy of relatively serious attention'.³⁵ Herbert's social Darwinism manifests itself in Jeremy Delacy's application of the language of the stockyard to the 'breeding' of Indigenous people, with Prindy being the only member of the family 'born on the wrong side of the slip-rails'.³⁶ As Herbert demonstrates in his novel through his characterisation of St Claire, whom he based on Elkin, anthropology and the administration of Aboriginal Affairs were closely aligned. According to McGregor, the positions of Assistant Protector of Aborigines and Government Stock Inspector were interchangeable, controlling the bloodlines of both the bovine and human stock of the nation in the interests of the economic progress of the Northern Territory. As epitomised by Delacy's menagerie at Lily Lagoons, to be looked at later in this chapter, national type, treated ironically in Carey's pet emporium, is fundamental to Herbert's vision of home and nation.

Herbert actively promoted miscegenation while living in the Northern Territory, and in 1937 he established the Euraustralia League.³⁷ He placed his future hopes for Australian Nationalism in his belief that the rise of the

expressing my thoughts, I asked my companion who had studied the Aborigines in the field, to look at this Indian; he said Australian Aborigine. Such impressions are born out by careful observations. (pp. 4-5)

³¹ McGregor *Imagined Destinies*, p. 200.

³² Ronald & Catherine Berndt, *From Black to White in South Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1951, p. 22.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 55.

Euraustralian, a person of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry, would create a unique, creole culture.³⁸ In her biography, *Xavier Herbert*, De Groen tells of Herbert's political endeavour in setting up the Euraustralian League in the Northern Territory:

Unlike the Halfcaste's Association, which did not discriminate against those of mixed Asian-Aboriginal ancestry, his attempt to mobilise the 'Halfcastes & Quartercastes whose blood is pure Aboriginal & European' into 'a gigantic organization called the Euraustralian League' which would rise up & multiply & eventually sweep the pommies back into the sea' was compromised by rabid anti-British sentiment and a racist obsession with 'blood', and by his desire to build a support base towards seeking Labor preselection for the Northern Territory.³⁹

Herbert outlays his grandiose vision of nation in a letter to Dibley written in June 1936:

Do you know what I've been dreaming of doing? Why, no less than dreaming of teaching the Aboriginal race to accept citizenship & win a place in the Nation, & honourable place, so that they may cross with the invaders & enrich the new Nation with their blood. Already I have founded a Euraustralian League, the members of which are Halfcastes and Quartercastes whose blood is pure Aboriginal & European, the aim of which is to teach pride of race to these people & to teach others to honour them & ultimately to found a Nation ... Truly, I've come to envy these half-castes their heritage, so much so that, for all my love of the soil & all my pride in being born of it, I must confess that I'm simply an invader & that there is no hope of my ever being able to claim the right to live in this land unless I fuse my very blood into the Aboriginal race.⁴⁰

In a later letter, Herbert, ever the political opportunist, states his interests candidly: 'God forgive me; I must confess that it is mainly ambition to be elected that is causing me to take such an interest in the Euraustralians'.⁴¹

Herbert's racialised concept of home and nation, in which blood is essential to culture and belonging, and his enthusiasm for the prospects of the Euraustralian are given voice in the following dialogue between Jeremy Delacy and the government stock inspector. Delacy shares his 'ideas on miscegenation' and the 'Euraustralian' after a day's work cutting out calves in the stockyard:

³⁷ DeGroen, p. 104; Saunders, p. 62.

³⁸ Saunders quotes a letter published in the *Publicist* which she attributes to the hand of Herbert summing up his views on miscegenation, arguing as it does that: 'the Aboriginal blends perfectly with the European to make a superior new type of human being, the Euraustralian' and that 'intermarriage between white men and lubras should definitely be encouraged' (p. 62).

³⁹ DeGroen, p. 104.

⁴⁰ Herbert in De Groen & Hergenhan, p. 71.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 77.

Jeremy went on: 'Have you ever thought what the Australian nation would have been like if the pioneers had succoured their hybrid offspring, had given even a little of the care they gave their stock ...'

'No, it never occurred to me. It would've made us rather like the Latin American nations, I suppose.'

'Exactly. We'd have been a Creole Nation ... of a different type again ... unique ... we'd've had that uniqueness to contribute to the world, in music, literature, politics ... instead of being just lousy copies of the stock we came from. Do you know the literal meaning of Creole?'

'Half-breed?'

'No. It comes through Spanish and French from the Latin, meaning created ... that is a created people, a new people. That's what we might have been ... There'd've been no need for planned immigration, because as hybrids we would have bred fast ...'⁴²

Bishoff inquires as to whether Delacy has any creole children with his Aboriginal wife, Nan. Delacy responds with reference to the Euraustralian:

'Creamies? No. Nan's illness prevented it. Perhaps for the best. I've had a lot of trouble with cross-breeds, trying to help them, as I thought. They're a different problem from the straight-out Aboriginal. Really a sociological one. I might have been too hard on my children, trying to make them perfect representatives of their race ... Euraustralian ... would have been, for a certainty. It's an easy way to get yourself roots in a country you want to belong to with all your being ... too easy, I think. Properly a man should do it on his own'.⁴³

Discussing childhood sexuality, Delacy queries Bishoff, 'I suppose you know our sexual preferences are established quite early in life?' Bishoff responds 'Yes ... I've read Havelock Ellis ... and all that'.⁴⁴ Following this exchange Delacy embarks on a discussion of the attraction women of mixed Indigenous and European descent feel for white men:

Beautiful as the girls though most of their menfolk are, the girls prefer the whiteman every time, even if he's rubbish. Whether it's physiological or psychological I've never worked out.⁴⁵

In his essay 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature', Sander Gilman discusses the fourth volume of Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1905), which he finds 'contains a detailed example of the great chain of being as

⁴² Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 53.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

applied to the perception of the sexualized Other'.⁴⁶ De Groen discusses Ellis' influence on Herbert's work in the writing of *Soldiers' Women* in particular, and it is in the *Psychology of Sex* that the grounds of Delacy's argument can be found.⁴⁷ Gilman argues that Ellis believed 'the men of the lower races ... admire European women more than their own' according to an 'absolute, totally objective scale of beauty which ranges from the European to the black'.⁴⁸

Robert Young's *Colonial Desire* demonstrates the extent to which hybridity is intrinsic to nineteenth century theories on race, which are driven by an obsession with sexual relations with the Other:

The ideology of race, a semiotic system in the guise of ethnology, 'the science of the races', from the 1840s onwards necessarily worked according to a doubled logic, according to which it both enforced and policed the differences between the whites and the non-whites, but at the same time focussed fetishistically upon the product of the contacts between them. Colonialism was always locked into the machine of desire: 'the machine remains desire, an investment of desire whose history unfolds'. Folded within the scientific accounts of race, a central assumption and paranoid fantasy was endlessly repeated: the uncontrollable sexual drive of the non-white races and their limitless fertility.⁴⁹

Young's thesis in *Colonial Desire* is further developed in his discussion of Count Gobineau, whose theories on the rise and fall of civilisations informed Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.⁵⁰ Gobineau equates the Aryan race with a masculine 'civilising impulse' that is attracted to the feminine 'uncivilised Black and Mongolian races'.⁵¹ This union leads to a rejuvenation of the old European stock and results in the kind of cultural resurgence envisioned above by Delacy in *Poor Fellow My Country*:

⁴⁶ Sander Gilman in James Donald & Ali Rattansi (eds), *'Race', Culture and Difference*, Sage Publications, London, 1992, pp 171–198, p. 181.

⁴⁷ De Groen, pp. 150–153.

⁴⁸ Gilman, p. 181. In his introduction to *Kanga Creek, Havelock Ellis in Australia* Geoffrey Dutton writes: 'there was a strong mutual admiration between Ellis and such pioneers as Bronislaw Malinowski and Edward Westermarck in the study of sexual anthropology; Ellis broke his rule about refusing to write introductions when he agreed to write a Preface to Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages*' (Sydney, Pan Books, 1989, p. 16).

⁴⁹ Robert J.C Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 180–181.

⁵⁰ Young, p. 99.

⁵¹ McGregor cites Pitt Rivers in *Imagined Destinies* applying similar ideas to Gobineau on blood and civilization in the case of Indigenous people:

The Aboriginal Australians according to Pitt-Rivers, were "fast disappearing" because they were racially adapted only to their own highly specialised "culture-forms" and they had not been sufficiently infused with white blood to raise their culture potential to a level commensurate with civilization. (p. 108)

Just as Arnold was a little later to argue that the feminine Celtic elements contribute at the level of imagination to philistine utilitarian English culture, so for Gobineau, imagination comes from the 'female' black races, and great art and literature, like physical beauty, come from a male-female white-black alliance: 'artistic genius', he states, 'arose only after the union of white and black.'⁵²

The idea that civilisation is dependent on the blood type of a people shaped the debate in Australia surrounding the identified predicament of the rising 'half-caste' population in the early part of the century.

There was a concern in Australia about the adaptability of the white race to the tropics of Darwin, at a time in which the majority of the population of Darwin was non-white. In Herbert's *Capricornia* it is stated that 'the halfcaste population was easily three times greater than the white'.⁵³ It was widely held that the evolution of different types of man was closely linked to climate. McGregor quotes 'Matthew MacFie at the 1907 meeting of the Australasian Association of the Advancement of Science' stating:

the world is divided into color-zones, and that each climate is exactly suited by natural law to the particular human racial type evolved under its influence, but cannot be adjusted to any other.⁵⁴

Young surveys the background to such arguments on miscegenation applied to the English colonies in the tropics of India and the Caribbean. He quotes Anthony Trollope's *The West Indies* (1859):

My theory ... is this: that Providence has sent white men and black men to these regions in order that from them may spring a race fitted by intellect for civilization; and fitted by physical organization for tropical labour.⁵⁵

An underlying question here is the evolution of a more efficient colonial machine, but also at stake is the sense of a homeland and belonging, as espoused by Charles Brooke:

'It is my conviction', he writes, 'that a time will arrive when by modification of races, resulting from intermixture and amalgamation through marriage, a kind of inhabitants will be found who can make such a country their permanent home'.⁵⁶

⁵² Young, p. 113. Gobineau's and Arnold's argument about the feminised Celtic and Black races injecting new cultural life into a decadent West is a recognisably romantic concern reiterated by the modernists' use of 'primitive art', as discussed in the context of Bardou's *Revolution by Night* in the following chapter.

⁵³ Herbert, *Capricornia*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Matthew MacFie in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ Anthony Trollope in Young, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Charles Brooke in Young, p. 143.

Herbert's Euraustralian is not only blessed with the spirit of *Terra Australis*, but also with the necessary climatic genes to survive and populate the Northern Territory.

Young discusses the origins of the theory voiced by Delacy that 'hybrids breed faster', in his examination of the etymology of the word miscegenation. The term was coined in a pamphlet written as a hoax by two anti-abolitionist journalists in the United States in the middle of the Civil War in 1864. The paper, entitled 'Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White Man and Negro', was written to provoke racial tensions:

The authors invoke ... another common argument, to be cited by Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, that a cross with 'civilised races' makes 'an aboriginal race' more fertile. In 'Miscegenation', the authors advance the proposition that miscegenation, far from producing degeneration as Gobineau and his American sympathizers had claimed, would have altogether beneficial effects, in this case by arresting the people of the United States from their alleged current decline, and increasing their fertility and vigour so as to form them into a new super-race ...⁵⁷

The Berndts in *Black to White in SA* also subscribe to this theory: 'people of mixed Aboriginal-European descent ... are increasing in number, and on the whole seem to show a higher fertility rate than either of the parent stocks'.⁵⁸ While Herbert saw his 'super-race', made up of 'yeller-fellas', as a positive force, populating the nation with a 'created people' and their corollary, a creative cultural force, such theories provoked anxiety in the likes of Cook, who would apply his eugenics to regulate the purity of the nation's stock.⁵⁹

The association of the black races with creativity is present in Herbert's portrayal of Prindy's precursor, Norman in *Capricornia*, when he discovers his Aboriginality in the bush following a lifetime of denial. It is a scene in which Norman's artistic and creative sensibilities spring to life as he discovers his Aboriginal side, and in doing so the 'Spirit of *Terra Australis*':

... he sensed the Spirit of the Land to the full ... A golden beetle shot into the firelight, for a while dashed blindly round, then settled in a bush, began to sing: Whirree-whirree-ehirreeynug-eeeyung-eeeyung ... reverberating droning rising rising in compelling volume into a miniature boom of didjeridoo diminishing to momentary pause then rising rising waxing waxing seizing mind compelling limb-eeeyung-eeeyong-

⁵⁷ Young, p. 144.

⁵⁸ Ronald and Catherine Berndt, p. 23.

⁵⁹ In *The Descent of Man* Darwin found such evidence of increased fertility in cross-breeds while observing the descendants of Tahitians and English in Pitcairn Island: 'thus the crossed offspring from the Tahitians and English, when settled in Pitcairn Island, increased so rapidly that the Island was soon over-stocked ...' (Darwin in Young, p. 201).

eeyong-eeyah-eeyah-eeyah—voice of the spirit of Terra Australis—eeyah-eeyah-eeyah—and Norman, wrapt, with eyes on the Southern Cross, took up a stick and beat upon a log—click-click—eeyung-eeyung-eeyong ... ee-yah-eeyah-eeyah!

He dropped the stick. His skin was tingling. He looked at his hand, ashamed. Then he snatched up the stick and hurled it at the beetle. The beetle fled. But for a long time its song went on ... He had to restrain himself from seeking relief in the 'Song of the Golden Beetle'. Then for the first time he realised his Aboriginal heritage.⁶⁰

This passage evokes the scene in the film *Jedda* in which Jedda's cultured piano playing breaks into the 'primitive' music of her racial forebears, or in a later scene when her legs begin to dance uncontrollably in a native fashion to Marbuck's singing. In both cases the underlying assumption is that blood equates with culture. In *Capricornia* the clapping sticks and didgeridoo sounds, and indeed the song of the beetle, rise from an instinctual communion with nature as opposed to any learned cultural practice. This is the promise, after all, of Indigenous blood in Herbert's vision of a creole nation: it is the carrier of the spirit of *Terra Australis*.

Highlighting Young's thesis that sexual desire has informed theories of race and hybridity, Delacy introduces his argument for a creole nation with the following question for the government stock inspector, Bishoff:

'Have you ever tried Black Velvet yourself? ... Now I'm using the term Black Velvet not simply to apply to fullblood women, but any of obvious Aboriginal strain, 'yeller girls', or 'creamy pieces', they're called, half and quarter.'⁶¹

Parallels can be drawn between Herbert's fetishising of the genitalia of the Other as 'Black Velvet', which is integral to his obsession with hybridity, and Gilman's discussion of the display of the genitalia of the 'Hotentott Venus', discussed in Chapter Three. (The title of Herbert's original manuscript for *Capricornia* was *Black Velvet*). Elizabeth Lawson's article 'Oh Don't You Remember Black Alice? or How Many Mothers had Norman Shillingsworth?' examines Herbert's sexist and racist representation of Indigenous women as 'Black Velvet' in *Capricornia*. She focuses in particular on the neglect given to Norman Shillingsworth's Indigenous mother, Marowallu, who dies on page twenty-four only to be remembered, or dis-remembered, three hundred pages later under the generic name 'Black Alice'.

⁶⁰ Herbert, *Capricornia*, p. 294.

⁶¹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 52. Russell McDougall quotes a similar exchange in the *Capricornia* manuscript between Ned Krater and Oscar in his essay '*Capricornia*: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel': 'After a pause, Krater said, looking sideways at

Norman is a precursor to Prindy. However, unlike the latter, he has little association with his Indigenous heritage, and is generally portrayed in the terms of an assimilationist success story. Much of the narrative is taken up with Norman's picaresque quest for his white father, while little narrative import is given to his Indigenous mother, signifying a suppression of his maternal racial inheritance. In her place, however, are the persistently recurrent references to 'Black Velvet'. While Lawson argues that 'a *wholly* ironic reading could see this silence as a social-realist attempt to mirror the historical silences of that majority of women whose history requires that, like Marowallua, they suffer and be still', she concludes that Herbert's obsession with 'Black Velvet' owes more to the:

irrepressibility of a boisterous delight in the masculine world which persecutes them ... A novel whose centre is an attack on racism and whose account of the lives of women seems often tenderly sympathetic in this way seems in a final analysis sadly sexist. While *Capricornia* can at one (careful) level be read as a lament for women, it is never their defence; while it never quite forgets the women behind Black Velvet, it continues to mis and dis-remember them.⁶²

DeGroen argues that Oscar Shillingsworth's (Norman's father) relations with Indigenous women are likely to have been based on Herbert's own experience in the Northern Territory, boasting as an old man, 'they crawled into the mosquito net with you (sometimes as many as three at once) ...'⁶³ Herbert's sexual fantasies and desire for the racial other are intrinsic to his nineteenth century understanding of race theory, as well as being an intrinsic part of the colonial desiring machine itself, which in outback Australia relied on the exploitation and fertility of Indigenous women to maintain a productive labour force.

Hodge and Mishra praise *Capricornia* and *Coonardoo* in *The Dark Side of the Dream* for promoting a vision in which the land is inherited by those who are a product of a union between black and white: 'the plot outcome is opposite, but the meaning of the two novels is the same: only the union of Black and White is worthy to inherit the land'.⁶⁴ Susan Sheridan alludes to this argument in *Along the Faultlines*:

Oscar and leering 'You like a bit of Black Velvet' (in *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol 10, No. 1, May 1981, pp. 28–39, p. 33).

⁶² Elizabeth Lawson, 'Oh Don't You Remember Black Alice? or How Many Mothers had Norman Shillingsworth?' in *Westerly*, No. 3, September, 1987, pp. 29–38, p. 36.

⁶³ Herbert in DeGroen, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Bob Hodge & Vijay Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 57.

as Ruth Morse points out in her suggestive reading of the novel, ... the children produced by the union of black women and white men ought be the true inheritors of the land, the inhabitants of the new community resulting from colonialism. This is a logic which English colonialism, in particular, has historically been loath to admit, a refusal that continues to cause untold anguish to Aboriginal people of mixed descent.⁶⁵

In so far as Prichard and Herbert in their respective novels sought to recognise and legitimise the presence of Indigenous people of mixed descent, and shocked their readers with accounts of inter-racial sexual relations, their representations of Aboriginality can be considered progressive for their time. However, as much as their novelistic vision provides 'a radical new basis of legitimacy for the Australian nation', the vision is arguably symptomatic of the dominant social Darwinist discourses of their time which posited that the white race is a type unsuited for the outback, women in particular.

In *Imagined Destinies* McGregor argues that during a period when the government had embarked on a number of failed ventures in promoting industry and its correlative, white civilisation, in the Northern Territory, the promotion of a white Australia in the Northern Territory was of upmost concern.⁶⁶ He quotes the government administrator, Gilruth, on the pressing issue of populating Australia's north:

One of the chief obstacles to the white development of the Territory, and especially to the introduction of white women and children, may prove to be the hostility shown by a very large section of the medical profession to the attempted development of any part of the world's tropics by white labour, and the insistence that no tropical climate is suitable for white women and children.⁶⁷

Jeremy Delacy's theory of miscegenation is based in part on the unsuitability of white women to outback life, which has led to the rise of an illegitimate 'halfcaste' population. He asks the stock inspector Bishoff:

'What's the use of a lady trained at the best ladies' school to a man who has to battle with this harsh country and needs a woman only to cook his tucker and root like an animal after watching animals root all day? The Squatter's Lady is the absolutely last choice of women for the bush. The first choice is the obvious one, the women with their roots in the soil itself ... the Aboriginal woman ...'⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing 1880s-1930s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 145.

⁶⁶ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 75.

⁶⁷ Gilruth in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 55.

This passage evokes the animal sexuality of Prichard's *Brumby Innes*, precursor to *Coonardoo*'s Sam Greary.⁶⁹ In *Coonardoo*, Sam Greary, who mates freely and aggressively with his 'gins' (although admittedly when it comes to his children he wants them 'thoroughbred' by white women), inherits the fruit of the land. Hugh's prudish morality has no place in the scale of social Darwinist evolution. In this regard it is not insignificant that with his white wife he has five daughters, while his one-night stand with Coonardoo produces the elusive son. To celebrate *Coonardoo* and *Capricornia* as novels which provide a 'radical new basis of legitimacy for the Australian nation' is to perpetuate the same antiquated racial theories that inform Herbert's own construction of the Euraustralian, and to continue the discourse which ties home and nation to race.⁷⁰

Jeremy Delacy's Menagerie

In *Colonial Desire* Young argues that in the 1840s there was a change of emphasis in racial theory as 'the study of humanity was increasingly emphasised as properly part of the science of zoology, with human differences analysed through comparative anatomy'.⁷¹ It was a time which saw the emergence of phrenology and the fusion of the biological and cultural in a 'persuasive and powerful way'.⁷² Discussing turn of the century Vienna in 'Black Sexuality and Modern Consciousness', Gilman sets up a disturbing scene which epitomises the interconnection between racial theory and zoology:

If we cast our eye back into time, to turn-of-the-century Vienna, to see with the eye of the Viennese of the period, we will be seeing a zoological garden quite different from our contemporary 'zoo'. We will be struck by the fact that among the animals on display are specimens of the genus *Homo sapiens*. Indeed, the European zoological garden of the late nineteenth century provided 'ethnological' exhibitions, representations of 'exotic' cultures, eating what were viewed as appropriate foods, living in appropriate housing, and undertaking appropriate tasks for 'primitives'.⁷³

⁶⁹ Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Brumby Innes and Bid Me To Love*, The Currency Press, Sydney, 1974.

⁷⁰ Ivan Hannaford's *Race: A History of an Idea in the West* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington D.C, 1996) argues that with the emergence of the modern nation state, defined largely by race, there has been a departure from the Classical civic definition of nation in which citizenship is defined by participation in the political process. Ideas linking nationhood and race, he maintains, need to be abandoned altogether in favour of civic political practice.

⁷¹ Young, p. 121.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Cornell University Press, London, 1985, p. 110.

In the above analysis it was demonstrated that Delacy's interest in the breeds of *Homo sapiens* is closely intertwined with his professional interest in bovine stock, revealing the influence of social-Darwinist anthropologists on Herbert's thought. This zoological ethnography is epitomised in Delacy's 'menagerie' and his attempts to preserve both the native flora and fauna and the nation's Indigenous subjects.

Jeremy's menagerie is first introduced in the narrative as he shows around one of his many admirers, the British fascist aristocrat Lady Lydia. Lydia has her own particular obsession with bloodlines, and she has already heard of the 'wonderful things' Jeremy does 'with breeding things'.⁷⁴ Showing Lady Lydia around his homestead, Delacy introduces her to his collection of maimed animals and sick blacks:

I hardly collect them. They have a way of turning up here themselves. The place's got a reputation in the animal world as a refuge, I suppose, as it has with the blacks ...⁷⁵

He has some 'old and sick blacks down the back ... and a couple of old horses'.⁷⁶ Inspecting their housing conditions, Lydia inquires as to how he keeps them clean:

Simply by having a rule for sanitary living on the place, and seeing it's enforced ... but not by the people themselves. Cleanliness as we know it means nothing to them. In their natural state they are clean as animals ... which is really being cleaner than humans, when you know animals. These people in their natural state are always on the move. The squalor comes only when they're forced to live in one place ... like animals in a zoo.⁷⁷

Evidently, Jeremy's veterinarian zeal is a sore point with his ex-wife: 'she couldn't stand the sight of the poor brutes. I had to keep them in a special compound'.⁷⁸ He goes on to describe the situation in more detail:

I insisted on indulging that so-called weakness of mine, but had to keep my creatures, including sick blacks, out of her sight. I set up a kind of hospital-cum-menagerie well away from the Big House ...⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 109.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 129.

It is in this 'hospital-cum-menagerie' that the disciplines of Panopticism can be seen at work in Delacy's positioning of the Indigenous Other as a powerless, defenceless subject in his national menagerie. In the above scene, Lady Lydia can be seen to represent the British Empire (the function of Mitsubishi in the pet emporium, as multinational capital replaces British imperialism) or the international backdrop against which Delacy stages an authentic Australian nationalism. Jeremy Delacy here is the manager and champion of the national space of which Lily Lagoons and its menagerie forms a microcosm. The Indigenous Other is included as part of the spectacle of nation, while at the same time is excluded in so far as difference and alterity are annulled in Delacy's scales of difference: full-blood, yella-fella, quartercaste and so on. Each variation on the White norm presents a distinct sociological and anthropological problem, a new case to be managed by Delacy. In the menagerie, the Indigenous subject is relegated to nature, and as in the case of Hage's depiction of a multiculturalism impossible without the peaceful coexistence managed by the White subject, their survival is impossible without Delacy's intervening hand and managerial expertise.

Later in the novel, Delacy critiques his own running of the menagerie:

God forgive me, I've done it myself ... have been doing it all along, I'm afraid. Even though I've bucked the stupid official policy of so-called Integration, I've still practised it in a way ... teaching them to be white blackfellows ... as against the official policy of making them black whitefellows.⁸⁰

Delacy goes on to put forward a proposal in line with that of the so-called segregationists, that Aborigines be set up on independent reserves. However, it is still a condescending proposal, with Rifkah to be the 'Mother Goddess ... a reincarnation of Koonapipi' overseeing the whole affair.⁸¹ In similarly self-critical terms Delacy refers to 'that Euraustralian thing I tried ... with halfcastes ... my Dictatorship, as she called it ...'⁸² Despite the prevalence of his social Darwinist views in the novel, Herbert nevertheless uses the trope of the menagerie to criticise the Government's treatment of Indigenous Australians. Delacy's Indigenous wife, Nan, runs an alternative school on Lily Lagoons, frowned upon

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 736.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 737. Fergus accuses Rifkah of trying to be another Daisy Bates: 'They don't want your help. Daisy Bates only follows them about'.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 871.

by government officials and missionaries.⁸³ Eddy McCusky, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, is the school's most trenchant critic, bent as he is on taking the 'halfcaste' Prindy into a government institution:

He had seen it before and sneered, calling it a Play School and a Menagerie for Visiting Anthropologists. But what about Prindy? Was it likely that he would be permitted to stay on as one of the performing animals?⁸⁴

This view typifies the argument in favour of integration in the early thirties by critics such as Cook, that to set up independent reserves would keep Aborigines in a kind of 'Stone Age' condition. McGregor quotes Cook in *Imagined Destinies*, arguing against any form of absolute segregation, describing the reserves as:

an area of land the status of a sanctuary, within the boundaries of which the aboriginal lives and moves and has his being as a museum specimen, with the difference that theoretically there should be no observers to study him.⁸⁵

Herbert has Dr Cobbity, Cook's alter ego, articulate this perspective earlier in the novel when discussing the running of his compound:

Whatever we did they'd break it down so as to stop me going on with my ideas for integration. They want menageries for their Stone Age Men, with mission stations next door so that as the savages come out of the Stone Age they walk into the arms of Jesus.⁸⁶

Dr Cobbity's compound is also described as a 'menagerie', drawing parallels with Delacy's treatment of his 'blacks', and at other times as a 'prison.' The uniforms used at the compound resemble prison uniforms, and 'the adult girls had a way of getting out of their cages when it suited them'.⁸⁷ This language again evokes Foucault's Panopticism, and in a passage that reveals the disciplines of power at work in the government bureaucracy and its administration of Aboriginal Affairs, Dr Cobbity is described as follows:

He's an arrogant bureaucrat. He's definitely not the man to be in charge of the new deal that had to be handed out to the Aborigines. He's a doctor. He's thinking in terms of medicine. He wants the old compound site first for a new hospital for whites. Next he wants a place where he can practice medical eugenics on the blacks.⁸⁸

⁸³ Herbert theorises his experience educating children at the Kahlin Compound, and the failure of government policy in this area, in a letter to Arthur Dibley on 17 October 1936 (eds De Groen & Hergenhan 2002, p. 83).

⁸⁴ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 630.

⁸⁵ Cook in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 234.

⁸⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 254.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 301.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 347.

In Dr Cobbity's administration of Aboriginal affairs, the discourses of the natural sciences, anthropology and medicine are shown to work in conjunction with the police and legal system, as Indigenous people of mixed descent, such as Prindy, are hunted down and institutionalised.

This power/knowledge relationship is all the more disturbing in Dr Cobbity's willingness to declare those insane who threaten the interests of his institution so that they can be conveniently locked away. Dr Cobbity's employee, Alfie Candlemas, who later in the novel becomes an activist and writer for the Free Australia organization, uncovers a sinister plot to have the 'half-caste' Jumbo declared insane so that his lands can be handed over to the Shell Oil company:

'I happen to know that it was through you that Captain Shane was able to hold his tide-flats and turn them into valuable property, while poor Jumbo Delacy, whom you've declared insane, is having his, the only thing he thought he owned in the world, and your protection by the law, taken over by the Shell Oil Company'.⁸⁹

Alfie had previously let it be known she was a troublemaker by speaking out in court in defence of Prindy's mother, an action that exposed her to the power apparatus of the administration.⁹⁰ The following passage reveals the chain of command that leads back to the King in the menagerie of Foucault's Panopticism, as the bureaucracy forces her to sign an Oath of Allegiance to the King of England:

'They haven't forgotten what I said in court that day. You said I'd bucked authority. Authority's out to get me. If I bow down to Our Sovereign Lord the bloody King of England, I bow down to His Bloody Honour the Administrator ... then to Cobbity, then to McCusky, then to Turkney ...'⁹¹

Herbert shows how the disciplines of science, medicine, anthropology and psychology combine with the power of the state in the court room to protect interests such as those of multinationals: 'powers like Shell Oil and Vaiseys seem to interlock, at least as far as mutuality in the exploitation of the earth and its

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 354.

⁹⁰ Herbert's court room scenes draw on his experiences in court in Darwin while working at the Kahlin Compound. In a letter to Dibby dated 6 April 1936, Herbert writes: 'I spent an hour and half in Court this morning fighting for the defence of one of the prisoners who declared he was not guilty. The legal system here is terrible. The rule of the Court is that the Prosecution has nothing to prove, that it is incumbent for the Defence to disprove everything' (De Groen & Hergenhan (eds), 2002, p. 60).

⁹¹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 33.

inhabitants are concerned'.⁹² At the end of the novel, in postwar Australia, British imperialism gives way to American and Multinational interests (the original 'war mongers'), Krupps and Mitsubishi.

Herbert's acute sense of the disciplines at work in the constant classification and persecution of Aborigines by the state leads to a tragic/comic instance of revenge when the looking glass is turned back onto the agents of oppression. Lily Lagoons is raided by the Commonwealth Intelligence Officers Inspector Ballywick and Sergeant Bugsy who are searching for the Jewish refugee, Rifkah, whom Delacy has taken into his care. They accuse Delacy of having a history of sheltering wanted 'criminals', and he in turn accuses them of Gestapo tactics:

The Aborigines I gave shelter to were like this unhappy girl ... whose only crime in her own country was to be born a Jew, and whose crime here has been to think that this is a free country with its arms open to the hunted ...⁹³

With Rifkah under house arrest on Jeremy's premises, Ballywick refuses Delacy the right to even administer her some barbiturates to calm her down, under the pretence that 'it's against regulations for a prisoner to be given any medicine, unless prescribed by a legally qualified medical officer. I understand you're only a horse-doctor.'⁹⁴

This moment of humiliation comes back to haunt Ballywick when Bugsy is fatally injured in the vicinity of the Lily Lagoons homestead in a later scene. Rifkah has escaped the clutches of the state and Bugsy is injured while being led along Prindy's false trail designed to distract the search party. Ballywick is forced by circumstance to petition Jeremy's help, he being the only person with an X-Ray machine and some medical expertise in the isolated region of his homestead. Jeremy tells Ballywick:

'If you'll agree that I'm dealing with an animal in this case, I'll do what I can for him ... as for any stricken animal ... This is an official form for services rendered to a Government department ... in triplicate, you see, in accordance with Government love of wasting paper. I'll require you to put your signature to it ... and Constable Stunke to witness it.' Ballywick held out his hand for the fountain pen Jeremy took from his pocket. 'Wait,' added Jeremy. 'You'll observe that it says here Species of Animal. What're we doing [sic] to put? You call yourselves Peace Officer, I understand. But that written would look even more ridiculous than it sounds. Besides, that mysterious boss of yours might want you to be more specific in identifying the creature, in case it

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 924.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 905.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 907.

looks like you're rigging the ex's. So, say ... Species of Animal, a 'Sergeant of Secret Police. Answers to name of Bugsy.'⁹⁵

Shortly after this incident Prindy is captured by the police, and has his neck placed in chains, which they jerk along as though he were a dog; Jeremy's play at humiliation appears justified. In the following passage, Jeremy is powerless before a power/knowledge regime of doctors and professors who appear indistinguishable from law enforcement agents:

As to making an official protest, it would be useless, because Dinny had written authority from Professor St Clair, assigning him complete guardianship of the boy. Jeremy said nothing, simply stared at the doctor to begin with, perhaps because he sounded very much like another policeman sticking up for a colleague, then dropped his eyes.⁹⁶

It is in this context of systematic abuse and oppression of Indigenous people that Jeremy's act of bureaucratic revenge becomes most poignant. It is an abuse and oppression that is paralleled by events in Nazi Germany, as Prindy and the Jewish refugee Rifkah are simultaneously hunted down by the state authorities, both persecuted for their race.

Despite Jeremy's realisation that in some ways his menagerie at Lily Lagoons mirrors the official system, he nevertheless continues to discuss Indigenous people in zoological terms later in the novel:

It's a fact that animals are easiest to train before sexual maturity, in most cases impossible afterwards. Blacks are similar ... I mean in the matter of educating them in our ways. It's generally accepted that their capacity for schooling collapses utterly at puberty.⁹⁷

Delacy is voicing views expressed by Herbert in his letter to Dibley, 17 October 1936, where he argues: 'I wonder does the Dept. think it can school lads who have been initiated? It can't be done. An Aboriginal child is just a child before initiation, comparable with any other; afterwards he is, permanently a savage'.⁹⁸ The following observation by Delacy evokes the great chain of being, in which the Aborigine resembles most closely the ape:

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 963.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 973.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1304.

⁹⁸ Herbert in De Groen & Hergenhan, pp. 83–84.

With interest he watched the Aboriginal embrace, the fondling that is like the so-called Grooming of apes, so naturally expressive of fellow-feeling that the whiteman seems to have lost ...⁹⁹

In *Imagined Destinies* McGregor quotes the Adelaide scientist Dr William Ramsay Smith who declared when concluding the results of a decade's research into physical anthropology, in a 1913 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, that 'the Australian aboriginals have furnished the largest number of ape-like characters'.¹⁰⁰ This is exemplary, McGregor argues, of the extent to which anthropology was 'locked into an evolutionary paradigm' that took for granted that 'Aboriginals were primeval forms of humanity'.¹⁰¹

Jeremy is forced to abandon his menagerie at Lily Lagoons when the station is appropriated by the war effort to repel impending Japanese invasion. He leaves, also, his Indigenous wife Nan, to whom he entrusts his project of instilling pride in the 'Euro-australoid':

He talked of what he wanted her to do to maintain the pride of race that had been taught here as religion to crossbreeds ever since it had been made a refuge for them, that now was the time when degeneracy could set in through her like having the opportunity to identify themselves with whites and being tempted to seize it, only to become as low as the lowest whites: how he wanted her to fill in her empty time with showing herself in her pride to those who would be sympathetic towards her and learn from her the problems of being Euro-australoid ... how he relied on her to teach the difference between yellow-fellow and black-fellow and stop the destruction, moral or otherwise, of those the country really belonged to ...¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1356.

¹⁰⁰ Dr William Ramsay Smith in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 39. Adam Shoemaker identifies Smith as the man who stole David Unaipon's work in 'Tracking Black Australian Stories: Contemporary Indigenous Literature' (Bruce Bennett & Jennifer Strauss (eds) *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Oxford University Press Australia, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 332–348):

... Unaipon's own literary tracks have been effectively invisible for decades because his entire 1929 manuscript, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, was published under the title *Myths & Legends of the Australian Aborigines* (1930) by the Scottish-born forensic anthropologist William Ramsay Smith, without any acknowledgment or reference to the real author of the tales. Amazingly, that 1930 volume was reprinted as late as 1996 in London and has been translated into foreign languages such as Japanese. Over the seventy years since the text was first written down, Unaipon, his estate, his descendants and the Raukkan (Point McCleay) community never received any recompense in terms of recognition—let alone royalties—for the sale of the Ramsay Smith volume (p. 334).

Ramsay Smith stole more than stories. Recently the remains of hundreds of South Australian Ngarrindjeri people who were collected from gravesites by Ramsay Smith were returned to the Ngarrindjeri by the National Museum of Australia. Ngarrindjeri elder, Tom Trevorrow, stated that 'the unbelievable acts of stealing, desecration, abuse and genocide upon our people will never be forgotten.' (ABC News Online, Monday, 5 May 2003, <http://www.abc.net.au>)

¹⁰¹ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 39.

¹⁰² Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1283.

It is a passage that exemplifies again Herbert's fixed notions of 'race'. The differences between the 'yellow-fellow' (as Lily Lagoons turns into a Uranium mine) and the 'black-fellow' will be returned to later in an analysis of the final chapter of the novel.

The extent to which Indigenous people in Herbert's novel are framed by the 'single biosocial law' of evolutionary theory that characterised late nineteenth and early twentieth century science is evident in the following pastoral scene.¹⁰³ Delacy ponders the fate of those he is leaving behind in an address to his fellow animals gathered at the Rainbow Pool, among them a wallaby and a brush-tailed possum, 'his silent listeners':

'I feel deeply guilty about you, my friends. What have I done to you, in my whiteman's arrogance and ignorance of Nature? Now that I have to abandon you, do I make your misery greater for having postponed it? I leave you confined here, perhaps at the mercy of louts of my kind who'll even make a sport of torturing you ... while to open the fence for you will only be to let your natural enemies in. Should I've left you to your true patron, Nature, to give you the coup de grace? You won't have to charge me with your agony when it comes. I'll be charging myself, thinking of you ... as of all the others ... sweet Nan, gentle Darcy, the poor old blacks ... all, like you victims of dependence on one too weak to support them ultimately ...'¹⁰⁴

Delacy's address to Nature can be read as reflecting the discourse of anthropologists such as Baldwin Spencer, whose *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory* (1914) was one of Herbert's sources for his appropriation of the Kunapipi myth to *Poor Fellow's* metaphysical structure.¹⁰⁵ McGregor argues that 'Spencer's biology and anthropology were informed by a common set of evolutionary assumptions', and he goes on to quote the preface to *The Arunta*:

Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the aboriginal as to the platypus and the kangaroo.¹⁰⁶

In this 'bio-social' evolutionary context the slip in address from the Wallaby and other 'creatures' at Lily Lagoons to the Indigenous characters Nan, Delacy and the 'poor old blacks' takes on added significance. McGregor argues that Spencer by no means believed 'Aboriginals to be mere animals', rather his words reflect 'a convinced evolutionist's assumptions about what was scientifically significant. The shared attribute of Australian fauna and Australian Aboriginals was not

¹⁰³ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1303.

¹⁰⁵ De Groen, p. 210.

animality, but primitivity'.¹⁰⁷ These evolutionary assumptions inform both Delacy's theory of the Euraustralian and his running of the menagerie at Lily Lagoons, and coincide with the voice of the omniscient narrator.

Herbert draws numerous parallels throughout *Poor Fellow My Country* between the treatment of Australia's Indigenous population and the plight of Jews in Nazi Germany. Jeremy Delacy even writes a tract on the subject: 'in which he likened Anti-Semitism to the century-and-a-half of relentless persecution of the Australian Aborigines simply because they wouldn't accept the whiteman's gods'.¹⁰⁸ However, as much as Herbert decries the 'depth and breadth of prejudice' against Indigenous people, it has been demonstrated that his own narrative is paradoxically tethered to an evolutionary social Darwinist discourse.¹⁰⁹ In *White Nation* Hage identifies the connection between radical ecology and fascism in Nazi Germany:

... nationalist domestication is not necessarily about excluding/destroying otherness, but primarily about regulating the modality of its inclusion. This can also mean a strategy of preservation. That is, the ecological struggle to preserve specific species can easily be part of, not in opposition to, the logic of domestication, especially a perverse domestication interested in promoting and preserving the diversity of nature ... The Nazis, for example, despite being most popularly known for their politics of extermination, strongly promoted a logic of preservation within their project of domesticating both the social and the natural world. That is, they advocated the preservation of both natural species and 'primitive cultures'.¹¹⁰

The regulation of the modality of inclusion of so-called 'half-castes' is evident in projects such as that of Tindale, and Herbert's own fixation on how such types should be defined. Herbert's twin project of preserving traditional Indigenous people and the native ecology is identified in the above passages. Exclusion also plays a prominent part in Herbert's nationalism, which is preserved for the Australian born. As De Groen writes:

Though rooted in the nationalism of the 1930s, his 'nightmare vision' of the future, in some respects comparable to the xenophobia of the One Nation Party, envisaged Australia becoming 'a collection of colonies of coolie peoples of all breeds ... ruled from outside by ruthless international masters whose one aim is to extract every saleable ounce of its richness, so that eventually it will become a desert that even the coolies will have to abandon'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Baldwin Spencer in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁸ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 784.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p. 174.

¹¹¹ De Groen, p. 260.

While Herbert's national vision provides a comprehensive critique of Australia's treatment of Aborigines and the disciplines at work in their control and oppression, his Social Darwinism and language usage is paradoxically informed by the same oppressive discourses that it sets out to expose.

Narrative Strategies in *Poor Fellow My Country* and *Illywhacker*: Alfie Candlemas vs Leah Goldstein

Differences in the narrative approaches of Herbert and Carey are highlighted by a comparative analysis of the characterisation of Leah Goldstein and Alfie Candlemas, and their respective roles as writers within the two novels. It was argued in Chapter Three that the insertion of Leah's voice into Herbert Badgery's narration further undermined his version of events, and exposed the inherent bias in the telling of his narrative. As a postmodern historiographic metafiction, Leah's intervening voice works to highlight the constructed nature of Badgery's history, leading the reader to reflect further on his/her own faith in the written word, or willingness to subscribe to the authority of the text. Leah's voice is metafictional as it comments on the process of the writing of the novel itself, and the extent to which we should treat Badgery's version of events with caution, as we have already been warned at the outset of the narrative that Badgery is a liar. In *Poor Fellow My Country* Alfie Candlemas tries to persuade Jeremy Delacy to collaborate on a book that will espouse the ideals of the Australia Free movement, and draw attention to the plight of Australia's Indigenous population. Although Jeremy declines, telling her that he is not one for the 'double harness', we nevertheless get to hear some of her novel, in which Jeremy is the central character.¹¹²

Alfie has already written one successful work on the political theme of Australian nationalism and the plight of the Aborigines, inspired by Delacy's teachings. Her second book is a novel titled *The Last Australians*, the protagonist of which is Charles Belamy, a thinly disguised version of Delacy: 'He's you, of course' she reminds him. Ironically, Delacy protests that Belamy is 'a bit of a

¹¹² A veiled commentary, perhaps, on the Stephensen controversy over his role in the writing of *Capricornia*.

pontificator'.¹¹³ Alfie reveals to Delacy how she came to write one particularly treasonous episode (her book has become something of a threat to national security in the context of World War Two) in which she has Belamy and his squad blow up a British vessel. Her description touches on the nature of writing and the relationship of fiction to reality: 'I saw her arrive through that window' [Her *Britannic Majesty, Queen Mary*] ... It didn't strike me that I could put a bomb under her, that a story-teller is God and can do anything in imagination ...'¹¹⁴ She mirrors Herbert's own position as the omniscient narrator of *Poor Fellow My Country*, employing as he does the God-like view of events in the novel.

Alfie's position on the question of authorship contrasts with that of Herbert Badgery in *Illywhacker*, who warns the reader: 'there is no god, only Herbert Badgery'. Leah's letter in Badgery's book confirms this in dramatic fashion to the reader, in which she also reveals they have collaborated on a number of works together. Alfie's novel within the novel, however, merely works as a reaffirmation of Delacy's version of events. The extent to which she veers from his world view is a measure of her own delusion, as opposed to any metaphysical comment on the writing of the novel, or phenomenological insight. Indeed, Delacy is disturbed by the extent to which Alfie mixes the objective reality of the real world with the reality of her fictional novel:

Her chattering of events that had to her become realer than reality sounded strange, with that ship lying out there, smoke pouring from one of her funnels, no doubt signaling preparation for the thousands of men who soon would be disappearing into her mighty maw.¹¹⁵

The causal relationship remains intact: reality, the ship smoking in the harbour, and fiction, the ship represented in Alfie Candlemas's novel, the line crossing only in her unbalanced state of mind as the events of the novel she relates to Jeremy are mixed indistinguishably with the real in her dialogue. Nevertheless, Herbert's strategy for the representation of reality in *Poor Fellow* is by no means straight forward, which the following analysis of his use of magic realism will reveal.

¹¹³ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1177.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 1178.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 1181.

Magic Realism in *Poor Fellow My Country*

The dialogue between the stock inspector Bishoff and Jeremy Delacy concerning Delacy's theories on a creole nation, analysed above, is interlaced with a discussion on the nature of Aboriginal magic. Aboriginal magic is not merely discussed, but as the two take their night walk about the property, Bobwirridirridi, the Aboriginal witch-doctor of the Rainbow-snake Cult, moves around them with miraculous alacrity, as if to bear out the argument that indeed magic is part of everyday Aboriginal life. Jeremy tells Bishoff that he believes in this magic, treating it as a mystical affair on a par with the prevalence of religious beliefs and superstitions in white Australia:

According to the blackfellow there's magic in everything ... every rock, tree, waterhole ... even in the things he makes ... his spears, dilly-bags. In fact, if you take the trouble, you yourself can find wonder in everything. We do in scientific things ... what we see through a microscope, what takes place in chemical reaction. As geologists we'd find it in the rocks through rationalism. As zoologists in the pools, botanists in the trees. The blackfellow's reverence for things strikes me as much more intelligent than the blank disregard of the mass of our own people ... who'd still be simple-minded enough to believe in the divinity of Christ and the sanctity of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Ghost, and all the rest of it.¹¹⁶

There are parallels here with *Oscar and Lucinda* and the glass church episode when ancient Biblical stories are juxtaposed with Indigenous mythologies. As Jeremy enlightens Bishoff with his knowledge of Aboriginal culture, he refers to the illusive Bobwirridirridi who shadows their progress through the night: 'He's done his famous disappearing trick'.¹¹⁷ As in *Illywhacker*, the 'disappearing trick' becomes an ongoing feature of the novel.¹¹⁸

Chanady argues that in magic realist novels the supernatural is juxtaposed with the rational without the latter explaining away the former. This is sometimes the case in Herbert's writing, although oftentimes the rational, mundane perspective on events works ironically to undercut the mythological interpretation, as in the following example:¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ There are further examples: 'Queeny exclaimed, "How dat bloody old bastard get 'head o' we?" Prindy said, quite seriously, "Might-be he fly"' (p. 433); 'Then he said, "*Mummuk, yawarra,*" swung away, did his disappearing trick' (p. 1448).

¹¹⁹ Here is another example, this time Bobwirridirridi's legendary influence on the weather is being ironically undercut, after being extensively built up in an earlier passage: 'If it was praying Finnuane had been, then his magic proved more powerful than old Bob's, because on

George listened to the Wind Spirits, and said they told him no one was following them, but they got to look out more far dat-a-way—he indicated due South ... Ostensibly under occult direction then, George found the spot, one so obvious that anyone less conversant with the Laws of Nature might well have done it alone.¹²⁰

At other times the opposing world-views are juxtaposed without one necessarily undermining the other:

Just over that rim, in comfort and at ease as those to whom *moah* held no terrors, the two males were camped in an overhang immediately opposite Aldinbinyah, which reared its head about a mile away, measuring down the steep gully intervening and up again. As a whiteman would see it, it was the headland of another projection of this plateau, a mass of rock that for some reason had better withstood the eroding effect of the ages which had levelled most of the rest of the high country thereabout. But it was not whiteman's country, and perhaps never likely to be, so that the blackman's reasoning that it was a Shade of the Old One, Tchamala, was the proper one. Indeed, reared against a purple sky, with the swinging stars, the Cross, the Scorpion, to give it fresh eyes as the others winked out, it looked remarkably like the flat head of a serpent rampant.¹²¹

There is a bias in the above passage toward an Indigenous reading of the landscape, sensitive to ways in which country is read and represented through different cultural grids in a manner consistent with Muecke's theorising in *Reading the Country*.

In another magic realist passage Herbert maintains a delicate balance between the supernatural and mundane, as Prindy proves himself capable of emulating Bobwirridirridi's disappearing tricks. Held in neck-chains, Prindy manages to escape police custody at the very same spot where Bobwirridirridi previously achieved a similarly miraculous feat. Crossing the wide expanse of waters which run down into the sacred Rainbow Pool on Lily Lagoons, Prindy takes advantage of his rearing horse and dives into the rushing water, dragging in Jinbul and Coon-Coon behind him (the same police who had earlier been duped by Bobwirridirridi). Prindy is saved by a ledge that juts out of the water like a quivering lip, while the hapless Coon-Coon and Jinbul drown either side of him:

Plainly it was a lip, quivering as if with suppressed laughter over the presumption of little men who thought they themselves so powerful, over the retribution always the due of traitors. But blind as he must ever be to the realities of the Unknowable, he saw it as a rock ... As the lip opened to reveal the maw, those on the extremities of the chain were swept around as if sucked from both sides, leaving the chosen one, the mid-link of this magic chain, to fetch up against what for a fact was a shelf of rock

the day after Boxing Day the rain ceased abruptly and the Weather Bureau announced the passing of the cyclone' (p. 208).

¹²⁰ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 422.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 451.

even if serving as a laughing lip ... The maw was like the throat of a flower, shining with light, to trap unwary creatures—like Gwanga, the Fly-catcher. The Shades hovered down inside like insects digesting in the false nectar that had trapped them.¹²²

The real and fantastic are intertwined in this passage as the omniscient narrator makes subtle shifts in perspective between Coon-Coon, who, blind to an Indigenous reading of the landscape, perceives the 'maw' as a mere rock, and Prindy, who lives in a land animated by Dreamtime creatures. A rational explanation is given for Prindy's miraculous escape. He is riding the same horse Bobwirridirridi rode: 'was it the fact that the horse Prindy now was riding had taken part in that event which caused it to play-up now?'¹²³ Coon-coon and Jinbul are eventually swept downstream, with only an arm remaining handcuffed to Prindy. In a fantastic, or Romantic, postscript an Osprey swoops down upon the disembodied arm and attempts to fly off with its prey; however, the handcuff pulls the limb back to earth in such a manner that it breaks upon a rock, thereby further freeing Prindy from his predicament.

Following the episode, Prindy narrates a more mundane version of events to Jeremy Delacy's son, Clancy:

... Prindy told a simple story of a horse's shying on the limestone crossing, the spilling of the party into the flood, his own fetching up against a rock, while the others were swept away.¹²⁴

The question of 'what happened' remains an ambiguous and open ended one, as Prindy is merely telling 'a simple story', the events having already been powerfully portrayed by the omniscient narrator through Prindy's eyes in magic realist fashion. Later in the narrative Prindy's escape is discussed by Delacy and Rifkah (Prindy in the meantime having been accused by the white community of having Satanic powers). Delacy interrogates Rifkah over Prindy's version of events, and the latter replies: 'Only Old Tachmala kill policeman. Vot is true story?' Delacy's answer is consistent with his position on Aboriginal magic outlayed for Bishoff: 'I know no more than that. Perhaps that is the true story. So much is strangely wonderful in life'.¹²⁵

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 980.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 978.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 983.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 1006.

There are several passages that feature the mysterious maw that emerges to save Prindy, and Monahan equates these with the narrative function of the dragon in the quest narrative of the Romance.¹²⁶ Rifkah encounters a mythological sea creature while being shipwrecked:

A great grey eye on a black stick popped up to stare into the wide hazel eyes—an eye on a stick that was like the scabbard of a sword and that cut the water like a sword—and vanished, with the hint of a black mass under the seething water.¹²⁷

A rational explanation soon follows: 'A hammer-head shark, more renowned for the curiosity that had caused Nature to endow it so monstrously than for savagery'.¹²⁸ Addressing this scene, Monahan makes insightful comment on Herbert's use of myth as a whole in the narrative:

The complexity of Herbert's quest myth is nowhere more evident than in the way it incorporates the central dragon killing theme of the tradition. Traditionally the dragon or the sea monster is unequivocally the enemy, is the evil blight on the land which the hero must kill. But Prindy sees the Rainbow Serpent and his earthly forms (sea, river, shark and crocodile) as master not adversary and Herbert presents Tchamala in one and the same breath as negative evil—and as a powerfully invigorating and necessary counterweight to the benevolence of Koonapippi. It is a vision William Blake would have understood and is one of the richest strands in the complex vision of Australia presented through Herbert's myth.¹²⁹

In a magic realist finale to the novel, the Dreamtime dragon returns to swallow Rifkah. It is a powerful finish to the narrative, and reasserts the mythological element of the novel and Indigenous world view in the face of an otherwise apocalyptic final chapter that narrates the destruction of Indigenous culture:

there ahead of her ... was a strange sight—a quadrageminal pattern of four bubbles ... Were the great eyes behind the flared nostrils really intense grey, or only appeared to be so upon the racing white water? Her mouth opened wide, to give forth a cry that rang to the very tops of the few remaining river trees: 'Prindy ... Prindy ... Ngooornberri ... ngungah ... ngungahhhhh!'

Down went the pattern of bubbles. Down went the copper head that looked like a bubble of blood. Nothing else for the gaping world to see. Only the *Moah* of the river to be sensed, by those with senses not yet too blunted by the jack-hammer logic of the *kuttabah* as still to be aware of the all-pervading *Mahrangi* of this ancient land, *Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo*.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Sean Monahan, 'Poor Fellow My Country: A Question of Genre' in *Westerly*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1987, p. 45.

¹²⁷ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1321.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Monahan, p. 51.

¹³⁰ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1463.

Evidently, Rifkah has been taken by a Crocodile, yet it is not the Crocodile we are accustomed to, rather it is, like the Hammerhead Shark, a mythological creature which embellishes the narrative with a sense of the magical and fantastic. As much as the last chapter is pervaded with an apocalyptic cynicism, as Indigenous culture is destroyed by Uranium mining, redemption is only to be found in Prindy's rebirth as a star, or as De Groen argues, his metamorphosis as the crocodile devouring Rifkah.

Delacy's encounter with his *Lamala* or *Yalmaru* further parallels the magical and supernatural in Indigenous and European culture.¹³¹ Described as follows, Jeremy's hallucination has more to do with Rousseau's Noble Savage and notions of authenticity than Indigenous Australia: 'a blackfellow's face ... truly Aboriginal, and with all the beauty and nobility you can often see in the faces of some of them'.¹³² Although the incident is extremely life-like, and puzzling, for Jeremy, he nevertheless rationalises it while relating the story to his old bush mate, Billy Brew:

¹³¹ Baldwin Spencer discusses the 'Yalmuru' in *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* as a belief of the 'Kakadu tribe', a possible source for Herbert's Yalmaru in *Poor Fellow My Country*: 'When the child is young the Yalmuru watches over it. If it strays from camp and gets lost in the bush, the Yalmuru guides it back, and, later on, when the child has grown into a man, the Yalmuru still helps it ...' (Spencer, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, McMillan & Co., London, 1914, p. 273).

¹³² Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1097. Herbert tells *Playboy* of an experience which might have provided the basis for the scene with the Yamala:

Playboy: Did you ever witness feats of magic by a witch-doctor, a native Australian witch-doctor like Cockeye Bob? A feat, for example, like appearing and disappearing instantaneously, which the wily Cockeye Bob performed several times in your book.

Herbert: No.

Playboy: The indigenous Indians of Mexico have among them very powerful sorcerers who can perform similar feats of magic, or are reputed to do so ... All over the world, in fact, there are special people who seem to have these superhuman abilities.

Herbert: Yes. I think it's a system of autosuggestion, hypnosis of people.

Playboy: ... Do you think this is possible.

Herbert: No. I'm a complete rationalist. I don't believe that, what you're saying, but I do believe in a very great power of the human being. I had an experience of my own, in the bush, when I saw my alterego ... it was a black man ... I woke up and saw this very tall, very black man, standing alongside of me, ablaze in the moonlight, shining, overblack and naked ... I looked up at him, and I was just going to say, "Who are you, boy?" ...

No, it was an hallucination. The thing was this: that I wanted to see it, I was living so close to it, and it was like being an alien in my own country."

Herbert also recounts this experience in a letter to Sadie in September, 1968: 'Remember I was lying in a creek bed in the moonlight [after] spending the previous night in a painted cave, & a

'I inferred that I didn't regard it as supernatural. I realize that it was an hallucination ... or, better, a metempirical experience ... A metempirical experience is one such as a saint has ... seeing Christ, or the Virgin, or some such thing ... or a blackfellow has when he sees a moomboo. It's more than an hallucination, which can be due to a physical condition. It's not just a fancy or a dream, either. It's a concept arising from some deep emotional state ... a need for a manifestation of a belief, I guess ... conceived as actual experience.'¹³³

Delacy is sharing his spiritual encounter with Billy as the latter once had a similar experience many years before, which at the time, Jeremy dismissed. Having now experienced it for himself, Jeremy is more inclined to accommodate it to a 'magic' world view, as his rational analysis gives way to Billy's appropriation of Indigenous spirituality.

Billy explains to Delacy that the 'apparition' is his '*Lamala*,' going on to narrate his own experience in detail:

'I was so certain it was someone, that I roused Ninyarra, who says right off it's a *Lamala* ... what the mob over your way call *Yalmaru* ... a man's second Shade ... my *Lamala* ... How come I, a whitefeller, get a *Lamala*? That's what I asks Ninyarra. He says, 'Now properly you belong country. That *Lamala* belong to some old blackfeller before, finish now for good. He lonely. He grab 'old o' you. Now you all-same blackfeller ... belong country!' ... Jeremy drew a long shuddering breath, breathed it out, repeating the words, 'Belong country!' He looked half around, into the distance, murmuring, 'That's what struck me ... if I see things like a blackfellow, then I must belong like one.'¹³⁴

Indigenous spirituality is here appropriated by the bushman, as Turner argues in *Inventing Australia* (and Ward also alludes to in *The Australian Legend*). Book Two of *Poor Fellow* ends with a C.J. Dennis take on Hamlet:¹³⁵

'You know Shakespeare, Jerry ... 'Amlet? 'there are more things in 'Eaven and Hearth, 'Oratio, than dreamt of in your philosophy.'

'Countryman!' whispered Jeremy.

Billy Brew breathed it back, 'Countryman!'¹³⁶

It is a dramatic finale. Jeremy finds he does belong to the country, to the real Australia, following his unsuccessful and alienated trials in Sydney, where he dabbled in the politics of the City.

huge Aboriginal man stood beside me, so vividly that I saw him even after I woke ...' (De Groen & Hergenhan, p. 301).

¹³³ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1096.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ C.J. Dennis, *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1915.

¹³⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1098.

The Painted Caves

There are a number of counter-pointed scenes in *Poor Fellow My Country* where Jeremy Delacy takes his guests at Lily Lagoons to a secluded gallery of rock art, the Painted Caves, to gauge their reactions. While the menagerie and homestead can be read as the ‘domestication’ of the national homely imaginary, as was Mr Bonner’s garden in Chapter One, the Painted Caves that house the *Espiritu Santo* of *Terra Australis* function as the flight from civilisation into Nature. In the company of Lydia and others there are a number of dialogues concerning the nature and meaning of the art, which range from anthropological discourses of the ‘primitive’ to a respect for cultural difference. I argue that the Painted Caves provide the basis in the novel for a Jindyworobak-style nationalism, and are invested with a significance that has parallels with James Bardon’s treatment of Indigenous art in *Revolution by Night*. Building on the discussion of magic realism in the preceding section, Herbert allows for different ontologies of place to coexist in the same postcolonial space, evidenced in the courtroom scene of the King vs Cockeye Bob. There is, nevertheless, a consistent social Darwinist argument in the novel, regarding Prindy’s savage ‘Orcus’, or bad ‘primitive’ characteristics. While Indigenous culture is appropriated into Delacy’s national vision, along with the ‘Euraustraloid’, this inclusion involves the simultaneous exclusion of difference. Accordingly, Indigenous people are classified and known in their various racial classes (full-blood, yella-fella and so on) and ultimately their innate savagery requires management as an anthropological and sociological ‘problem’. The ‘true Commonwealth’ cannot exist in the absence of the manager of White national space, Jeremy Delacy, whose presence is necessary to organise and categorise difference.

We are first introduced to the Painted Caves in the company of Lady Lydia, who is alienated by both the rock art and the view of country visible from the cave site. Delacy explains to Lydia:

‘I’ve had lots of discerning people here to see them and give me an opinion on Aboriginal art that’ll satisfy me ... because I’ve never been able to form one ... and all I’ve got is something either different from everybody else’s or the conventional stuff of the Anthropologists ... symbolic equivalence, ethnographic parallels, and the like,

which I think's all academic humbug. I'll be very interested in the effect it has on you.¹³⁷

Lydia's reaction is disappointing: 'If you asked me if it's art, I'd say, perhaps the art of children ... but not done by children, nor for children's purposes ...'¹³⁸ Ultimately, she is alienated both from the rock art and the view of the country which the site proffers: 'I feel as if I don't belong here ... nor am wanted in here ... by anything ... the spirit of the place ...'¹³⁹ Lydia's alienation is that of the coloniser. Delacy's empathy with the rock art is symptomatic of his love for the beauty of the land itself, a beauty alien to Lydia's eye: 'Monotony ... awful monotony'.¹⁴⁰ Lydia's rejection of the landscape and her failure to grasp the significance of the Painted Caves provides grounds for Delacy's foundation of a unique Australian nationalism.¹⁴¹ In Oedipal terms, Indigenous culture can be read as the father figure breaking the bond between Mother England and an adolescent Australia, preparing the way for the establishment of an independent identity.

Point, counterpoint, Delacy returns to the caves accompanied by his avid admirer and Australian nationalist, Alfie Candlemas. Delacy asks the latter:

'Did it strike you as childish?'

'Of course not!'

'But you could hardly say it was sophisticated art.'

'It's abstract art.'¹⁴²

Arguing that the art has more to do with 'cultural patterns' than mere 'individual expression', Delacy is doubtful about the modernist category 'abstract art' which Alfie applies so confidently. The readiness with which she subordinates the paintings to a European aesthetic is symptomatic of her integrationist aspirations, which are revealed at the end of *Book One*:

'Being an Australian isn't being a blackfellow ... just the opposite. That's where Jeremy Delacy's wrong. It's got to be civilized ... the blacks've got to be civilized. We've a continent to win ... a nation to build!'¹⁴³

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 140.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 142.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁴¹ Discussing this scene, McLaren writes that 'Lydia's role is to give an exposition of one of the perverted forms of nationalism, an aristocratic form of fascism, and to enable Jeremy to define his own nationalism in opposition to hers' (p. 25).

¹⁴² Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 545.

The ease with which Alfie labels Indigenous art in European cultural terms is indicative of her failure to appreciate the potential for an Aboriginal world view to challenge European artistic practices, and to provide the basis for a Jindyworobak-style nationalism.

Herbert held a correspondence with Ian Mudie, addressing him in a letter dated 23 November 1940 as 'Dear Kaijek, the Songman'.¹⁴⁴ DeGroen and Hergenhan note:

As Herbert revised his story for Mudie's proposed magazine ... he fell in with Mudie's Jindyworobak-flavoured rhetoric, paying Mudie the compliment of identifying him with his protagonist (now named Kaijek) while at the same time adopting for himself the persona of Kaijek the Aboriginal songman suffering, as Herbert was, from writer's block.¹⁴⁵

Introducing the Painted Caves to General Esk (Lady Lydia's father), who is directing the war effort in the face of Japanese invasion, and his assistants Malter and Denzil Dickey, Delacy outlays his Jindyworobak-style nation vision, in which the lack of European history and monuments will be replaced by an appropriated Indigenous mythology. Delacy reveals to the General that he regards the caves to be a holy place, the 'Genus Loci of Terra Australis':

... Jeremy was telling Sir Mark that while he himself did not presume to grasp the true significance of Aboriginal Art, he felt drawn to the Galleries as to holy places, shrines to the Genus Loci of Terra Australis, which only true Aborigines could feel at one with. Nevertheless, he said, he believed that it was only through the medium of it that the non-indigenous would ever come to feel truly at home.¹⁴⁶

Delacy provides General Esk with a postcolonial critique of Australia's colonial education system, arguing that Indigenous art should be taught 'in the schools':

So that children will grow up to accept it as part of their own heritage ... as they now do pictures of the Battle of Hastings or the Bayeux Tapestries ... This is something you don't understand ... the awful emptiness of the colonial-born. You yourself have a country, and an Empire or Commonwealth or whatever ... But it's your country comes first. As children we were taught at school ... and I suppose it's still much the same, with King's Birthday and Empire Day and all that ... The Empire is My Country, Australia is My Home. It used to hang framed on classroom walls. How can an Empire be anyone's country? And how can a man live without ... a country ... 'Breathes there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, this is mine

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 555–556.

¹⁴⁴ Herbert in DeGroen & Hergenhan, p. 148.

¹⁴⁵ DeGroen & Hergenhan, p. 148.

¹⁴⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 668.

own, my native land?' Australia's filled with millions of men with dead souls. I believe that is chiefly what is wrong with us.¹⁴⁷

As if to prove Delacy's nationalist aspirations, Denzil interrupts the former's discourse with the news that Prindy has told him 'the pictures made him Sing Inside',¹⁴⁸ causing Delacy to conclude that this is the answer he has 'been seeking for so long'.¹⁴⁹ The paintings are none other than 'The Voice of the Spirit of the Land', a ready-made anthem for Delacy's 'true Commowealth'. Whereas Delacy posits Australia as a nation of dead souls without a strong sense of country, Hage argues it is national discourses such as that of multiculturalism that create spectacles of stuffed Australian types. In incorporating otherness into the nation, the new organisation or system of meaning in which it is exhibited destroys its very substance. Hage writes in *White Nation* that:

It is precisely such a process of control and normalisation embodied in the multicultural collection which makes every multicultural celebration of difference in Australia operate paradoxically like a mourning ritual. Every celebration becomes a tomb to the difference it is celebrating.¹⁵⁰

This is the process at work in Carey's pet emporium, or the small deaths of the town people in 'American Dreams'. Similarly, Delacy's menagerie, and Herbert's social Darwinist portrayal of Indigenous people, annul the alterity of the otherness it seeks to exhibit, thus including and excluding difference at the same time. This will be demonstrated below in the analysis of Prindy's savage 'Orcus' characteristics.

The final sojourn to the caves is led in militaristic fashion, in the style of Jeffris, by the anthropologist, Fabian Cootes, and in the company of the Professor of Anthropology, St Clair (modelled on Elkin):

In fact the trip to the Galleries had been taken over by Cootes, who wanted to use it as what he called an Exercise, drawing on his new military vocabulary, to test the efficiency of his men, horses and accoutrements.¹⁵¹

Whereas Jeffris models his character on Major Mitchell, Cootes models himself on Napoleon:

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 669.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 668.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 669.

¹⁵⁰ Hage, p. 164.

¹⁵¹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 751.

... Fabers confessed that he rather thought he resembled Napoleon, and not merely in appearance. He said his grandmother, who doted on him, had harped on this resemblance in his boyhood and bought him several Lives of Bonaparte as presents, which he had read and re-read avidly.

... 'Denied the military career, I took to anthropology because it would give me the chance to go into unknown places ... not just as a roughneck, but as a scholar as well ... because I'm that, too ... and so was Napoleon . . and Julius Caesar. The adventures I've had, man ... in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, in parts here where no other whiteman has been ... rubbing shoulders with naked primitive savages, crossing crocodile-infested rivers ...¹⁵²

Cootes has visited the caves once before 'as an expert in the case of the King Against Cock-Eye Bob', and demonstrates a good command of the 'academic hum-bug' Delacy has earlier denounced, making reference to the likes of 'Malinowski, Frazer and Margaret Mead.'¹⁵³

Debate arises between Professor St Clair and Delacy over the uses of the distinction between Art and Primitive Art. Delacy asks the Professor:

'... why differentiate ... Art and Primitive Art? Surely not because of the use of crude materials and ignorance of the rules of perspective and light and shade and such things? These people can draw quite realistically if taught.'¹⁵⁴

St Clair replies:

'I know ... Namitjira [*sic*] and all that. But there you go ... asking me what you already know.' The Professor chuckled again. 'Primitive Art is magico-religious, of course. You surely know that.'¹⁵⁵

Cootes enters the scene soon after this exchange, and although he barely glances at the paintings themselves, obsessed as he is with the setting up of his photographic equipment, he embarks on a learned exegesis on the 'magico-religious' in Primitive art, beginning with the observation: 'these parietals represent as perfect an expression of the Paleolithic ethos as you'd find anywhere in the world ...'¹⁵⁶ His analysis leads Professor St Clair to sum up: 'these people can be advanced to any degree of culture Homo Sapiens is capable of ... with careful tutelage of course ... the most careful tutelage. I hope you'll agree?', voicing Elkin's theory that despite minor biological differences between the races, there is potential for civilising Aborigines.¹⁵⁷ This closure of Indigenous

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 742.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 753.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 755.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 757.

knowledge in the category of 'primitive' limits its relevance to contemporary Australia, as opposed to Delacy's recognition of the potential of Indigenous culture to provide a distinctly Australian art aesthetic.¹⁵⁸

A conflict over interpretations of Aboriginal magic arises between Cootes and Denzil in a later scene during which they are witnessing a corroboree. Whereas Denzil has taken notes of Cootes' theorising in the above expedition to the Painted Caves, here he takes issue with the latter's anthropological method, which rationalises the function of Aboriginal magic in traditional ceremonies. Cootes discredits Bobwirridirridi's snake cult, arguing that his powers are nothing but clever trickery:

'There you have it!' declared The Coot, turning now to Professor St. Clair. 'That's all that's at the bottom of this Rainbow Snake business, as I've always said. It isn't anthropological ... just a racket introduced from time to time by shrewdies, the so-called koornungs, to put it over the mob ...'¹⁵⁹

Cootes defines the power of the ceremony as being 'traumaturgical dramaturgy', to which Denzil puts down his notebook and asks, 'What's it mean?':

... 'Well, in blunt terms, that a racket is made out of magic for entertainment. Same in all religious practise.'

... 'but the oneness with Nature. Isn't that magic? Because natural phenomenon amounts to magic, doesn't it?'

Cootes grinned. 'Look out you don't get taken in by this magic stuff, boy.'

... He muttered, 'But I am ... I am.'

¹⁵⁸ An indication of the degree of change which has come about in approaches to the study of culture is revealed in Fergus' joking aside to Cootes that graffiti on toilet walls might be taken seriously as an object of academic study: 'Fergus asked, "Ever think of doing a paper on the parietals of the Sydney public lavatories, Cootsey?"' (p. 756). Eric Michaels discusses the significance of Indigenous graffiti, with his focus on modes of production and economies of exchange, and Christine Nicholls studies the graffiti on the toilet walls of Flinders University and compares it with Warlpiri graffiti in her essay 'Warlpiri Graffiti' in John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (eds), *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, University of NSW Press, Kensington, 2000. Tony Birch turns the gaze back onto the coloniser in his essay 'The Giant Koala', as tourists stop to paint their signature on the rocks in an effort to inscribe their presence on the landscape:

I first visited the site in the early 1990s and was struck by the ceaseless layers of graffiti, which dominates the rock formation, surrounding trees and most any other static object. The 'art-work' could be dismissed as a form of 'ghetto graffiti', but this practice of tagging so-called natural features has a strong tradition and history within European settler society and must be understood as yet another attempt to claim land within a European consciousness. (Tony Birch, 'Come See the Giant Koala', *Meanjin*, Vol 58, No. 3, 1999, pp. 61-72, pp. 65-66)

¹⁵⁹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 837.

Cootes guffawed, 'Look out ... or you'll get taken in by our young con-man friend and his Rainbow Snake.'¹⁶⁰

Indigenous magic is here again equated, through Denzil's eyes, with a certain mysticism of the wonder in all things, and mother Nature—the kind of magic associated with the Romance genre. Cootes' denial of Aboriginal magic and cultural difference does not end with his own personal or professional opinion, but has serious consequences when played out in the court room scene of 'The King vs Cock-Eye Bob'.

Cock-Eye Bob (Bowirridirridi) is on trial for a murder carried out according to the protocols of traditional law. The clash between traditional and European law, and radically different ontologies of place, is symbolised in the different readings of the country visible through the open courtroom door:

There was the jetty, there another steamboat, another flying-boat; but what was most striking of all by far and surely was what was ordered to be looked at was Rainbow Head standing high out of water and fairly blazing in the morning sunlight, with behind it, straggling away southward out of view, a line of jagged rocks past which the incoming tide was seething with such force that, aided by mirage, the whole thing looked like a mighty monster swimming. That was the treacherous Rainbow Reef, one of the few geographical features in the land named by the whiteman after the geography of the blackmen, who believed it to be one of the Shades, and perhaps the most dangerous, of the Rainbow Snake ... Scarcely had Prindy set eyes on the amazing thing when there was a shout: '*Silence in Court ...be upstanding!*'¹⁶¹

The powerful juxtaposition of Indigenous and European ways of seeing, and the court-room setting, brings out the political ramifications of the extent to which one ontology is endorsed by the brute power of the colonial machine. That machine is just as much a mythology in itself with its symbol of the lion and the unicorn and its allegiance to God and the Holy Book:

Old World stuff, with all the Old World trappings, of wigs and gowns and tipstaff, as well as the Lion and the Unicorn, looking insanely outlandish when taken with that wide view through door and window of Terra Australis, the Southern Land of the Holy Spirit, venue for Australia Felix, the dreamed-of Nation where the insanity and inanity of the old world might be forgot and true brothers be.¹⁶²

Despite the fact that 'the shade of Old Tchamala' is glaring at Prindy and Bobwirridirridi through the doors and windows of the courtroom house, which frame the landscape in European terms, Dr Fabian Cootes agrees with the judge

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 838.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 291.

the Rainbow Snake business has no founding in anthropological literature, with Cootes considering it 'quite unauthentic anthropologically'.¹⁶³ As demonstrated in the discussion of magic realism above, Herbert's novel does incorporate a degree of heteroglossia in its denouncement of Imperial myth making. However, this tendency is counteracted by the social Darwinist discourses at work in the novel that fix and exhibit the Indigenous Other in Delacy's national menagerie.

Prindy As 'Bad Primitive'

Despite the space created in the novel for the juxtaposition of radically different ontologies of place, there is nevertheless a strong critique running through the novel of so-called primitive life. In Chapter One reference was made to Richard's identification of a grammar of representation that manifests itself in the binary logic of the good and bad primitive. When Prindy's lover, Savitra, interrupts his initiation ceremony, the punishment meted out to her is brutal and demonstrates the Orcus aspect of the wildman in all its sexual and cannibalistic manifestations, as identified by Richards in *Masks of Difference* in the paintings of Tourmaine. It is the climactic scene in the novel, and it is part of a chain of events that leads to the deaths of Prindy and Jeremy. The passage runs over two pages, and goes into fine detail as Herbert shocks the reader into cognisance of the savagery of the Australian Aborigine. Savitra's knees are shattered with a 'nulla-nulla' one by one, before the executioner moves on to her elbows, while the crowd chant together the '*Tjangaluma*.' As she screams out in agony she is systematically raped by the tribesmen:

Again the bone-breaker stood his stick in the ground, to go take up a position a few paces from the spread chocolate thighs. Then, leaping into a dance in which he jerked erratically, he drew his black dara from the apron of his belt and masturbated to the rhythm and the undulating of his fellows till he had erection, when suddenly he rushed the victim, penetrated her, jerked to orgasm, after which he wheeled away, now with hand raised to join the *Tjangaluma*, while another man who had been dancing as he, replaced him ...¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 1437.

After she is raped by all members of the tribe, the executioner returns with Jeremy's clasp knife, given as a gift to Bobwirridirridi in an earlier scene, and proceeds to mutilate her breasts and genitals as a sacrificial gesture to the gods:¹⁶⁵

He stooped over the victim, bared the right breast, seized it in his left hand, while with his right he sliced round and removed it to the depth of the white rib bone. As the man with the dish held it towards him, he cut the slightly quivering flesh into some half dozen lumps, letting them fall. He stepped over to the left breast, did the same. The flies swooped into the oozing holes. He stepped to the crutch, took a grip of the tuft of pubic hair, sliced from back of the mons right round the vulva, removed the whole, again cut it into pieces into the fly-filled bowl.¹⁶⁶

The pieces of meat are then thrown on the fire to be shared among the tribesman, as 'the savour of cooking human flesh' rises to the whistling kites, presumably for a cannibalistic rite which will complete the picture of the savage wildman.

Prindy, being the initiate, is a passive observer of these events and is no chivalric knight (as Monahan would have him be in his reading of the novel as a Romance) rescuing his damsel in distress. Rather, he is bound by the savage traditions of his forebears, pondering on 'how many times such a scene had been witnessed throughout the Dreamtime', resigned to the fate of his savage traditions and social role as initiate.¹⁶⁷ Jeremy comes on the scene some time later to find Prindy fending off spears with a Boomerang as he is subject to a ritual punishment for his affair with Savitra. Not being one to truck with savage custom, Jeremy Delacy naively yet heroically intervenes, causing Prindy to lose concentration and to be speared through the chest. Bobwirridirridi instinctively throws a spear at Jeremy, killing him. The narrative makes clear that Jeremy has been foolish in his interference. However, it is also clear that both Prindy and Jeremy are victims of a violent native tradition.

¹⁶⁵Mutilation and castration is a theme running through the novel, as Rifkah has also been mutilated by the Nazis, and at one stage in the novel a doctor threatens to castrate the scrub-bull Jeremy Delacy who develops gangrene in his testes after being bashed by police. However, the scene of Savitra's mutilation is the most graphic and violent, evoking as it does the discourse of the bad primitive.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 1436–1437.

¹⁶⁷ In Chapter One it was noted that 'Primitive' characters in novels often have their individual identity subordinated to their social function in primitive society. Prindy is definitely a three-dimensional character, though he is perhaps never drawn with the ease of Jeremy Delacy.

The sacrificial ceremony of which Savitra is the victim is no mere aberration in Arcadia. It is a scene foreshadowed in the dialogue between Bishoff and Delacy discussed above in this chapter:

Nelly was caught in the sacred precincts, and subjected to the ancient and horrible ritual demand ... which consists of breaking arms and legs, literal rape by the participants ...¹⁶⁸

Prindy has already demonstrated his savage tendencies in his treatment of Savitra on several occasions. One of these follows a dialogue between Fergus and Rifkah, in which the latter is accused of being naive in her Daisy Bates-like approach to the 'Aboriginal problem':

'You see these people ... your people, as you quite erroneously call them, because they're nobody's people ... you see them as simple Arcadians ... and their Arcady as some lovely thing to be preserved as an example to the brutal world... I'm an Anthropologist, trained. I don't go round claiming to know these people like the others. I don't know them ... But I know savages from intense reading about them.'¹⁶⁹

Fergus' thesis is then backed up by the omniscient narrator:

An example of the miniature of the complexity of savage culture and the brutality that could go with it, was forthcoming even as Fergus gave up the argument as they neared the landing.¹⁷⁰

The example referred to is that of Prindy hitting his wife, making her nose bleed as he does on a number of occasions, each of which are accompanied by a remark about the savage customs of traditional cultures: 'that sharp Indian nose was not adapted to take an Aboriginal wife's traditional putting in her place easily.'¹⁷¹

In *Masks of Difference* Richards observes that the 'Orcus' wildman serves as a justification for the colonising process, inviting as it does the enforcement of moral order and spiritual guidance. Indeed, Cook employed a similar argument in his attack on those promoting independent reserves for Aborigines:

Cook alleged that any policy that sought to perpetuate traditional Aboriginal customs would place the government in the moral dilemma of condoning 'cruel

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 1279.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 1314. On the next day Prindy 'backhands' her, leading Jeremy to remark: 'Whatever the blacks are going to think of his having a wife, they won't be able to object to the way he treats her ... strictly according to the rules' (p. 1314).

initiation ceremonies and such bitterly controversial matters as ritual rape [and] tribal murder.¹⁷²

The placement of Savitra's mutilation at the climax of the novel privileges a particular reading of traditional Aboriginal culture which can be seen to justify Delacy's role as hero in the narrative, appropriating Indigenous spirituality and burial rites. Nevertheless, Herbert suspends the question of violence as Delacy challenges Rifkah's desire to temper savage custom with the influence of the mission's Christian teaching:

'It is not to mek zem Catholic, but save zem from vot zey call Barbarous Practice. Somezing ze blacks do are ver' cruel ...'

'That's Aboriginal Ethos. I thought we were pledged to preserve it?'

'I do not know now. Mooch I haf to learn. Prindy vill help teach me.'¹⁷³

Rifkah's answer that she does not 'know now' echoes Fergus' and Jeremy's claims not to ever really 'know' the Other despite all of their anthropology. Rifkah's position that 'Prindy vill help teach me' can be read as an understanding of the importance of the Indigenous voice in the determination of Indigenous affairs.

In his analysis of 'The Flaying of Marysus', discussed in Chapter One, Richards demonstrates the significance of the Pan flute or pipe as a symbol of the Primitive, as opposed to the strings of the lyre. As in the Flaying of Marzayus, Prindy's primitive status is symbolized by his accomplishment at playing the flute, as in the following passage:

Herschel was revealed as a music lover, in fact as a very accomplished flautist, which threw him in with Denzil, and also with Prindy for a while ... however, Prindy had to drop out, because Herschel had no enthusiasm for what he called the Primitive.¹⁷⁴

Pan's musical failure results in his being 'flayed', cut open and known by the more knowledgeable Apollo. The flute is Prindy's natural choice of instrument. In a letter to Sadie dated 11 September 1968, Herbert discusses his characterisation of Prindy and one can see 'the grammar of representation' identified by Richards at work:

With childish playfulness, yet with a kind of Puckish (Pan & the God of the woods—Puck is the English Pan) impishness and, of course, he will tootle madly on

¹⁷² McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 235.

¹⁷³ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1006.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 849.

his flute. Yes, he is behaving quite madly it seems ... Here she [Rifkah] is almost about to become what she might have become, but for being Jewish & hence too civilised to be the elf that is required to be P's companion ... Of course a Rifkah, or Sadie, could not do it—it isn't in Jewish nature, which is the nature of Einstein, the Rationalist. It was the Jews raised humanity from the lunacy of the bondage to the Sylvan Deities (gods of the wilderness) ...¹⁷⁵

As discussed with reference to Robert Young's work, Delacy's creole nation is a combination of the Indigenous creative force of the wilderness, with the rational force of the European mind. Within the order of Delacy's national vision, the Indigenous other is included as an exhibit, displaying creativity (the Painted Caves) and cultural distinction from Europe, yet the difference of the Other is reconfigured and framed within a European grammar of representation, becoming a moribund exhibit of European mythology.

Travellers, Tourists and Postcards

In postwar (and post-Jeremy Delacy) Australia the Northern Territory and Lily Lagoons have metamorphosed into a theme park subject to the interests of the Yankee trader, along with 'the grand old warmongers who had started it, like Krupp and Mitsubishi'.¹⁷⁶ It is a scenario that evokes Hissaou's revenge on a nation too cowardly to fight its own battles and to free itself from the imperialist yoke, and in particular, the simulacrum of 'American Dreams', with tourists buying postcards at the Painted Caves and having the actors pointed out to them:

... picture postcards of the memorial had a ready sale at the Manager's Residence at Knowles Creek and the Painted Caves, and as the old love of gossip still prevailed, those who sold them often told the tale. The story was made all the more interesting by the fact that two of those involved were still around to be pointed out, a couple of old fogeys known as Lopsided Pat and Red Rifkah ...¹⁷⁷

As for the Painted Caves themselves, the spiritual centre on which Jeremy dreamed of founding a true Australian Nationalism, they have been desecrated by travellers and tourists (the bad culture carriers):

¹⁷⁵ Herbert in DeGroen & Hergenhan, p. 307.

¹⁷⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1451.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1456.

Indeed the beer can had become symbolic of the final conquest of the land. Travellers now carried them as the pioneers had their water-bags and pack-canteens, blazing their trails with empties, even the Aborigines, what few of them still wandered.¹⁷⁸

Lily Lagoons homestead has been turned into 'the great Uranium Treatment Plant' that has seen 'the end of the Rainbow Pool, at least as the Place of the *Moah* it had been from the Beginning'.¹⁷⁹ Ultimately it is a Nietzschean landscape in which the power of the gods has been usurped by the atom bomb: 'only those masters of the Negative in Nature, the Old Ones, Satan, Ahriman, Tchamala, could have equalled it'.¹⁸⁰ The Uranium Plant is also 'symbolic of Man's having beaten God to the power to destroy the Earth And All That In There Is'.¹⁸¹ Fabian Cootes, meanwhile, 'in his capacity as Director of Aboriginal Culture' had the best paintings of the galleries carved out 'to ensure their perpetual preservation in museums'.¹⁸²

One might suspect that in such a Nietzschean landscape Herbert's 'Homo Novis', the Euraustralian, might realize his full potential. However, as discussed above, the 'yella-fella' is represented as being little more than a political opportunist.¹⁸³ Since the Painted Caves have been turned into a Tourist Attraction:

the only blacks who worked these days were from Southern centres, people far removed from old tribal ways, having regard for the kuttabah's economics, hence not content with the Social Service Payments. Social Service had become the blackman's livelihood since the acquirement of citizenship, which, although designed by benign authorities to keep unemployed citizens in reasonable comfort, was barely enough to keep in booze such booze-artists as the Aboriginal Race had proved to be with the lifting of restrictions. Those who worked, like the Rangers here, wanted the things that proved their emancipation—fine clothes, radios, guitars, motor-cars—above all motor-cars. Above their wages, the Rangers profited from the sale of Aboriginal Artefacts, which were in such demand since the Nation had come to feel fully guilty

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 1452.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 1450.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 1452.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p. 1453.

¹⁸³ In interview with *Playboy*, Herbert expresses similar views to those spoken by Rifkah and the omniscient narrator, explaining away Aboriginal activism as some kind of political scam by 'savvy blacks'. When asked about Charlie Perkins' comments on the possibility of racial violence disrupting the Commonwealth Games, Herbert replies:

Herbert: Well, you see, Charlie is not really representing them, they are representing themselves. Of course, Charlie is part white, you know.

Playboy: Does that mean his thinking is white-oriented?

Herbert: He's a cross-bred black man, you see, and the cross-breed's militancy is a very different thing from the black man's docility, a very different thing. (p. 36)

about its former ill-treatment of the blackfellow that they were mass-produced in factories, even imported from Japan. However, there were occasions when these smart fellows reverted to type, went in to Elizabeth and got on the booze with their happy-go-lucky brethren from the Aboriginal Settlement popularly known as Boongsville, and joined in the new Aboriginal sport of calling whites White Bastards and telling them to get to hell off their sacred soil.¹⁸⁴

Herbert's racism is manifest in his references to 'type' and 'race', and the underlying discourse of cultural authenticity in which Indigenous culture is represented as being static, unable to evolve in contemporary Australia. It is a passage which owes much to the stereotype of the 'fringe-dwelling Aborigine', depicted in literature and art as embodying the worst of European culture, while having lost any nobility of their tribal ways.¹⁸⁵ This is the limit of Herbert's vision: one bound by notions of authenticity and contained in the form of his hallucination of the Noble Savage.

Herbert's Manichean discourse of the authentic/inauthentic Aborigine is reaffirmed in Rifkah's speech at the end of the novel as she warns of the difference between the true Aborigine and the 'half-caste': 'Give back to ze blackman a vorthvile piece of ze stolen land, and let him live zere as he likes ... If ze kuttabah ... ze stranger, vich mean everybody not belonging, and zat mean halfcaste too ...'¹⁸⁶ Mudrooroo compares this passage with a similar one by Herb Wharton in *Unbranded*, arguing that his representations of Indigenous people lack 'the sensitivity of Indigenous people writing on the same or similar subjects'. Mudrooroo writes:

Poor Fellow My Country is ... the high point of the settler modernist text in which the author is enthroned as God commenting on things below, and there is no questioning of God's right to represent who he pleases and in whatever way he chooses. In fact, the author enthroned as God is what distinguishes the modern settler texts from postmodern, in that the latter are aware of the pitfalls of conventional characterisation in regard to Indigenous people, and try to negotiate Indigenous representation by seeking to render them as part of the backdrop of Australia, by ignoring them, or even by paying them homage; but few postmodern writers seek to

¹⁸⁴ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1453.

¹⁸⁵ Bernard Smith observes the 'collapse of the noble savage as a pictorial convention' in transformations in depictions by William Blake, referring to the latter's engraving 'Family of Negro Slaves from Loango' for Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Tribes of Surinam*:

Here, then, in the same engraving the noble savage is confronted by the comic savage, a graphic type to become far more common in the succeeding century; and it is in line with the later development that the comic figure should be depicted clothed and smoking a pipe, and bearing the marks of degeneration upon contact with Europeans. (*European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd ed., Harper & Row Publishers, Sydney, p. 174)

¹⁸⁶ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1462.

contain the Indigenous in the old stereotypes formed from the outmoded conventions of nineteenth century characterisation and Aboriginalist anthropological texts.¹⁸⁷

In the expedition to the Painted Caves led by Cootes earlier in the novel, Delacy espouses a similar philosophy of segregation to that posed by Rifkah, expressing his opinion that the Painted Caves should be returned to the exclusive care of their Indigenous owners, thereby guarding them:¹⁸⁸

against intrusion by anyone except Aborigines, who would have sole right to admit anyone else; and that preservation of such places as these here, where proper responsibility had ceased with disintegration of the tribes, be vested, at Government expense, in such tribesmen as still practised the ancient arts.¹⁸⁹

McGregor argues that the movement for absolute segregation for 'full-bloods' on reserves in the thirties was characterized by the reification of culture: 'Cultures became, in the anthropological imagination, real things, which people did or did not possess.'¹⁹⁰

This reification of culture underlies Herbert's representations of Aboriginality throughout *Poor Fellow My Country*, with the 'half-castes' being ever in danger of losing their culture and becoming 'bloody-nutchings'. Prindy is evidently an exception, a 'half-caste' who maintains a traditional education while also being exposed to many other religions and belief systems, a synthesis cut short by his tragic death. This is made explicit earlier in the novel as Jinbul hunts down Prindy and contemplates the plight of the inbetween 'Yeller Feller':

... what of that odd creature for whose existence there was no more explanation according to the blackman's logic (and who would believe a whiteman?) than for such monstrosities as twins, pigs, buffaloes—the Yeller Feller? Some said he was part whiteman. No true blackfellow ever said that. To such he was a Bloody Nutching ...—All Yeller Fellers? What of this kid who had been adopted by the cleverest koorning in the land. Could you wipe him off as Bloody Nutching?¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Mudrooroo, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1997, p. 61.

¹⁸⁸ 'In 1938 Elkin, McEwen and J.A. Carrodus drafted the framework for a policy subsequently approved by Cabinet and issued in February 1939. The "New Deal for Aborigines", as it was dubbed, was fundamentally in accord with the proposals put forward by Cook in 1935 and 1936.' (McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 182).

¹⁸⁹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 753.

¹⁹⁰ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 231. One of the underlying motives for the establishment of separate reserves for 'full-blood' Aborigines was the perceived negative effects contact with European civilisation had on the Aborigine, a view espoused by the anthropologist Donald Thompson whom McGregor argues: 'was not the first, or the last, white Australian to see in the primitive Aboriginal a host of desirable qualities, while in the de-tribalised fringe-dweller he could see only a distorted image of the evils of his own society' (p. 232).

¹⁹¹ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 977.

Prindy's death signifies a failure to reconcile traditional culture with European traditions, reinforcing the argument in the novel to treat the true blackfellow and the 'halfcaste' as different 'sociological problems'.¹⁹²

According to McGregor, in the 1930s 'Aboriginal activists of the day vehemently repudiated any distinction between persons of full and those of partial Aboriginal descent'.¹⁹³ William Cooper, Secretary of the Victorian-based Australian Aborigines League, argued (ironically in terms similar to Cook) that 'we don't want to be zoological specimens in Arnhem land'.¹⁹⁴ Cooper and other activists, McGregor maintains, were actually pro-assimilation. While this view appears archaic in the contemporary political context, at the time the priorities of the Aboriginal rights movement were to combat social Darwinist views that posited biological differences between the European and Aborigine.

Although Herbert is influenced by social Darwinist anthropology, he nevertheless represents the dissenting voices of the Aboriginal Rights movement in the protest against Rifkah's 'solution' for the 'Aboriginal problem':

She was drowned in a howl of protest from the crossbreeds in the dusky crowd. But her voice came through again: 'Like Jew who is not brought up to Judaism is not Jew, but what blackfellow call Bloody Nutching ... black-fellow who has lost his Dreaming to Bloody Nutching ...'

'Bloody nutching yo'self!'

'Shut up ... bloody puggin white bastard!'¹⁹⁵

A chaotic brawl ensues, amid shouts of 'Land Rights' and 'Integration' as different factions of the crowd make themselves heard. This final scene evokes the dissenting voices at the end of *Illywhacker* that threaten to bring down the pet emporium, and Rifkah's death, despite occurring amidst what Mudrooroo defines as 'a gabble of Aborginal words from Herbert alone knows where', may

¹⁹² Herbert's position resonates with that of Tom Wright who, according to McGregor, wrote 'The New Deal for Aborigines' in which he: 'proclaimed that it "would be an important step towards a better understanding of the aborigines question if it were clearly recognized" that the full-bloods and the half-castes comprised "two separate problems".' Olive Pink was another advocate for absolute segregation who argued that there was a strict difference between the two: 'In her view, humanitarian efforts to uplift the half-castes were misdirected. It was the true Aborigines, the full-bloods, who were in need of saving; and this, Pink believed, could be done only by their maintaining a truly Aboriginal way of life.' (McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 249)

¹⁹³ McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 249.

¹⁹⁴ Cooper in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 250.

¹⁹⁵ Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country*, p. 1462.

be interpreted optimistically as creating an aperture for a new take on old solutions.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

Mudrooroo's critique of *Poor Fellow My Country* as a high modernist text is a telling one, for Herbert shares with White a confidence in speaking for the Other that has long since been shaken by postmodern and postcolonial theory, and the ongoing demands of Aboriginal activists. Such is the shift in narrative and scholarly approaches that these texts now constitute an archaeology of social Darwinist thought that appears stone-age for the contemporary cultural studies critic. Herbert and White are set pieces in the menagerie of Australia's assimilationist era. If only the racist discourses that shape their respective representations of Indigenous culture were not the structural stuff of newspaper columns throughout the nation, which continue to imprison Australia's Others in the architecture of a covert White Australia policy window dressed by the emphasis on skilled migration.

It is paradoxical that Herbert should denigrate the traveller and tourist in the final chapter of *Poor Fellow My Country* as the harbingers of cultural destruction when his own representations of Aboriginality have largely arisen out of his travels in the Northern Territory where he met and worked with people whom he would draft characters on for his novels. His recourse to anthropologists such as Elkin and Baldwin, and his engagement with anthropological discourses in general, are products of travelling cultures engaging on different levels. James Clifford argues that rather than being read as a static entity, all culture, from Western to traditional Indigenous, should be read as travelling cultures.¹⁹⁷ If we

¹⁹⁶ Mudrooroo, p. 61.

¹⁹⁷ Clifford writes in his essay 'Travelling Cultures':

For example, in my own work, among others, there has been an attempt to question the oral-to-literate narrative, hidden in the very word "informant". The native speaks, the anthropologist writes. "Writing" or "inscribing" functions controlled by indigenous collaborators are elided ... If thinking of the so-called informant as writer/inscriber shakes things up a bit, so does thinking of her or him as traveler. In several recent articles, Arjun Appadurai has challenged anthropological strategies for localizing non-Western people as "natives". He writes of their "confinement," even "imprisonment," through a process of representational essentializing, what he calls a "metonymic freezing," in which one part or aspect of people's lives come to epitomize them as a whole, constituting their theoretical niche in an anthropological taxonomy. (James

are to acknowledge that Indigenous culture is a contemporary, ever evolving entity, that it has never stopped travelling, we are forced to acknowledge that European culture is also an ever evolving, travelling entity, in a hybridised state, engaging with Indigenous culture in rhizomic fashion. Opposed to the reification of culture is Delueze and Guattari's concept of desiring machines which in the colonial context:

While providing an overall theoretical paradigm, the desiring machine also allows for the specificity of incommensurable, competing histories forced together in unnatural unions by colonialism. Nothing catches this disavowed but obsessional tale of disjunctive connections between territories and bodies better than the pulsations of the desiring machines caught up in a continual process of breaks and flows, couplings and uncouplings, 'crossing, mixing, overturning structures and orders ... always pushing forward a process of deterritorialization'.¹⁹⁸

There is no separation here between individual and culture, or individuals from different cultures; rather, the colonial narrative is played out through the psychological and the social: 'Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics, and zones marching to different beats and differing in nature'.¹⁹⁹

Despite its Social Darwinism and overt racism, *Poor Fellow My Country* is a dialogic novel engaging with the many languages of the Northern Territory, and its social Darwinist traits are indicative of the cultural milieu out of which Herbert was writing. The dialogic aspect of the novel informs the magic realist episodes and the readings of Indigenous rock art in the Painted Caves, subtleties that add to the complexity of Herbert's personae and writing that emerge in his letters and life stories. Herbert's core themes remain at the heart of the history wars of Australia's contemporary political landscape, and the comparative analysis of *Poor Fellow My Country* and *Illywhacker* marks a distinct shift in the imagining of home and nation, from the modern to the postmodern.

Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' in L. Grossberg et al. (eds) *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp. 96–116, p. 100)

¹⁹⁸ Young, p. 174.

¹⁹⁹ Delueze and Guattari in Young, p. 168.

Mapping the Homely National Imaginary in *Revolution by Night*

James Bardon's *Revolution by Night*¹ is a text answerable in Bakhtinian terms to both Charles Sturt's *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia*² and Geoff Bardon's experience with the Papunya Tula artists, narrated in *The Art of the Western Desert*³ and *Papunya Tula*.⁴ Sturt's maps, along with excerpts from his 'lost journal' are challenged and reinterpreted by the sand mosaics and hieroglyphs of the Indigenous artists of the Western desert. These painters, recognisable from Geoff Bardon's texts, speak from the gaps and absences in Sturt's historical account of his journey into the interior of Australia, giving it a post-colonial re-evaluation. Paul Carter's work on Sturt, and his theorising of the explorer journal genre will again be drawn on here, along with his discussion of Albert Namatjira's and Geoff Bardon's accounts of the events surrounding the origins of the Papunya Tula art movement in *Lie of the Land*.⁵ Carter's discussion of the assimilationist architecture at Papunya will be compared to James Bardon's use of the house as a recurring trope to represent the Eurocentric world view of the explorer making space into place through the barred windows of latitude and longitude. This discussion will also be informed by the work of Tony Birch, who

¹ James Bardon *Revolution by Night or Katjala Wananu (The Son After the Father)*, Local Consumption Publications, Sydney, 1991.

² Charles Sturt, *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia*, London, Facsimile Edition, 1965.

³ Geoff Bardon, *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1979.

⁴ Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula*, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, 1991.

⁵ Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, Faber & Faber, London, 1996.

locates questions of mapping and naming, and colonial architecture, in contemporary tourism practice.

There are a number of continuities between Jack Dutruc's (the protagonist of *Revolution by Night*) experience and that of Geoff Bardon as narrated in *Papunya Tula*.⁶ Dutruc promotes the work of the local Indigenous artists, and assists in the selling of their paintings, while suffering the hostility of the white community for his close association with them. Many of the paintings discussed are recognisable from Geoff Bardon's account, along with events such as film nights, and the resounding presence of the electric generator. As Barry Hill observes: 'the melancholia of the fictional man [Dutruc] reads like an extrapolation from between the lines of *Papunya Tula*'.⁷ These experiences are intertwined with fictional re-workings of Sturt's *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia*, along with Daniel Brock's unofficial account of that journey *To the Desert With Sturt, A Diary of the 1844 Expedition*.⁸

James Bardon writes this experimental novel in a poetic prose, or 'transrational writing', that evokes the work of the futurists who influenced Pound among others. Bardon's narrative approach is explained in an appendix titled: 'A Monograph concerning Hieroglyphs in Australian Art, and their perspectives'.⁹ Readers familiar with Geoff Bardon's *Papunya Tula* will recognise that James Bardon's monograph is influenced by the former's essay, 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art'. Although James Bardon is attempting to evoke the 'simultaneity' and 'four-dimensionality' of the desert hieroglyphs in linguistic form, it will be argued here that his narrative techniques owe as much to modernism as they do to an Aboriginal philosophy of place. Pound's new poetic, while incorporating prose, was also based on the notions of simultaneity and juxtaposition that characterise Bardon's text:

Energy, force, dynamism—these were to be key terms in Poundian poetic. Another was simultaneity, which is to say, the juxtaposition, within the same construct, whether visual or verbal, of different time frames.¹⁰

⁶ James Bardon travelled with Geoff Bardon through Central Australia in the 1980s (Lyn Jacobs, 'Inscribing Distance: Narrative Strategies in James Bardon's *Revolution by Night*', *Kunapipi*, Vol XV11, No 2, 1995, pp. 4–22, p. 6.)

⁷ Barry Hill, 'Mantric Maps: Lost and Found', *Voices*, Vol 11, No 2, Winter, 1992, pp 74–84, p. 83.

⁸ Daniel George Brock, *To the Desert With Sturt, A Diary of the 1844 Expedition*, Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Adelaide, 1975.

⁹ James Bardon, pp. 224–237.

¹⁰ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Movement*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 174.

In Bardon's novel, Sturt's expedition into the central desert is portrayed from a number of different perspectives in a futurist collage that lacks chronological structure.

James Bardon's poetic prose shakes the edifice of pre-conceived notions about Aboriginality and the pre-eminence of explorer narratives in the imagining of the Australian nation, but nevertheless follows the grammar of representation provided by the modernists' appropriation of the 'primitive' imagination into Western art in the early twentieth century. James Bardon's reworking of Sturt's explorer narrative is postcolonial in so far as it interrogates Sturt's construction of the interior in Eurocentric terms. Nevertheless, it will be argued that the conclusions made by the fictional Dutruc in the 'monograph', an appendix to the novel, concerning the perfectibility of language, are essentially modernist and antithetical to those of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Stephen Muecke, Eric Michaels and Mikhail Bakhtin. In a further contrast, Muecke's *Reading the Country* provides an alternative communication theory that avoids the hierarchising of Indigenous and non-Indigenous readings of country, placing each in their respective cultural context.¹¹ In addition to Muecke's theorising, and his call for a non-Oedipal narrative of nation in *No Road*, Michaels provides an alternative way of theorising Papunya Tula art where questions of authority are privileged over those of authenticity.¹²

Papunya Tula Art and the Fourth Dimension

The following discussion examines the role of the imaginary primitive in the conceptualisation of the fourth dimension, and the implications of this in James and Geoff Bardons' theorising of the work of Papunya Tula artists. The discussion of the 'fourth dimension' draws on Linda Henderson's in depth study on the subject, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, which is acknowledged as a source by Geoff Bardon in *Papunya Tula*.¹³ James and Geoff

¹¹ Stephen Muecke, Paddy Roe and Krim Benterak, *Reading the Country*, Fremantle Arts Press, 1984.

¹² Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen all the Way)*, Fremantle Arts Press, South Fremantle, 1997.

¹³ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983.

Bardon's use of the fourth dimension is then critiqued in the light of Muecke's theorising of indigenous art and communication theory in *Reading the Country*, and Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, along with Richards' critique of the modernist use of the 'primitive' in *Masks of Difference*.¹⁴ Michaels provides an alternative approach to appreciating the work of both the Papunya Tula artists and that of related artists at the nearby Yuendumu settlement—origin of the famous Yuendumu doors (presently housed in the South Australian Museum). A discussion of the visual prerogatives of the modernist artists and poets who described their work in terms of the fourth dimension leads to a discussion of Michaels' essay on the invention of Aboriginal TV and alternative ways of discussing traditional Indigenous cultures in contemporary Australia.¹⁵

Dutruc is the fictional author of the 'Monograph concerning Hieroglyphs in Australian Art, and their Perspectives' that appears as an appendix to *Revolution by Night*. Discussing the Cubists and Russian Cubo/Futurists and Suprematists, and foregrounding the work of Malevich and the visual language experiments of Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, Dutruc argues that the hieroglyphs of Indigenous art attain a four-dimensionality and simultaneity:

It is as if one were looking down upon the earth beneath one's feet and imagining the designed and patterned earth as an immense centrifuge. It is by this understanding that the paintings achieve four-dimensionality, that is to say, *the sense of space expanding in all directions at once*, simultaneously with the apprehension of the object at the one time from multiple, or seemingly limitless viewpoints. The painting in fact expands *as it is seen and because it is seen*.¹⁶

The first sentence of the above passage can be found in Geoff Bardon's essay, 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art', applied specifically to a reading of Clifford Possum's painting 'Man's love story', which is cited as a 'fine example of simultaneity and four dimensionality':

It is as though one were looking down at the ground beneath one's feet at this painting and imagining the designed and patterned earth as an immense centrifuge.¹⁷

In addition, Geoff Bardon states that: 'the same story could be arranged into endless variants of hieroglyph clusters', and James Bardon writes:¹⁸ 'the painters

¹⁴ David Richards, *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

¹⁵ Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994.

¹⁶ James Bardon, p. 226.

¹⁷ Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula*, p. 132.

can apparently change the same story into endless variants of hieroglyph-clusters'.¹⁹ In *Papunya Tula*, Geoff Bardon thanks James Bardon for his assistance with the editing of the text for publication, so it should come as no surprise that both brothers are locating Indigenous art in closely aligned theoretical contexts.

In their respective references to 'the fourth dimension', both critiques emphasise the spatial over the temporal in readings of Indigenous art. Geoff Bardon argues that 'time has become space',²⁰ and James Bardon writes, 'we could say that the conceptualisation at least graphically involves the simultaneous reading and seeing in space'.²¹ Geoff Bardon's 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art', having as a subheading 'The Fourth Dimension', elaborates on its applicability to Indigenous art:

The European visual tradition and its conventional understanding of perspective were called into question in the early twentieth century by Cubist painters such as Marcel Duchamp and Suprematist painters such as Kasimir Malevich. Like the Aboriginal artists before them, they esteemed the tactile quality of pictorial space along with the visual, and sought to perceive and depict a fourth dimension in their art. However, whereas with Marcel Duchamp it was the rotation of the painting which could induce the fourth-dimensional idea, with Aboriginal art it is walking around the painting or, in its original sand form, walking through the painting. This capacity to both encircle the painting and enter into it is at the heart of the dimensionality of Western Desert art. The painters seem to feel most at ease with their story when it is seen from all directions at once and seen 'through'.²²

Simultaneity is crucial to the concept of the fourth dimension, whereby the object is perceived from all possible viewpoints at once. The limited perspective of an individual observing an object at any particular point in time is overcome by the totality of the object thus perceived. While the subjectivity of individual perception is acknowledged, it is also overcome in this spatial representation, which endows the object with a transcendent four-dimensionality. While the Cubists had a more geometric conception of the fourth dimension, which was to be conveyed by moving around the painting, the Russian futurists argued that this was only 'the first step to the desired higher consciousness'.²³ This 'higher consciousness' might be closer to the transcendent quality in hieroglyphic art identified by Geoff Bardon, the seeing through the painting both physically and spiritually.²⁴

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ James Bardon, p. 225.

²⁰ Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula*, p. 134.

²¹ James Bardon, p. 230.

²² Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula*, p. 131.

²³ Henderson, p. 268.

²⁴ The fourth dimension has its origins in a branch of analytical geometry known as *N*-dimensional geometry that was used as a mathematical tool for the working out of specific problems. Toward

One of the most influential philosophers of the fourth dimension was Charles Hinton, whom Henderson labels 'the first true hyperspace philosopher'.²⁵ Hinton published two volumes on the fourth dimension: *A New Era of Thought* and *The Fourth Dimension*.²⁶ Central to Hinton's philosophy of the fourth dimension was Kant's 'unknowable noumena', or 'thing-in-itself'. While some argued that Kant's philosophy of perception had been undermined by the new geometries, his *a priori* theory of spatial and temporal perception being based on a Euclidean world view, Hinton 'credits Kant with identifying space as our means of cognizing the world'.²⁷ Hinton proposes that: 'If it is through spatial intuition that we apprehend the world, we can work specifically on that space sense and develop it in order to intuit new kinds of space.'²⁸ According to Hinton, our three-dimensional world-view is merely a phase in the evolution of the higher intuition of the fourth dimension.²⁹ It is here, in the mystical realm of the fourth dimension, that Kant's 'thing-in-itself' is revealed in its 'truthful' totality.³⁰ Like Blake's cave of the five senses, and Plato's cave of the philosophers, the three dimensional world is one of limited perception to be overcome by the mind of the artist or philosopher. In *Revolution by Night*, the fictional Jack Dutruc argues in his monograph that: 'the hieroglyph is the worded image or image as word, the very thing-in-itself after which so many painters in the Western tradition have sought'.³¹ Geoff Bardon also claims in his 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art' that: 'the hieroglyph is a gestural word, a thing in itself'.³²

the end of the nineteenth century geometers attempted to depict more concrete representations of the fourth dimension, known also as 'hyperspace': 'Obviously, it was far more difficult to apply the physically orientated geometrical reasoning of synthetic geometry to higher dimensions than to treat the fourth dimension as an algebraic variable of analytic geometry' (Henderson, p. 7). The impossibility of adequately depicting the fourth dimension visually made it ripe for exploitation by mystics and artists, some of who would claim an ability to intuit the higher realm through an elevated consciousness. By the end of the nineteenth century the fourth dimension had taken on 'philosophical, mystical and pseudoscientific' meanings, including H. G. Wells interpretation of time in *The Time Machine* (Henderson, p. 11).

²⁵ Henderson, p. 28.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ While the geometers of the nineteenth century sought to represent the fourth dimension visually, Hinton's philosophising marks a shift to an inner consciousness. Hinton states 'we can never see, for instance, four-dimensional pictures with our bodily eyes, but we can with our mental and inner eye' (in Henderson, p. 29).

³⁰ Henderson, p. 30.

³¹ James Bardon, p. 225.

³² Geoff Bardon, p. 136.

Hinton's writings influenced the Russian philosopher P.D. Ouspensky, who also wrote a book titled *The Fourth Dimension*, which was a seminal influence on Malevich, Kruchenykh and other Russian futurists.³³ Ouspensky argues that:

What we call perspective is in reality a distortion of visible objects which is produced by a badly constructed instrument—the eye ... Hinton's idea is precisely that before thinking of developing the capacity of seeing in the fourth dimension, we must learn to visualize objects as they would be seen from the fourth dimension, i.e., first of all, not in perspective, but from all sides at once, as they are known to our consciousness.³⁴

It was from Ouspensky that Kruchenykh derived his belief in the necessity of a new illogical language that would accommodate the revelations of the fourth dimension:

Kruchenykh explains that just as the new painters have discovered that 'incorrect perspective brings about a new, fourth dimension,' writers have found that 'incorrect structure of sentences brings about *motion and a new perception of the world*.'³⁵

James Bardon's use of poetic prose in *Revolution by Night*, and juxtaposition of past and present events, is similarly intended to make a new, revolutionary perception of the Australian continent, founded on the ontology of the desert hieroglyphs. Discussing the significance of the desire of the Russian 'avant-garde to expand human consciousness to a fourth dimension otherwise inaccessible and unbeknown' in his monograph, Jack Dutruc emphasises the vital importance of 'non-logical relationships and non-causality and simultaneity of apparently unrelated phenomena' in their experiments with visual writing.³⁶ These are all characteristics discovered by the modernists in 'primitive art', with which they sought to revitalise a perceived decadent Western tradition.

The Imaginary Primitive

Dutruc's monograph maintains that the hieroglyphs of the Western desert, which he sees as providing an insight into an originary universal consciousness, will reinvigorate a decadent Western culture, and form the basis for a unitary language that will restore the alienated vision of Eurocentric art in Australia. The fourth

³³ Henderson, pp 25–26.

³⁴ Ouspensky in Henderson, p. 268.

³⁵ Henderson, pp. 271–272.

³⁶ James Bardon, p. 233.

dimension has always been closely associated with ‘the primitive’ for modernist artists, and by finding this quality in Papunya Tula art, James and Geoff Bardon deploy the same modernist grammar of representation. To the modernist claims of universal humanism that inform Dutruc’s call for a new unitary language, Foster puts the question: ‘what do we behold here: a universality of form or an other rendered in our own image, an affinity with our own Imaginary primitive?’³⁷ In *Reading the Country*, Muecke deconstructs such universal notions and offers an alternate representation of Aboriginality that does not hierarchise any one cultural reading of landscape over another.

Apollinaire’s ‘La Peinture nouvelle’, cited by Henderson as the most detailed description of the fourth dimension in Cubist art theory, is a manifesto characterised by the modernist fascination with ‘the primitive’:

*it represents the immensity of space eternalizing itself in all directions at any given moment... the fourth dimension ... has come to stand for the aspirations and premonitions of the many young artists who contemplate Egyptian, negro, and oceanic sculptures, meditate on various scientific works, and live in anticipation of a sublime art.*³⁸

There is also to be found here a correspondence with Dutruc’s description of the fourth dimension as ‘*the sense of space expanding in all directions at once*’. Picasso’s art was influenced by the perspectives provided by African art, and he believed that ‘the primitive’ would be to modern art what antiquity had been to the Renaissance.³⁹ In *Masks of Difference* Richards writes: ‘both the savage and the classics offer a ground of origins and a repository of models upon which a tradition may be reformulated’.⁴⁰ It is this modernist discourse that shapes James and Geoff Bardon’s theorising of Papunya Tula art.

Henderson argues that one of the reasons Ouspensky’s philosophy was so adaptable to the Russian avant-garde was the predominance of ‘primitivism in painting (and in poetry) which looked to native Russian folk art as well as to the art of children because of its spontaneous, intuitive quality’.⁴¹ Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* was an influential text informing the moderns’ fascination with ‘the

³⁷ Hal Foster, ‘The “Primitive” Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks’ in *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1985, pp 181–211, p. 186.

³⁸ Apollinaire in Henderson, p. 75.

³⁹ Foster, p. 184.

⁴⁰ Richards, p. 203.

⁴¹ Henderson, p. 269.

primitive', and Richards traces its influence on Eliot and Yeats in *Masks of Difference*. Eliot argued that 'the mystical mentality ... plays a much greater part in the daily life of the savage than in that of the civilized man'.⁴² This mentality is accessed in modernity primarily through the power of the poet's imagination, that 'unique individual in modernity who still retains the primitive spirit ...'⁴³

Yeats located the primal imagination in folk culture, positing 'the existence of an oral tradition which preserves enshrined a state of mind unchanged since "the beginning of time"'.⁴⁴ Frazer's model for *The Golden Bough* was an evolutionary one that sought to demonstrate the extent to which so-called civilised man had freed himself from the yoke of magic and superstition. Yeats and Eliot, in contrast, dwelt upon the affinities between the irrationality and illogicality of 'the primitive' and the irrationality that persists in modern Western culture. This counter-reading of Frazer thereby inverted his evolutionary model.⁴⁵ In similar fashion, James and Geoff Bardon can be seen to invert the all too familiar primitive/civilised binary in the Australian context.

The Russian Cubo-Futurists aimed to mine 'primitive art' for access to a universal consciousness uncontaminated by Western logic that would invest their own work with a four-dimensionality:

The Cubo-Futurists' exploration of primitive and child art was motivated by their desire to get at the human brain as a piece of the universe, untouched by learned logic ...⁴⁶

These artists believed that 'primitive art' was a 'more perfect' revelation of the individual artist, human nature itself and even a 'divine' principle.⁴⁷ There are parallels to be found in the Bardons' theory that the Indigenous hieroglyphs represent the survival of a universal 'archaic consciousness' or 'primal state' of being in nature. Geoff Bardon describes the hieroglyphs as: 'an archetypal expression of human consciousness, the coming together of image and word in unsurpassed harmony. The return of the gods, perhaps'.⁴⁸ And according to Jack Dutruc in *Revolution by Night*: 'the hieroglyphs are a survival of a consciousness we

⁴² Eliot in Richards, p. 204.

⁴³ Richards, p. 205.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Charlotte Douglass, *Swans of Other Worlds, Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1980, p. 28.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Geoff Bardon, *Papunya Tula*, p. 133.

seem to have lost, and by our cultural traditions, seem forever to have been seeking to regain.⁴⁹

In ‘The “Primitive” Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks’, Hal Foster argues that the evocation of a universal human consciousness is problematic, on the grounds that:

the analogy implies that the modern and the tribal, like the Renaissance and antiquity, are affined in the search for ‘fundamentals’ ... this position tends to cast the primitive as primal and to elide the different ways in which the fundamental is thought.⁵⁰

This analogy results in the disavowal of difference and the subordination of the Other to the privileged history of the evolution of a Western consciousness. Colonialism and the prerogatives of the modernist enlightenment project remain unchallenged: the ‘primitive’ is rendered invisible and silent. In *Reading the Country* Muecke warns that ‘the search for origins is futile’, and he goes on to deconstruct the notion of universal man, having already been put to death by Foucault:⁵¹

Anthropology contributed to the construction of this universal entity, Man, in a paradoxical manner: anthropology denounces ethnocentrism in its quest of the universal nature of man by saying that all men are equal. But at the same time, it can only be a *European* science (therefore ethnocentric) because of the conditions of its birth, and it constructs the face of universal man by repeatedly comparing European man’s image to that of ‘the Others’—the tribal or pre-industrial peoples whose societies are seen symbolically as the unconscious counterpart to modern western man’s consciousness of himself as labouring, investigating, suffering being—one who has lost ‘nature’ and innocence with the rise of industrialization.⁵²

Reading the Country takes a more grounded approach to theorising and framing Indigenous ways of seeing. Muecke proposes that the country will be read in different ways according to the location and motivation of one’s utterance in culture:

We have learnt that rather than any one of them being absolutely right, there is a range of purposes, economic or otherwise, to which each reading offers up its services ... Each reading thus produces a partial knowledge of the country, and using the reading is the only way to gain access to that knowledge; the country does not offer up the fullness of its meaning to the receptive individual as some romantics and spiritualists would have us believe.⁵³

⁴⁹ James Bardon, p. 228.

⁵⁰ Foster, p. 185.

⁵¹ Muecke et al., *Reading the Country*, p. 71.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 67.

Muecke's theorising distances itself from the kind of mysticism and romanticism associated with the fourth dimension. In the absence of an imposed cultural hierarchy, Paddy Roe's oral histories and hieroglyphs are allowed to sit side-by-side with the horizons of Krim Benterrak's landscape paintings as a discourse among other discourses with currency in contemporary Australia.⁵⁴

Dutruc's quest for origins and an idealistic universal synthesis of human expression lead him to reiterate the anthropological lamentations of a fall from nature, as paraphrased by Muecke above, who finds in the hieroglyphs:

a kind of innocence ... a way of seeing and being without duplicity, a kind of moral esteem in what is represented so much at odds with what has been found lacking in our sequential word scripts ...⁵⁵

The sign of a possibly impending Western cultural decadence, it is claimed, is the divorce between the word and the visual nature of that which it seeks to represent, Kant's 'the thing-in-itself':

There is a continuing and increasing disjunction between written language and sight. One might well ask whether our culture wishes to see any more, or whether we are all moving inwards and no longer seek after any comprehension of a seen physical world. We need an idiomatic eye, one which temporizes words through a spatial naming by form.⁵⁶

These are the main grounds upon which James Bardon has Dutruc find our present day language in an 'incidental, disintegrating and psychotic state'.⁵⁷

Attempts by the futurists and cubists to restore the word to the realm of the visual, Dutruc argues, fall short of the technical sophistication of the hieroglyphs of the Western desert:

An entire Continental perception, I will have sought to show, 40 000 years of tradition, intersects with, superintends and subsumes the visual tradition of western civilisation as defined by its priorities in the twentieth century.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Although Paddy Roe's knowledge of his country is more profound than that of the Parisian born Benterrak, the latter's aesthetic vision is nevertheless a valid one, in so far as it is an alternate cultural reading of the one landscape which has emerged from a particular social and historical determination.

⁵⁵ James Bardon, p. 228.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 234.

It subsumes the Western tradition because the futurists failed to achieve their goal of creating a truly visual language, their abstract forms not being ‘words animated by shapes, but ultimately, only shaping or shapes animated by words’:

Malevich knew very well what he was after but he did not have, nor could he seem to have, the extraordinary conjunction of word and image which is the hieroglyphs ...⁵⁹

For Dutruc, the hieroglyphs offer an insight into ‘the very beginnings of human self-expression’, a time of unity and harmony before the fall of the written word. He also argues that their unique conjunction of word and image will also pave the way forward for a ‘great new synthesis of human expression’.⁶⁰ This may be read as a return of the futurists’ desire for a poetic language equipped to convey the truths of the fourth dimension.

Bardon has Dutruc acknowledge that his idealistic position on language ‘is hardly new’,⁶¹ and Richards argues in *Masks of Difference* that ‘since Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, language has been used as an ‘index of the degree to which nature is corrupted by the false sophistication of culture’’.⁶² In *Reading the Country* Muecke deconstructs Rousseau’s essay as a piece of imperialist myth-making:

this sort of language study represents a flight away from problems associated with how people can write and talk in the present; how to write Aboriginal history, for instance, and how best to create Aboriginal literature.⁶³

Muecke’s communication theory tends to play down the difference between Western and Indigenous sign systems, arguing that Paddy Roe’s sand hieroglyphs are in themselves merely another form of writing. This concern with the present and the writing of Aboriginal history makes Muecke’s theorising of language consistent with that of Bakhtin, to which this chapter will now turn.

Chronotopes and Heteroglossia

Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism share with Muecke’s communication theory a concern for the social and political context in which

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 226.

⁶² Richards, p. 230.

languages live and breed. There is no room for universals, as all languages offer partial insights into reality, or construct partial truths. Just as Muecke sees each reading of the country (non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike) as producing 'a partial knowledge', Bakhtin hypothesises:

languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-levelled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror.⁶⁴

The phrase 'languages of heteroglossia' does not so much signify foreign languages as the stratification of literary language into genres and different classes of speech. Many layers of social discourse roam the public squares and city streets: the talk of lawyers; professionals; academics; the working-classes and the criminal underground. These are 'all languages of heteroglossia ... specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views'.⁶⁵ Echoing Bakhtin, Muecke argues in *No Road*:

A language like English is like a group of textual suburbs. Each suburb has its character, some are systematic: red-brick houses on a grid of small streets. Some texts have the imperial sweep of the avenue, some the paranoia of cul-de-sacs with groups of houses like a circle. In each suburb the language is like the architecture, like the spaces it vibrates in. Then at another level, there are doctors who seem to occupy a suburb of language with their medical talk. It has its limits, its own truths are kept under strict control, access is denied at professional checkpoints. It is the same for professional golfers, or any other group. These linguistic suburban spaces interconnect like sites on the internet. There is no overall system, no capacity for infinite generation. We can sometimes find ourselves in a space where a word has never been used before, where that is just the right word to use in that time and place. Sometimes we travel to the edge of the city and the words run out at the same time as the houses. Then we might find ourselves in a culture and a community where words might have a completely different purpose to the one we imagine they have: the landscape changes colour, we begin to lose our grip.⁶⁶

For Bakhtin, the novel is the ideal art form to give voice to this heteroglot world, or more properly, the aesthetic representations of those voices, as opposed to what he perceives as the more monologic stylistics of poetry.

⁶³ Muecke et al., *Reading the Country*, p. 71.

⁶⁴ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.), University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp. 259–422, p. 414.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 292.

⁶⁶ Muecke, *No Road*, p. 22.

Bakhtin attacks Khlebnikov and the futurists' experiments with a poetic, visual language of the 'gods' as essentially an elitist enterprise, antithetical to the heteroglossia of the novel:⁶⁷

If the art of poetry, as a utopian philosophy of genres, gives rise to the conception of a purely poetic, extrahistorical language, a language far removed from the petty rounds of everyday life, a language of the gods—then it must be said that the art of prose is close to a conception of languages as historically concrete and living things. The prose art presumes a deliberate feeling for the historical and social concreteness of living discourse, as well as its relativity, a feeling for its participation in historical becoming and in social struggle; it deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents; prose art finds discourse in this state and subjects it to the dynamic-unity of its own style.⁶⁸

Bakhtin emphasises the 'essential *human* character' of language and the extent to which it is culture-bound, existing in a world of diverse languages and cultures: 'language, no longer conceived as a sacrosanct and solitary embodiment of meaning and truth, becomes merely one of many possible ways to hypothesize meaning'.⁶⁹

Muecke's communication theory shares with Bakhtin a strong awareness of the social struggle and historical becoming of living discourse, concerned as it is with the politics of writing Aboriginal history and creating a contemporary Aboriginal literature, and the manner in which people write and talk in the present. Discussing the origins of the Papunya Tula movement in *Lie of the Land*, Carter states that Geoff Bardon's use of the fourth dimension and simultaneity to describe the paintings 'may be misleading', emphasising instead its historical grounding:⁷⁰

⁶⁷ 'It is noteworthy that the poet, should he not accept the given literary language, will sooner resort to the artificial creation of a new language specifically for poetry than he will to the exploitation of actual available social dialects. Social languages are filled with specific objects, typical, socially localized and limited, while the artificially created language of poetry must be a directly intentional language, unitary and singular. Thus, when Russian prose writers at the beginning of the twentieth century began to show a profound interest in dialects and skaz, the Symbolists (Bal'mont, V. Ivanov) and later the Futurists dreamed of creating a special "language of poetry," and even made experiments directed toward creating such a language (those of V. Khlebnikov)' (Bakhtin, p. 288).

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, p. 331. One might argue, however, that the verse of working-class poets such as Charles Bukowski and Geoff Goodfellow is warm with social struggle, and accommodates the many languages of the pubs and streets.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, p. 370.

⁷⁰ Carter's 1991 review of *Revolution by Night* is a positive one, but makes a similar claim: 'in an Appendix to his book Bardon takes up his brother's suggestion that Papunya-Tula painting can be linked aesthetically and spiritually to the work of such Modernist masters as Malevich. I think he is greatly mistaken in this, not least because of what he himself tells us about the nature of sand art' (Paul Carter, 'A Sea Not to be Seen' in *Overland*, No. 125, 1991, pp. 83–85).

the simultaneities cultivated by the Orphists, no less than the Cubists, the Futurists and Suprematists, presupposed what Gibson calls the aperture perspective of Western linear logic. They presented themselves as a poetic trick, an historically transcendent *trompe-l'oeil*. By contrast, Bardón's account of the Papunya-Tula movement's beginnings suggests the opposite: that in those weeks and months, the artists and their teacher felt themselves reinserted into history.⁷¹

Carter's analysis of the Papunya Tula movement focuses on how it emerged in the third space of cross-cultural contact, and the extent to which it subverted the monologic assimilationist architecture in which it took place—this will be discussed in more detail in the final segment of the chapter.

Whereas Malevich's conceptualisation of space in his Suprematist works before the 1920s is Newtonian, Bakhtin's theory of language is inspired by Einstein's theory of relativity. Bakhtin applies Einstein's theory that space and time are relative to one another, and that the same event in the universe is perceived differently, according to one's velocity and position in space, to a philosophy of language. Inspired by Einstein's revolutionary model of space and time, Bakhtin emphasises the unique event of each individual's experience in language. Holquist sums up Bakhtin's application of relativity theory to language in the following passage:

What is cognitive time/space? It is the arena in which all perception unfolds. Dialogism, like relativity, takes it for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else: dialogism's master assumption is that there is no figure without a ground. The mind is structured so that the world is always perceived according to this contrast. More specifically, what sets a figure off from its dialogizing background is the opposition between a time and a space that one consciousness uses to model its own limits (the I-for-myself) and the quite different temporal and spatial categories employed by the same consciousness to model the limits of other persons and things (the not-I-in me)—and (this is crucial) vice versa.⁷²

Part of the reason the fourth dimension fell out of favour in art circles was the popularising of Einstein's theory of relativity in the 1920s. Malevich's contemporary, Lissitzky, who had originally been influenced by the former's theorising of the fourth dimension, undertook mathematical studies of relativity theory that led him to conclude the Futurists had only gained a most superficial and flexible scientific understanding of the fourth dimension.⁷³ By 1929 the director Eisenstein was treating the fourth dimension as something of a joke in his essay on

⁷¹ Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, Faber & Faber, London, 1996, pp. 355–356.

⁷² Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p. 21.

⁷³ Henderson, p. 296.

'The Filmic Fourth Dimension'.⁷⁴ Without dwelling on the mathematics of Relativity Theory, it is important to emphasise the different approaches between the Futurists and Bakhtin. Whereas the Futurists sought to overcome the limitations of individual, subjective perception by perceiving the 'thing-in-itself' in its 'truthful state' in the fourth dimension, Bakhtin's theorising begins on the premise that the 'thing-in-itself' is unattainable, emphasising what is always a subjective and historically circumscribed entry into language and art.

Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope' considers ways in which time and space have been represented in the writing of novels:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space).⁷⁵

The chronotope in literature has changed, he argues, through different cultural epochs that treat the relationships between space and time differently according to their social and political organisation. Bakhtin identifies the Rabelaisian chronotope, for example, as being inherently folkloric and shaped by a society with a closer relationship to the earth and the changing of the seasons:

The time is collective, that is, it is differentiated and measured only by the events of collective life; everything that exists in this time exists solely for the collective. The progression of events in an individual life has not yet been isolated (the interior time of an individual life does not yet exist ...)⁷⁶

Bakhtin suggests that as life evolved around the seasons: 'time here is sunk deeply in the earth, implanted in it and ripening in it.' Cyclical time is 'profoundly spatial and concrete. It is not separated from the earth or from nature'.⁷⁷ One might conjecture such a chronotope shares something in common with that of traditional Indigenous art.

The point of this discussion of time and space in both *Revolution by Night* and the hieroglyphs of Indigenous art is that they are culturally relative:

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 298.

⁷⁵ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84–258, p. 84.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 208.

whatever these meanings turn out to be, in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible for us (a hieroglyph, a mathematical formula, a verbal or linguistic expression, a sketch, etc). Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope.⁷⁸

Even the hieroglyphs are subject to this organisation of space and time in society. Ways in which space and time are organised differently in Papunya Tula art and the Australian landscape tradition are not necessarily signs of cultural decadence. Rather, they reflect the differing social contexts of artistic production.

In James Bardon's novel, Dutruc posits that 'imagery acts below the level of consciousness and it is at this level of consciousness that the concept of the hieroglyph must be considered'.⁷⁹ He also states that the hieroglyphs are akin to a 'primal state in which mankind makes feelings and consciousness apparent in the observable world'.⁸⁰ Bakhtin and Muecke, on the other hand, are concerned with the extent to which the hieroglyph is a sign signifying in a particular cultural matrix. Nietzsche, too, argues that language is culturally relative, and that even our original perception of the world is based upon metaphor. According to Nietzsche, 'man' in his hasty quest for truth oft 'forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to be things in themselves'.⁸¹ Language has arisen out of a need for human beings to communicate in order to survive socially, and is but a rudimentary system of signs that operates at a superficial level:

Owing to the nature of *animal consciousness*, the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface and sign-world, a world that is made common and meaner; whatever becomes conscious *becomes* by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization'.⁸²

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 258.

⁷⁹ James Bardon, p. 226.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 227.

⁸¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' in D. Breazeale (ed. & trans.) *Philosophy of Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, Harvester Press, 1979, p. 86. Nietzsche also writes:

The 'thing in itself' (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for. This creator only designates the relations of things to men, and for expressing these relations he lays hold of the boldest metaphors. To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor ... (p. 82).

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 355.

Nietzsche is not referring here only to written language, but any sign system, be it audible or in the form of hieroglyphs. The 'thing-in-itself' is unattainable, 'something not in the least worth striving for'.⁸³

Relations between text and image are at the forefront of Muecke's theorising in *Reading the Country*, reflecting the way the text is structured, with transcriptions of Paddy Roe's oral history set side-by-side with Krim Benterrak's paintings and Muecke's photographs. All of these elements are brought under the umbrella of Muecke's musings on cultural theory. As such, it is a text concerned with the relationships between text and image not only in theory but also in practice. In a passage that clarifies both Muecke's speaking position and the intentions of his book, he discusses the relationship between Paddy Roe's words and the images accompanying the text:

This word-image relation has nothing mystical about it because both words and images are material, material which can be formed into texts. 'Text' is the word which I can use to describe both images and words after they have been worked upon and formed into some sort of shape.⁸⁴

Rather than mystifying Paddy Roe's Indigenous perspective, Muecke is intent on presenting each reading of the country as culturally relative.

Muecke maintains that 'someone who talks the discourse of the Dreaming deserves to be treated in the same way as a novelist or a poet, but one who comes from a particular culture.'⁸⁵ While in James Bardon's text the representational potential of the hieroglyphs are idealised in the concept of the fourth dimension, Muecke's communication theory treats them as another form of writing:

Paddy Roe's writing is an abstract signifying system of lines, dots, circles and so on. His culture has insignia which represent everything of importance to it: clans, families, movements of people, classical myths and recent events, animals, seasons, plant life and the layout of the country. Do we fail to call it writing because it is kept from white people or because it is erased and redrawn during the telling of stories? Must a trace endure to qualify as writing?⁸⁶

Muecke is counteracting claims that Indigenous culture is 'illiterate', asserting that it should be considered as 'analphabete' in the French sense, illiterate in one particular Western system of writing. Muecke goes on to argue that speech is not

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸⁴ Muecke et al., *Reading the Country*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 63.

necessarily a purer form of communication than the written word: 'speech does not have the special privilege over writing of being able to magically transfer thought from one mind to another's. We are always using some medium to make some trace ...'⁸⁷ Speech, the written word and hieroglyphs are all cultural media of communication, as argued by Nietzsche and Bakhtin.

The quest to reinvigorate a decadent Western tradition with the discovery of 'Other' cultures, to which James Bardon has Dutruc subscribe, is also Orientalist. Said identifies the Romantic quest to revitalise European intellectual traditions with Asian culture in *Orientalism*:

the regeneration of Europe by Asia ... was a very influential idea ... anyone who, like Schlegel or Franz Bopp, mastered an Oriental language was a spiritual hero, a knight-errant bringing back to Europe a sense of the holy mission it had now lost.⁸⁸

There is something about the 'knight errant' in Dutruc's depiction of the hieroglyphs as 'trophies of the Gods, so that we might become more perfect yet'.⁸⁹ In addition, the narrative strategy of *Revolution by Night* owes as much to the modernists' affinity with 'our own imaginary primitive' as it does to the hieroglyphs of the Western desert. Treating the hieroglyphs of the Papunya Tula art as an example of a 'continental perception' is also Orientalist in the extent to which it denies the presence and cultural practices of other Indigenous communities in a politics of the present. Birch argues in his essay, 'Nothing has Changed: The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture' that:

Europeans continue to 'make' and 'unmake' indigenous people. When we attempt to claim rights to land, or to the bodies of our ancestors, we are separated from an 'ancient past'. Steve Mickler believes that, as the appreciation (and possession) of Aboriginal art has increased, so too has 'the intensity of the denigration of practised or 'lived' Aboriginal culture'.⁹⁰

Dutruc's privileging of one aspect of 'traditional' Indigenous culture as a continental perception is metonymic, and can be seen to deny the vitality of coastal or urban Indigenous cultures around Australia. Muecke, on the other hand, shows an appreciation of how place, taking the example of Roebuck Plains, is constructed differently by people of different cultural backgrounds:

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p. 115.

⁸⁹ James Bardon, p. 229.

⁹⁰ Tony Birch, 'The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture', *Meanjin*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1992, pp. 229–246, p. 238.

the meanings of the Plains are constructed in language, that is, in dialogues which have a certain purpose or direction based on the sorts of signs, appropriate to their knowledge, which different people see in the country.⁹¹

Whereas James Bardon's text can be seen to invert the traditional civilised/primitive evolutionary hierarchy, Muecke steps out of the binary altogether, evidencing the extent to which all readings of country are cultural constructs.

Cultural Horizons

Geoff Bardon argues that the alienation of Western culture manifests itself in the persistence of the horizon in non-Indigenous landscape painting, and this is echoed by Dutruc in *Revolution by Night*:

a horizon may be a metaphor, in our tradition, for a division between earth and sky, or for the boundedness of the earth, and the apparent emotional need in the beholder to keep both earth and sky in view; and it refers also to absolutist values themselves of whatever kind in the European tradition. Although perspective does not inhabit the same ideology, it articulates man himself in the environment and gives a visual metaphor for the apparent need he has felt, most famously since the Renaissance, to separate himself from the earth.⁹²

Dutruc's monograph concludes that alienation from the land, which results in a failure to see the land as it really is, gives rise to an aesthetic failure in non-Indigenous art. Where some artists have attempted to incorporate hieroglyphs into their landscape paintings, like the Futurists, they have fallen short of the cultural benchmark set by the Papunya Tula artists:

The difficulty that arises ... when an immigrant people such as the Europeans in Australia attempt to define and characterise their landscape, is that the artistic conventions of the age deny the need or the wish to see what apparently exists. The feeble or psychologically impaired attempts in Australian art to find symbolic and therefore hieroglyphic equivalences are perhaps a measure, and a worrying one, of an apparent dissolution of our culture, and of our collective mind.⁹³

In 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art' Geoff Bardon identifies John Olsen and Fred Williams as artists who have followed on from the Streeton-Roberts school of

⁹¹ Muecke et al., p. 12.

⁹² James Bardon, p. 236. In 'Theories of Papunya Tula Art' Geoff Bardon writes: 'In the European painting tradition the horizon may be a metaphor for a division between earth and sky, or for the boundedness of the earth' (*Papunya Tula*, p. 134).

⁹³ James Bardon, p. 235.

impressionism in the search 'for an emotionally valid approach to the country's landscape'. While acknowledging Williams' brilliance, Geoff Bardon makes note of his conceptual inability to conceive of the landscape without a horizon:

The paintings of John Olsen and Fred Williams show where the search has led. These two artists have tended to use—sometimes as quotations, sometimes as borrowed conventions—the Western Desert iconography of hieroglyph and form. But one senses continually the tenuousness of their gaze. In the absence of the genre story of the Heidelberg tradition, there is a strain in these artists' way of looking at the landscape.⁹⁴

The absence or presence of a horizon indeed marks a significant difference in aesthetic approaches to representing the landscape, and this very difficulty of coming to terms with the Australian landscape in a predominantly European cultural matrix is a characteristically postcolonial one. However, the postcolonial paradox of the Australian artist coming to terms with a European cultural tradition is no less emotionally valid for its sense of alienation. Far from being aesthetically 'feeble', as James Bardon has Dutruc argue, it is a marker of the postcolonial condition that has become a norm for exiled writers and artists living in the twentieth century, and a point of departure for cultural theorists such as Bhabha and Said. A different approach to art and art theory is taken in *Reading the Country*, where Benterrak's use of the horizon complements Paddy Roe's narrative.

In place of an anxiety about a cultural misinterpretation of the landscape there is the acknowledgment of one's speaking position within a particular cultural context:

in making a book about Paddy Roe's country there is no ultimate and unified authority. First there is the existing Aboriginal account and then there is the desire of a man to speak that story. Similarly, there is no landscape authority: there is a tradition of Australian landscape painting and Krim's desire to paint.⁹⁵

A dialogue is set up in the text between the different narratives, which generates the possibility of new readings and commentaries, as opposed to the hierarchising of one representation of the land over another. In one of Krim's paintings, not one but two horizons are used to speak back to the Australian tradition of landscape painting and play with notions of perspective. Muecke poses the question: 'from what perspective are we now viewing it?'⁹⁶ There is no expectation that Krim will see the country, or read it, as Paddy Roe does, for:

⁹⁴ Geoff Bardon, p. 134.

⁹⁵ Muecke et al., *Reading the Country*, p. 19.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 183.

not even the wildest European imagination could produce Paddy Roe's reading of the country: the words are just not there. It makes more sense, therefore, to see the readings in terms of their cultural and historical determinations ...⁹⁷

An appreciation of the horizon in landscape painting is not an endpoint in cultural evolution. Rather, it is a beginning in our own cultural reassessment of reading the country in the light of other ways of seeing. For the cultural theorist, the use of a horizon, or lack of one, gives form to the landscape from a particular cultural perspective, rather than being the sign of cultural decadence.

Revolution by Night: A Victory Over the Sun

In arguing that 'to cut the very idea of a horizon out of the human eye is not so extravagant as might appear', Dutruc echoes Malevich's Suprematist call in *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism* to abandon all horizons in art:⁹⁸

I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and got out of the circle of objects, the horizon ring that has imprisoned the artist and the forms of nature ...

I have overcome the impossible and made gulfs with my breath.

You are caught in the nets of the horizon, like a fish!⁹⁹

In his Suprematist works, which followed Ouspensky's attack on Futurist and Cubist art for the 'falsification' of the fourth dimension in his second edition of *The Fourth Dimension* published in 1914, Malevich abandoned three dimensional objects altogether in his experiments with geometrical forms.¹⁰⁰ These designs originated out of the set designs for the absurdist opera *Victory Over the Sun*, written by Kruchenykh, which was funded by the Union of Youth Theatre Company along with Mayakovsky's play *Vladimire Mayakovsky*.

There are obvious affiliations between the title of Kruchenykh's opera and that of Bardon's novel, and these extend to their respective narrative strategies, shared also with Mayakovsky's work:

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹⁸ James Bardon, p. 237.

⁹⁹ Malevich in Perloff, p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson, p. 278.

Although Kruchenykh's and Mayakovsky's literary styles differ, both place the emphasis of the work on imagery and the poetic treatment of language, rather than on the development of a narrative or dramatic structure.¹⁰¹

In both *Revolution by Night* and *Victory Over the Sun* a common theme is that of a revolution in the way in which language and culture function, an overthrow of Western reason, symbolised by Apollo:

The man-versus-sun image is archetypal of the futurist desire to transcend the merely present and visible. 'The sun of cheap appearances' as Matiushun called it, is both the creator and symbol of visibility, and hence of things, of the illusion of reality; it is Apollo, the god of rationality and clarity, the light of logic, and hence the arch-enemy of all singers of the future.¹⁰²

Apollo also symbolises the cultural violence of Western reason over Indigenous cultures, as Richards theorises in his deconstruction of Titian's 'The Flaying of Marsyas', discussed in Chapter One.

Foster argues that the modernists' use of the primitive, in particular Picasso's African masks, appropriates African forms into Western art while denying the violence of the colonial situation in which these forms were originally extracted. *Revolution by Night*, however, is a title intrinsically associated with the violence of colonialism, and can be seen to symbolise the overthrow of, or rebellion against, Apollo's knife of European reason in 'The Flaying of Marsyas'. During the Renaissance the Satyr came to represent the primitive nature of New World 'savages':

the revived satyr returned to fulfil a unique role as the exemplary figure of speculations concerning historical and cultural evolution and the relationship of contemporary civilisation to the savage, wild or animal world which it constructed as its original state.¹⁰³

Reading 'The Flaying of Marsyas' in the colonial context, Apollo comes to symbolise the triumph and domination of European power and knowledge over the primitive Other, that is paradoxically 'unmade' by Apollo's knife in order to be known. As discussed in Chapter One, Voss's gift of a knife to Jackie symbolises his gift of a new consciousness, the knives of thought of objective Western reasoning.

¹⁰¹ Douglass, p. 41.

¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁰³ Richards, p. 25.

Aboriginal TV and the Visual Prerogatives of the Twentieth Century

The futurists' experiments with a visual language were not merely driven by a desire to liberate themselves from a repressive sequential word script. More significantly, they were an aesthetic response to the emergence of photography and the moving images of the cinema. Apollinaire's short prose piece 'The New Spirit and the Poets' (1917) reveals the importance of these and other technologies that fuelled the quest for both simultaneity and a visual language. These technologies gave a sense of definitive break from the past and provided a catalyst for the disruption of traditional aesthetic forms: 'up to now the literary field has been kept within narrow limits. One wrote in prose or one wrote in verse'.¹⁰⁴ Apollinaire goes on to predict the refinement of the art of photography and cinema into an idealised, visual poetic:

It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art par excellence, the cinema, is a book of pictures, the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of films. These last will become more perceptive, and one can predict the day when, the photograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown ... One should not be astonished if ... they set themselves to preparing this new art (vaster than the plain art of words) in which, like conductors of an orchestra of unbelievable scope, they will have at their disposition the entire world, its noises and its appearances, the thought and language of man, song, dance, all the arts and all the artifices ... with which to compose the visible and unfolded book of the future.¹⁰⁵

Apollinaire's quest for a new, revolutionary language to break the bounds of the written word adumbrates that of Dutruc in *Revolution by Night*, only the former hopes to found a new language on the visual nature of the cinema, while the latter on the visual prerogatives of the desert hieroglyphs.

Questions of time and space, and notions of simultaneity, were brought to the fore by the development of the railways, and new communication technologies such as the telephone and the wireless. Distances and time were being perceived differently, and the wireless provided a sense of simultaneity as events in one part

¹⁰⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, Roger Shattuck (ed. & trans.), New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York, 1971, p. 227.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, p. 228.

of the world were communicated instantaneously to another. One could be in England and talking to someone on ‘the continent’ at the same time:

simultaneity: connected to construction of railways, cars, aeroplanes, cinema, radio, telephone—distance was shrinking, it was possible to be in two places at once.¹⁰⁶

Blaise Cendrars evokes the new sense of cultural simultaneity and changing perceptions of space and time destabilised by the development of the modern metropolis in his prose poem ‘Profound Today’ (1917):

Everything changes proportion, angle, appearance. Everything moves away, comes closer, mounts up, fails, laughs, states its position, and is enraged. Products from the five parts of the world show up in the same dish, on the same dress.¹⁰⁷

Revisiting the social and cultural context of the Futurists’ experiments with a visual language, and their use of terminology such as simultaneity and the fourth dimension, one is forced to query James Bardon’s lament over Western culture’s dependence on the logos of the word. In fact, their experiments with language were a response to the new visual and technological priorities of the twentieth century: the revolutionary new language of cinema and film.

In *Bad Aboriginal Art* Michaels provides examples of how these visual technologies have been re-invented by traditional indigenous communities, in particular the Warlpiri living at Yuendumu. Michaels’ ethnographic approach avoids simplistic binaries between Western and Indigenous cultural modes of production, and he warns against positing the latter as somehow being ‘originary’:

It matters not whether the value-loading is Rousseauesque romanticism, or native advancement, or simple garden variety racism. The point is that very few people believe what anthropology teaches: that indigenous, small-scale traditional societies are not earlier (or degenerate) versions of our own. They are rather differing solutions to historical circumstances and environmental particulars that testify to the breadth of human intellectual creativity and its capacity for symbolization.¹⁰⁸

Placing questions of authority over those of authenticity, Michaels argues: ‘it would be better to shift ontologies, by problematizing the very term “originality” and denying that any appeals to this category can be legitimated’.¹⁰⁹ In his essay ‘For a cultural Future: Francis Jupurrula Makes TV at Yuendumu’, Michaels describes the Warlpiri film-maker, Juppurrula, as ‘inventing Aboriginal television’. This concept

¹⁰⁶ Perloff, pp. 13–14.

¹⁰⁷ Blaise Cendrars, *Selected Writings of Blaise Cendrars*, Walter Albert (ed. & trans.), New Directions Publishing Corporation, New York, 1966, p. 229.

¹⁰⁸ Michaels, p. 82.

of ‘inventing’ challenges existing stereotypes about Aborigines and technology, along with standard ways of thinking about how cultures, particularly traditional ones, work. His way of discussing Indigenous culture preserves ‘difference’ and foregrounds the complexity of cross-cultural readings—whether it be Warlpiri viewers watching *Dallas*, or non-Indigenous people watching Aboriginal TV.

In deconstructing the oral culture/primitive binary, Michaels makes the salient point that ‘this very deeply rooted conceptualization is now being challenged as we move from writing to electronic coding as the central symbolization of our age’.¹¹⁰ Michaels acknowledges the extent to which the logos of the word, and the authority of written texts, has been challenged from within Western culture by the kinds of visual technologies that influenced the work of the modernist artists discussed above. Citing observations made by intellectuals in the vein of ‘Ong, Innis, or even Levi-Strauss’ that there exist ‘special equivalencies between oral and electronic society’, Michaels goes on to argue:¹¹¹

We may now question whether written texts are in fact so authoritative as we have been used to considering them. But we raise this question at a time when another inscription system competes for centrality in our information processing and imaginative symbolizing: electronics. It seems particularly interesting that this new inscription process is proving more accessible, and perhaps less culturally subversive, to people in those remaining enclaves of oral tradition.¹¹²

These equivalences, or points of convergence between different cultures, evoke Deleuze and Guattari’s theorising of culture as being rhizomic, and their emphasis on synchronicity, as opposed to the linear (tree) model applied by James and Geoff Bardon.

In light of the above, independently evolved cultures may not be so incommensurable as the metaphor of the glass church in *Oscar and Lucinda* suggests. Electronic communication systems, and glass, are merely tools to be put to use in the ongoing task of producing cultural representations characterised by the hybrid. Notions of cultural purity, such as those espoused by Herbert in *Poor Fellow My Country*, in his obsession with distinguishing between the ‘Yellow Feller’ and traditional Indigenous people, are rendered irrelevant:¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 83.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 82.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 95.

¹¹³ Michaels writes: ‘They distinguish themselves from more Europeanized Aborigines not by racist notions such as “half-caste” or “yeller-feller” but by concerns of law: “Those people lost

From this perspective, it would seem difficult to see in the introduction of imported video and television programs the destruction of Aboriginal culture. Such a claim can only be made in ignorance of the strong traditions and preferences in graphics, the selectivity of media and contents, and the strength of interpretation of the Warlpiri. Such ignorance arises best in unilineal evolutionism.¹¹⁴

In her introduction to *Bad Aboriginal Art*, Marcia Langton emphasises the extent to which those aspects of traditional Indigenous culture that have survived the ongoing violence of colonialism have readily incorporated western technologies:

While European colonization had destroyed whole segments of the traditional information network, in some areas these networks still function, especially through the Centre, the Top End, and the Northwest. Anthropologists have noted the transmission of cults along these networks, and now signal the role of communications technology, including Toyotas, radios, and video, in restoring and facilitating traditional information exchanges such as ceremonies.¹¹⁵

It is in this context that Michaels suggests one should consider different sets of questions about Indigenous culture, which avoid the futile search for cultural origins, and accept the extent to which all cultures are changing, hybrid entities.

Issues arising in Michaels' discussion of Aboriginal TV are also applied to a critical appreciation of Aboriginal Art, in which aesthetic judgements are problematised and questions of authority privileged. Whereas James and Geoff Bardon emphasise an aesthetic interpretation of the traditional qualities of the work of Papunya Tula artists, Michaels considers the work in terms of a dialogue between cultures and the politics of exchange. Central to his discussion of the art is the role of art dealers and the prevailing tastes and fashions of the international art market:

As Papunya art became recognized, it obviously received advice on materials justified by arguments of durability and suitability for the museum/collector market it was attracting. Canvas boards and school poster paints would no longer do. What evolved was the use of raw linen and thinned acrylics. This produced a comparatively flat, stained surface. There must have been some restriction on paint colors during the late 1970s, emphasizing an 'authentic' earth palette: red, yellow, and white ochres, browns and pinks (what Brisbane upholsterers call 'autumn tonings') ... the extent that an industry came into being (by now promoted and fought over at the national level by the Australia Council, the Aboriginal Development Corporation, and marketing units within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, as well as museum/university staffs), it produced that redundant, recognizable, brand-name product: *Papunya Tula*.¹¹⁶

their law," they say of more assimilated Aborigines. And they may acknowledge another community's success in cultural survival as due to their "having strong law there" (p. 106).

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 96.

¹¹⁵ Langton in Michaels, p. xxx.

¹¹⁶ Michaels, pp. 154–155.

In recognising the social, political and economic aspects of the production of Papunya Tula art, and his own involvement with the production of canvases at the neighbouring Yuendumu settlement, Michaels is careful not to disregard the work as superficial or merely commercial. Refraining from, and problematising, aesthetic judgement (hence the irony in the title 'Bad Aboriginal Art') Michaels makes the more insightful argument that questions of authenticity may only be of relevance to a European perspective audience.

It is mostly the European discourse that concerns itself with the possibility that the contribution of these advisers taints the art, renders it inauthentic, and so compromises its value, as if some intact arcane authority can be transferred directly from Aboriginal elders onto canvases, which can then be purchased, owned, and hung in European lounges and corporate boardrooms.

A focus on modes of cultural exchange and the local economy in which Indigenous art is produced, opens discussion on ways traditional indigenous cultures work in the present. An example is given in the payment of two Toyotas for a major series of paintings produced, with Michaels' involvement, at Yuendumu. The Toyotas gave the artists at Yuendumu the means to visit and care for the country depicted in the paintings:

This exchange value—paintings for Toyotas—is not arbitrary. The paintings depict, in terms of a religious iconography, geographical sites for which the painters have some special responsibility. Several Warlpiri terms describe this responsibility and are variously glossed by English translators. The closest term, for our purposes, is a verbal form meaning 'to care.' The men who paint these pictures are, by that very act, describing their responsibility to 'care for' these places. Long ago (but within the lifetime of these painters), this caring would have included traveling to these sites to perform recurrent ritual and other actions to assure the continuity of the land and its Dreamings. When the Warlpiri were relocated to Yuendumu, they were cut off from many of these lands, which are as far as 400km distant and not necessarily accessible by road. Only Toyotas can get you there. And this is precisely what land rights have meant to traditionally oriented Aborigines—access to their sites so they can resume caring for their land.¹¹⁷

Muecke discusses the art of Butcher Joe in similar terms in *No Road*, emphasising the extent to which the latter is producing art in a complex set of exchange relations both within his community and in the international art scene.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 55.

¹¹⁸ Muecke writes in *No Road*:

Contact with Butcher Joe could always produce a market, a point of exchange on a trade route. Being on the spot meant that you were in the line of exchange which would

Avoiding any mystification of Indigenous culture, as signified by the fourth dimension, Michaels grounds his discussion of traditional Indigenous culture in the present, and with a view to what he terms the '*cultural future*'. This concept, emphasising future over past, challenges those academic discourses that have so often confined Indigenous culture to a static 'prehistory':

By this [a cultural future] I mean an agenda for cultural maintenance that not only assumes some privileged authority for traditional modes of cultural production but also argues that the political survival of Indigenous people is dependent upon their capacity to continue reproducing these forms.¹¹⁹

Questions of representation are crucial to the maintenance of a 'cultural future', and it is in this context that television, if projected onto the community from an authoritative beyond, could become a negative force in collusion with an unchecked government bureaucracy:

Given the government's present policy of promoting media centralization and homogenization, we would expect that Yuendumu will soon be overwhelmed by national media services, including 'approved' regional Aboriginal broadcasters who serve the state's objectives of ethnicization, standardization, even Aboriginalization, at the expense of local language, representation, and autonomy.¹²⁰

Here, again, Carey's pet emporium is relevant, along with Ashcroft's discussion of Imperial narratives of nation that confine people from the outside, and Muecke's Oedipal narratives of nation, to be discussed in further detail below. Warlpiri TV is an example of heteroglossia—Indigenous voices speaking for themselves, not to fulfil a perceived national lack, but to tell their own stories to their own communities.

In a similar vein to Hage, Michaels identifies the caging effect of multiculturalism's production of national ethnicities, among which he situates Aboriginality. Associating multiculturalism with an officially endorsed 'Australian way of life', Michaels argues:

Warlpiri people, when projected into this lifestyle future, cease to be Warlpiri; they are subsumed as 'Aborigines,' in an effort to invent them as a sort of special ethnic

frustrate those in Perth who wanted him to retain his work for them alone. 'Things must go two ways,' says Paddy Roe about Aboriginal-White relations, and he is reinscribing a traditional trade rule. Once it was only the artefact that was traded, but now the agents trade on Butcher Joe's name. His name, the singularity of this style, these are rarities, and rarity is value in the contemporary production of Aboriginal culture as an archival accumulation, not a lived disposable economy for those producing the artifacts. (p. 216)

¹¹⁹ Michaels, p. 102.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

group able to be inserted into the fragile fantasies of contemporary Australian multiculturalism.¹²¹

Furthermore:

it would be mistaken to claim that the ethnic cultural policy has ignored Aborigines. In fact, they play a major part in the construction of the national, multicultural image; in this scenario, they become 'niggers.' Then they will be regularly on the airways, appearing as well-adjusted families in sitcoms, as models in cosmetic ads, as people who didn't get a 'fair go' on *60 Minutes*.¹²²

The invention of Aboriginal TV is made possible by the recognition of the '*continuity of modes of cultural production across media*'.¹²³ It is 'invented' by Warlpiri makers of video as it conforms 'to the basic premises of their tradition in its essential oral form'.¹²⁴ Whereas multiculturalism defines people from an authoritative beyond and manufactures the nation's 'Others' for a panoptic white subject, Michaels argues that when viewing Aboriginal TV 'it is we who are rendered other, not its subject'.¹²⁵

Mapping and Naming: A Travelling Colonial Architecture

Revolution by Night writes back to the colonial project of rendering space into place through mapping and naming, and experiments with English language usage in an attempt to model its form on the hieroglyphs of the Papunya Tula artists. Questions of visibility arise as Sturt's words and maps domesticate the landscape, lifting the veil on the centre of Australia, and work to create an imaginary homeland for future colonists. The power of Bardon's poetic prose makes for an uncanny experience as Sturt's founding narrative is estranged:

And I placed these directional lines Sturt had made between Fort Grey and the area near Eyre's Creek and beyond, and his curving indentation where a range-line had been made. The latitude and longitude bars were made by a division of the space into squares and over them the river dry-lines ran like a red wind between where Tjapaltjari smoothed in his fingers across the page and he began to laugh and say the white men had made a page of windows which had no name. He cannot be seen this Charles Sturt, he cannot be seen, no white man be seen, Tjapaltjari whispered, and he

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 124.

began to laugh gently, toss tiny flicks of sand in the air. They were never born, and you were never born Tjungerrayi, he whispered.¹²⁶

Both Bardon and Carey emphasise in their work the extent to which maps are cultural artefacts written from positions of power, drafted in the eye of the imperial gaze, the logic of which frames the landscape in a manner that not only makes possible, but justifies, its colonial appropriation. In the above passage the 'windows' are metonymic of a European mode of perceiving the world, framed by the longitude and latitude bars. The house is also a recurring trope in the novel. Map and house are combined in Sturt's dream:

In my dreams I saw that great map upon the wall of the house in which I slept, and on the map were inscribed pedigrees, time-grids, interior-clouds all circumscribing the older words and the map was a kind of mirror, of a blindness, which I could not quite understand, the dream said, for recorded history and ordinary form had long since left whatever now remained. The exactitude of truth had quite vanished here, and what the hand drew was not what it saw.¹²⁷

Indigenous culture theorist, Tony Birch, has identified an ongoing anxiety surrounding white Australia's hold on the Australian landscape, and his discussion of tourist practices in Victoria's Western District will conclude this discussion of mapping and naming in the cultural future.

James Bardon's juxtaposition of past and present events in *Revolution by Night* emphasises the continuity of the colonial oppression Indigenous people suffer, and the 'revolution' in the title of the novel signifies both historical and contemporary resistance, as well as the potential cultural revolution of the hieroglyphs for Australia's Eurocentric art tradition. Aspects of the representation of life at Papunya Tula in *Revolution by Night* are consistent with Geoff Bardon's accounts of an oppressed and heavily policed community that resented and actively sought to disrupt his work with local artists:

I had come to a community of several tribal groups apparently dispossessed of their lands and quite systematically humiliated by the European authorities. It was a brutal place, with a feeling of oppressive and dangerous racism in the air.¹²⁸

Oppression is powerfully symbolised by the impounding of the Honey Ant tree in the police barracks: 'the sacred tree for the Honey Ant Dreaming journey was

¹²⁶ James Bardon, p. 6–7.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²⁸ Geoff Bardon, p. 11.

in the police compound and was shielded by a very high fence'.¹²⁹ Apart from suffering the hostility of local bureaucrats, and the white community in general, for his involvement in the establishment of Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd, Geoff Bardon was also subject to close scrutiny from ASIO.¹³⁰ Returning to Papunya a year after his departure, Geoff Bardon gives an account of how he found 'the painters' quarters ransacked and every painting there ... carried away' by government officials.¹³¹ In addition, the superintendent at Papunya told him in no uncertain terms 'that the paintings were by "government Aborigines" and therefore were "government paintings"'.¹³² Geoff Bardon gives the following account of a riot that erupted in response to an intense environment of oppression:

One Saturday night in May 1972, the extraordinarily passive Aboriginal folk rioted. The settlement pistol was stolen and the police fired at night over the heads of the rioting children. Thirty police arrived the next day. Ten children were sentenced to a total of seventy-four years' gaol as a result of the riot. (Gaol for them was a place with three meals a day and pictures on Sunday.) The superintendent's pistol was never recovered, and the episode was blamed on petrol sniffing and alcohol, not on the frustration of brutal captivity.¹³³

In *Revolution by Night* the white landowner O'Grady, in similar style to the police at Papunya, 'fired the shotgun over their heads again and again the women began to scream but they didn't move back'.¹³⁴ One can see in Geoff Bardon's account the all-pervasive disciplines of power at work in the oppression of Indigenous people, as depicted by Xavier Herbert in the previous chapter; these forces also drive the narrative in *Revolution by Night*.

James Bardon invests Sturt's words with a great discursive power in *Revolution by Night*, the effects of which resonate with the contemporary cultural and physical oppression of the Papunya Tula community, as the explorer proceeds through country 'trying to make town, here, there, town':¹³⁵

Therefore you perhaps had need to know the words Charles Sturt believed he had, all their valedictions, causes, hideous powers. Such people as he who created all the perceivable world must needs-be speak long after they are dead, and he knew this.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 138.

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³⁴ James Bardon, p. 56.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 4.

Tjapaltjari and Don Luther are among the Indigenous artists who, silenced by Sturt's imperial monologue, are given space to speak back, and they tell of the suppressed Williora Massacre of 1939-1940 through their sand hieroglyphs, thereby 'putting the lie' to the official history:

And there is no record of the insurrection, of the extraordinary graphic designs they made about that time, everything was suppressed. The number of men killed must be (as it were), put away, how many bodies burned so that there should be no human remains. The Aborigines themselves in the main fighting groups were all shot at Williora during my last week there, the bodies heaped up barbarously in great fires on the plain beneath Honey-Ant, you could smell the petrol on the bodies flashing away in little clouds as their poor souls screamed up in that fire.¹³⁷

In *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* Sturt makes a reference to the Williorara tribe near the junction between the Williorara river and the Darling, with whom, he records, Mitchell had had a 'dispute' in 1836.¹³⁸ While the Williora massacre appears to be fictional, it alludes in name at least to the many suppressed massacres that mark the dark side of the Australian dream.¹³⁹ The power of Sturt's words evokes the power of imperial discourses that continue to shape past and present ways in which Australians conceive of themselves and their others in the national homely imaginary, discourses that continue to dispossess Indigenous people, giving them 'a hideous power' indeed.

In postcolonial style, Sturt's travels are retold through the sand paintings of the peoples his journal and maps actively dispossess, as the novel represents a view from the other side of the frontier. There is a different perspective of time in the following passage, as James Bardon strives to achieve the chronotope of the hieroglyphs in Papunya Tula art, an Indigenous world view or cultural matrix that further challenges Sturt's Eurocentric construction of the landscape:

How Tjapaltjari smoothed the sand out to make the journey-line pass silently along the sand-ridges opposite the camp. Again he takes the track, puts in water and sand-hills, a meander-path and then a man sitting by the camp-site and spears lying by his side, he draws the fires the white men are to ride between ... Yes now I recall it how it was, how I saw Captain Charles Sturt riding towards us ...¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ Sturt, p. 134.

¹³⁹ See Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe's essay, 'The Massacre of Aboriginal History' (in *Overland* No. 163, Winter 2001, pp. 21-41) for a discussion of the suppression of massacres in the writing of Australian history.

¹⁴⁰ James Bardon, p. 9.

This history is not directed by the authority of Sturt's journal, but by the hand of Tjapaltjari as he sketches in the sand in which Sturt once rode. Rather than words and abstract maps, there is the movement of a hand through sand, lending the whole a hapticity that both Dutruc and Geoff Bardon argue is characteristic of Papunya Tula art. In representing the alterity of the Indigenous subject, James Bardon does more than represent voice. His novel seeks to represent an Indigenous sign system that operates beyond the subject/object paradigm of western discourse, and the result is a text that is unique in many ways.

Rendered invisible through the eyes of Indigenous people, the cultural authority and power of Sturt's words is undermined, and his imperial monologue gives way to the heteroglossia of marginalised voices:

I have put Charles Sturt's map-line upon the sand; the painters say that it is a lie for it does not sing, they quietly disparage the line which died as it was born, they say ... 'Does he have a song?' Billy Titus-Midah asks me now, 'this Sturt?'¹⁴¹

Here the onus is cast back on Sturt to justify his culture, his presence, and as such a mirror has been thrown on his interrogation of Aborigines, a theme on which his *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* closes. He sums up with the following remarks:

With respect to their religious impressions, if I may so call them, I believe they have none. The only impression they have is of an evil spirit, but however melancholy the fact, it is no less true that the aborigines of Australia have no idea of a superintending Providence.¹⁴²

Just as Sturt has accused the Aborigines of Central Australia as having no religion to speak of, he is in turn accused of having no song, no cultural authority in *Revolution by Night*. Nevertheless, the alterity of the Indigenous subject is again subsumed in the narrative by the universal quest for origins, as theorised in Dutruc's monograph analysed above:

These words these black men write remind me of the very oldest of human dreams, a speaking and writing in things which are seen actually to talk in wind and stars of night like children of the beginning of the world. And also not changing them, so that there is an endless innocence in the world. So that there is no blame or conspiracy in any words ... it is strange now, seeing those naked wretched black men writing the shapes of our human beginnings in the sand as quickly as it blows away.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁴² Sturt, p. 141.

¹⁴³ James Bardon, p. 10.

This passage evokes the modernist 'imaginary primitive', whose childlike innocence renders the world as it was before the sophistication of abstract language, and is antithetical to the work of cultural theorists such as Muecke and Eric Michaels.

In a section of the novel titled 'John McDouall Stuart records Sturt's Return from the First Journey towards the Centre of the Continent', Stuart observes: '*it's like a hateful ghost of something, It's like I'm not meant to see Charles Sturt's mind because his damned boat floats only on dreams he can't see, except at night, it's like that*'.¹⁴⁴ The theme of invisibility is informed by the irony of Daniel Brock's claim that Sturt was near sighted, and had difficulty reading his instruments to establish accurate positions:

Poole scarcely knows how to take an observation, and Captain Sturt is near sighted, and cannot scarcely discern a planet; the Doctor is called upon occasionally to use the instrument, but he does not profess to be able to read the instrument.¹⁴⁵

For the Indigenous artists, on the other hand, Sturt's blindness is symptomatic of the extent to which his representation of the landscape is a reflection of his own cultural preoccupations and individual aspirations to discover what is already mapped and known:

on the map I show to Don Luther and Howard, and they begin to talk to me about what the white man actually sees, a desert made like his body and face, so he draws the face, the parts of the body, the legs, the neck.¹⁴⁶

Sturt's preoccupations with the figure of death and Satan, the antithesis of the Eden or promised land of the inland sea, are also products of what Carter refers to in his review of *Revolution by Night* as the former's 'own metaphysical enclosure'.¹⁴⁷

As discussed in Chapter Two, Carter argues that it is the very absence of 'great rivers' and 'mountain ranges', or in the case of Sturt, 'inland seas', which forms the subject of explorer journals. In *Revolution by Night*, this displacing of language is a recurring theme: 'that very truth of what you seek was only perhaps yourself, and the red desert but the mirror image of a dying sea'.¹⁴⁸ And in the following passage: 'that Night-Continent was too vastly large for those rivers we had ever seen, its silences were like an error in the imagination of the world'.¹⁴⁹ There is an

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁴⁵ Brock, p. 36.

¹⁴⁶ James Bardon, p. 44.

¹⁴⁷ Carter, 'A Sea Not to be Seen', p. 84.

¹⁴⁸ James Bardon, p. 63.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

overwhelming sense of the land eluding Sturt's cultural matrix, lending the journal a duplicity or double vision:

And you never see this Night-Continent, but only what it is not, and you are not twice blessed for seeming not to see your fate. For understand also I had been asked to find such a place which was not some Dreamless Sleep of the Dead. The journal of which I speak is not therefore as simple and unfounded as you might first have thought or wished.¹⁵⁰

In a passage that evokes Le Mesurier's subversive 'anti-journal', created out of symbolist prose poems as discussed in Chapter One, Sturt is left searching for another language to put a name to the land:

You began to write in another language than the one you had, like ploughing fields at night you could not see, and you began to keep another diary or journal, so that we put a doubling, probationary word to sleep, that those who named the earth would return safely home.¹⁵¹

This other language is described in terms of a domestic simile, 'like ploughing fields', which is reinforced by the last phrase of the passage 'that those who named the earth would return safely home', that emphasises the domesticating function of the colonial project and the imagination of the Australian nation.

Carter's analysis of Namatjira's watercolours raises questions of representation and visibility similar to those posed by Bardon in *Revolution by Night*, in particular, 'Namatjira's infamous omission of the railway line from his painting of Heavitree Gap'.¹⁵² According to Carter, the omission is not so much to do with the vision of the 'primitive other, incapable of change' as it is a mirror held to the European framing of the land in biblical terms.¹⁵³

by representing it as the Land of Promise, he was painting it in the only way that the Lutherans and white community could conceptualize it and make sense of it, allegorically, as a prefiguring of somewhere else.¹⁵⁴

Namatjira's mimicry of the European reading of the land, and his denial of the progress symbolised by the railway, which Carter argues epitomises 'our white indifference to the lie of the land', has parallels with the invisibility of Sturt's tracks in *Revolution by Night*.¹⁵⁵ Both counts of invisibility mirror the European's

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁵² Carter, *Lie of the Land*, p. 46.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 46.

denial of Indigenous readings of the landscape and their concept of progress which posits a primitive blackness at one end of the line and a civilised white man at the other.¹⁵⁶

Rendered invisible, the imperial 'I' of Sturt's authority, his linear reading of the country which advances, like the railway, despite the lie of the land, can no longer frame the other. Invisibility, argues Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, is a postcolonial strategy that works to undermine the framing of the Other in the eyes of the white subject:

What Meiling Jin calls 'the secret art of Invisible-Ness' creates a crisis in the representation of personhood and, at the critical moment, initiates the possibility of political subversion. Invisibility erases the self-presence of that 'I' in terms of which traditional concepts of political agency and narrative mastery function.¹⁵⁷

Goon's disappearing trick in *Illywhacker* is relevant here, as it symbolises both the erasure of minorities such as the Chinese in the privileged discourse of Australian history, and Goon's own strategy for escaping his stereotypical representation as 'Other'. Discussing the question of the invisibility of the subject in a poem by Adil Jussawalla, and that of another migrant poet, Bhabha argues:

What these repeated negations of identity dramatize, in their elision of the seeing eye that must contemplate what is missing or invisible, is the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision. By disrupting the stability of the ego, expressed in the equivalence between image and identity, the secret art of invisibility of which the migrant poet speaks changes the very terms of our recognition of the person.¹⁵⁸

Whereas in the poems to which Bhabha refers, and in the case of Goon, it is the migrant 'Other' that is made invisible, and therefore unfixable, in the case of Sturt's and Namatjira's omission of the railway it is the imperial eye itself that is made invisible and can no longer frame the 'Other'. A mirror is held to Sturt's blindness, which is also the blindness of Oscar sailing up the Bellinger.

Bhabha's theorising reaches its endpoint with the invisibility of the subject, so that the subject may be liberated from the enclosure act of its representation by the 'Other'. In *Masks of Difference*, Richards argues that in order to move beyond

¹⁵⁶The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole' (Homi Bhabha, 'Interrogating identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative' in *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 40–66, p. 41).

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 46.

erasure, or the endpoint of enunciation, one must let the voice of the other speak for itself, which leads to his heterogeneous notion of different masks speaking, as opposed to the homogenous mask of difference. He sums up Bhabha's position on representation as follows:

For Bhabha, for the other to be truly other the strategies of representation must be utterly denied, systematically subverted, cancelled or erased from representation; their fabrication must be marked by the hide and seek of erasure. Only by denying representation—both 'philosophical' and 'anthropological'—can the native be truly represented ... In this situation the subject becomes opaque, 'incalculable', emptied of 'content', but recognised because 'empty.' The postcolonial subject emerges as a shadow figure, 'tethered' to the more substantial presence of an erroneous western subjectivity.¹⁵⁹

Turning to the works of Soyinka, Achebe and Okri, Richards argues that while adopting similar attitudes to Bhabha they are moving in the 'opposite direction' by 'elaborating identities with which to ... "free themselves" and to turn ... "our own weapons against us"' by writing in English but subverting it to the linguistic structures of 'Yoruba proverb or igbo myth'.¹⁶⁰ Richards sees disciplines such as anthropology as being in a state of:

discursive crisis from which the anthropologist's own subjectivity emerges as a guarantor of the truth of his text and the nobility of his intentions but which, in negotiating the pitfalls of representation, effaces the subject of discourse. The apprehension of the anthropologist's crisis of representation is substituted for the apprehension of his/her subject.¹⁶¹

Crisis of representation is the subject of Muecke's *No Road, Bitumen all the Way*, and his discussion of how one might go about making a contemporary film of Prichard's *Coonardoo*, in which questions of representation must be foregrounded.¹⁶²

In *Lie of the Land* Carter discusses the process by which Namatjira's art enters the house of Western history, both metaphorically and literally, as the art hangs on the walls of galleries and the homes of private collectors:

To enter the realm of representation (mimesis), as the Hermannsburg painters are said to have done, is to enter the house of Western history, with its books, its windows and doorways. It is no longer to see all around (with ears as much as eyes) a

¹⁵⁹ Richards, p. 239.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁶² Muecke quotes Trinh T Minh-ha: 'To raise the question of representing the Other is, therefore, to re-open endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outsider and insider' (in *No Road*, p. 96).

radiating environment of tracks and breezes; it is to be conscious of inhabiting a protective enclosure here and there breached by apparitional openings—doorways and windows—where spirits presumably enter and exit at will. Consciousness of a division between inside and outside, between what is present and what is absent, the quick and the dead, is instantiated in the architectural enclosure. The spiritual function of building becomes plain—to provide a site, a tabula rasa of foldless surfaces where this new division can be commemorated, a memorial of the outside which, now glimpsed fragmentarily as a receding landscape, seems to be in a state of ruin.¹⁶³

Carter quotes water colourist Rex Battarbee lamenting the fact the Hermannsburg painters lacked walls to hang their representations of the country on: ‘because of the poor living conditions of the artists they and their people have not been able to gain the full appreciation of their paintings which comes of living with them in their own homes’.¹⁶⁴ Carter argues that the corollary of such a belief is that ‘the true and proper Art Gallery of the Australian people must be the domestic home’.¹⁶⁵ Strehlow hoped that a hybrid coming together of Indigenous and European culture would provide an art and poetry that would render the landscape homely, as opposed to the alienation inherent in European art forms. Strehlow argued that while viewed in the home, such art was to inspire a non-architectural vision of country: ‘the art that would fit itself to such a home should reflect something of the airy, spacious freedom, the brilliant light, and the strong colours of our environment.’¹⁶⁶ This leads Carter to conclude that Strehlow’s ‘homeland is conceived anti-architecturally, as a radiance of land’.¹⁶⁷ Carter’s analysis of Namatjira’s art, and the manner in which it enters both the house of Western history and the domestic homes of ordinary Australians, is more in tune with Eric Michaels’ theoretical approach to the work of the Papunya Tula artists. Both writers see Indigenous art as emerging in a hybrid, bicultural space.

It has been observed that the revolution in *Revolution by Night* signifies resistance to a historical and contemporary oppression of Indigenous people, and that the overt violence of massacres continues in the violence of mapping and naming practices. Birch locates many of the questions explored in Bardon’s novel in his analyses of contemporary tourism practice. In his essay, ‘Nothing has

¹⁶³ Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁴ Battarbee in Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, p. 55.

¹⁶⁵ Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁶ Strehlow in Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁷ Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, p. 58.

Changed: the Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture', Tony Birch discusses the politics of a proposal by the then Victorian Minister for Tourism, Steve Crabb, to restore Indigenous place names to the Grampians and other areas in the Western District of Victoria. Birch quotes from Mitchell's journal in a passage that has parallels with James Bardon's trope of the house in *Revolution by Night*:

During this search for exploitable land Mitchell claimed that he was exploring a terra nullius—a no man's land—despite his having contact with local indigenous people, some of whom his party murdered. Mitchell wrote:

It was evident that the reign of solitude in these beautiful vales was near a close; a reflection which, in my mind, often sweetened the toils ... of travelling through such houseless regions.

He described these houseless regions as an 'Eden' awaiting 'the immediate reception of civilised man'.¹⁶⁸

Mitchell's image of an Eden awaiting the presence of civilised man (discussed in detail in Chapter Two) is invested with the same colonial logic as Sturt's image of the 'lifting the veil' on the centre of Australia. In both cases, the colonial project is sanctified as the land, under the imperial eye (I) of the explorer (there can only be one journal), is brought into the house of God and Nation. Lifting the veil is also a domesticating image, as Sturt marries the land and brings it into the colonial sphere. The domesticating of the land has added significance in Sturt's letters to his wife, who awaits him in the *domus*, the point of departure and return for his journeying. In addition, at the time of white invasion, houses and recognisable signs of cultivation were grounds on which prior sovereignty was recognised according to British law.¹⁶⁹ Mitchell's and Sturt's observation that there are no houses in it provides the foundations for the claim of *terra nullius*, and is a further example of the colonial logic at work in the metaphoric possession of the landscape.

Issues of visibility are also raised by Birch as he reveals that the Victorian government's name-restoration project was carried out without consultation with any of the five Koori communities living in the Western District:

A spokesperson, Geoff Clark, criticized the government's continuing refusal to consult local Kooris on policies affecting their history and culture. Although he supported the 'refreshing and positive gesture' of the name restoration, Clark compared Crabb's

¹⁶⁸ Birch, p. 171.

¹⁶⁹ See Alan Frost's discussion of *terra nullius*, 'Our Original Agression? New South Wales as *terra nullius*' in *Botany Bay Mirages: Illusions of Australia's Convict Beginnings*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 176–189.

approach with that of a fellow Scott: 'he and Major Mitchell are guilty of ignoring the Aborigines' past and present association and ownership of the Grampians area ... over thousands of years'.¹⁷⁰

The Western district contains 80 percent of Victoria's identified Koori rock-art sites, and one of the existing Eurocentric descriptive names includes 'Cave of Ghosts'.¹⁷¹ As in *Voss* and *Poor Fellow My Country*, the cave can be seen to signify both presence and absence: providing the Australian nation with a pre-history while disavowing the native title of Indigenous people in the political present—for the cave is empty, or peopled only by ghosts. In this case, the act of name restoration fulfils the State's need for a 'culturally authentic' tourism industry, while also faithfully continuing in the traditions of that earlier Scott, in rendering Kooris invisible in the eyes of the official culture. This is a classic example of Said's Orientalism, whereby the coloniser appropriates the culture of the colonised as self-professed guardians in the interests of world history, while simultaneously denying the authenticity of the colonised who are considered to be the decadent remnants of a past high cultural era.

Conclusion

This chapter has moved from the unitary stylistics posited by the Bardons' theorising of Indigenous hieroglyphs, to the cultural pluralism of Muecke's communication theory and Bakhtin's heteroglossia. The analysis of Bardon's text has re-emphasised the power of the triple artillery of map, sketch and journal, the colonial tools of representation, and the fact that these markers of home, which render space into place, continue to do their colonial work in contemporary Australia. *Revolution by Night* is a text that grapples with the challenge of representing these voices in its revisiting of the national story. The result is a unique and fascinating text that has provided fertile ground to examine postcolonial issues at the heart of the politics of Australia's homely national imaginary.

¹⁷⁰ Birch, p. 230.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

Coda

In his discussion of the Papunya Tula art movement, Carter argues that the environment of oppression and racism in which the artists lived and worked manifested itself structurally in assimilationist architecture. In a symbolic act, the schoolrooms in which the artists worked were later pulled down, as if to deny the very possibility of such cultural interaction ever having taken place:

The power released there, at once poetic and political, to ground the future differently remains potent. Fearfulness saw that the school was later pulled down; the same fearfulness will, in a misplaced spirit of piety, I predict, see to it that the school is one day rebuilt to commemorate what happened there. But the grounding of a society adumbrated there fell outside these bleak, architecturally-imagined historical enclosure acts. It was intended to institute a different mode of exchange, one that acknowledged the coexistence simultaneously of many stories on a shared but not owned ground.¹

From an assimilationist space, the schoolroom was transformed by the artists into something akin to Bhabha's 'third space' of cultural dialogue, a place where the heteroglossia of the 'many stories' of nation could be expressed:

the art of Papunya embodied a different conception of history, one in which the opening and maintenance of a space in-between might occur, where impending cultural genocide could be held at arm's length, and room for an alternative destiny set aside.²

Carter describes the assimilationist architecture in more detail in his discussion of Obet Ragget, that 'gentle diplomat of the in-between', who was 'critical to the initiation of the Papunya painting movement':³

His in-betweenness was reflected in his occupation of one of the 'grotesque transitional houses' which the white authorities, in their assimilationist wisdom, had erected at Papunya ... These barn-like sheds, their curvilinear corrugated-iron roofs

¹ Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, Faber & Faber, London, 1996, p. 355. Geoff Bardon's recent death, on 6 May, 2003, will no doubt spark further and perhaps revisionist scholarship of the events at Papunya Tula (see Vivien Johnson's obituary, 'Papunya's Primary Patron' in *The Australian*, Friday, 16 May, 2003, p. 14.)

² *ibid.*, p. 348.

³ *ibid.*, p. 349.

suspended far above the ground on spindly stilts, half-walled, concrete-slabbed, would make a worthwhile study in themselves. Permanently, and so dysfunctionally, directional, unlike a temporary Aranda shelter; shadowing an undifferentiated space, its floor of uninscribable hardness, something like the burnt-out ruin of an old Community Hall, they are the architectural embodiment of the assimilationist fallacy. The common ground they created was off the ground, placeless, pointless, uninhabitable. Nevertheless, 'Obed had made particular improvements to his accommodation ... He had built windbreaks of corrugated iron around the verandah perimeter and within the verandah and this was quite different from what I recall of other families.'⁴

Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus* that traditional societies are oedipalised under colonialism, as traditional power relations are re-coded along capitalist lines, at the heart of which is the nuclear family, divorced, in schizophrenic manner, from the site of labour and material production:

Yes, it becomes Oedipal in part, under the effect of colonization. The colonizer, for example, abolishes the chieftainship, or uses it to further his own ends (and he uses many other things besides: the chieftainship is only a beginning). The colonizer says: your father is your father and nothing else, or your maternal grandfather—don't mistake them for chiefs; you can go have yourself triangulated in your corner, and place your house between those of your paternal and maternal kin; your family is your family and nothing else; sexual reproduction no longer passes through these points, although we rightly need your family to furnish a material that will be subjected to a new order of reproduction. Yes, then, an Oedipal framework is outlined for the dispossessed primitives: a shantytown Oedipus.⁵

Without going into the detail of Deleuze and Guattari's anti-Oedipus theory, and while acknowledging Lattas'⁶ critique of their (mis)representation of the so-called 'primitive', it is important to recognise colonialism's role in reorganising traditional society into new power relations and economies of desire.⁷ Nevertheless, as the survival of Indigenous cultures demonstrates, the reorganisation of culture can be resisted or hybridised to work in conjunction with ongoing Indigenous modes of production.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley et al. (trans.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 168.

⁶ Andrew Lattas, 'Primitivism in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*', in *Social Analysis*, No. 30, December 1991, pp. 98–115.

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari argue that Oedipus oppresses individuals both in the society of the coloniser and that of the re-coded and re-territorialised colony: 'there or here, it's the same thing: Oedipus is always colonization pursued by other means, it is the interior colony, and we shall see that even here at home, where we Europeans are concerned, it is our intimate colonial education' (Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 170).

In *No Road* Muecke calls for a non-Oedipal way of imaging the nation, in which Aboriginal Australia is not used to fill any lack in the modern Australian nation:

For instance, the familiar cultural-tinge story is about intolerability. We can't stand it that Australia is childlike in relation to empire, to Europe; Australia always being talked about as if it is coming of age. And if it isn't in relation to England, it is in relation to some other country: we have to 'mature' in relation to the US, in relation to Asia, and so on. I would argue that a move towards republican post-nationalism necessarily means we have to stop telling stories in an Oedipal way. We have to conceive of Australia as already 'full'; not lacking anything so that we have to look to others to complete the national psyche ... One way to start to talk in a non-Oedipal manner is through the example of the Aboriginal cultural renaissance over the last twenty years or so. It means taking seriously the achievements of Aboriginal people, taking their narratives on their own cultural terms, in all their singularity. And in the process, one has to be careful not to look there also for completion of a national lack, to recolonise their history and culture in that same Oedipal mode.⁸

There are parallels to be drawn between Muecke's statement above and Ashcroft and Salter's argument that Australian nationalism must listen more closely to the heteroglossia of voices otherwise marginalised in the Oedipal monologue of imperialism, or its substitute, multinational capital:

Lacan described an illusion of the self as the fallacy of 'seeing oneself as oneself'; a fallacy in that to do so we are avoiding the implication of the other in the construction of the self. There are two ways of seeing this. On the one hand, Bakhtin mentions the 'absolute aesthetic need of man for the other, for the other's activity of seeing, holding, putting together and unifying, which alone can bring into being the externally finished personality'. This is entirely in keeping with the principle of dialogism, when in normal discourse speakers continually orient themselves towards each others' conceptual horizon. But the 'gaze of the grand *Autre*' is an identification obtained by an orientation to the authority in the 'distanced zone'. This describes particularly well the way in which the colonial subject is identified by the discourse of imperialism. In contemporary language, 'imperialism' could be replaced with the phrase 'international capitalism', and Phillip's 'Englishman' could today include the American and the Japanese ... But the traditional nationalist subject requires the imprimatur of the international 'centre' to authenticate its reality—and paradoxically, its marginality. This is why the subject of the gaze calcifies into stereotype because the 'gaze of the grand *Autre*' aids and abets the inhibition of the social generative process.⁹

While Indigenous culture is employed to fulfil a cultural lack in the national imaginary in the works analysed of White, Herbert and Bardon, Carey's fiction draws attention to the fullness of voices otherwise marginalised in nationalist discourses. *Illywhacker's* pet emporium functions as a monologic narrative of

⁸ Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen all the Way)*, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, 1997, pp. 224-225.

⁹ Bill Ashcroft & John Salter, 'Australian Voices: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Australian Nationalist Debate' in Patrick Fuery (ed.) *Representation, Discourse & Desire: Contemporary*

nation, and Carey's literary approach is closely aligned with Ashcroft's evocation of the postcolonial. In the pet emporium, one can see the Oedipal narrative of nation in operation. Hissaou takes the place of the father (Badgery) who is caged, and does so with the backing of the multinational Mitsubishi, which replaces Britain and the US as the imperial mother power. While enacting his revenge Hissaou nevertheless remains caught in the same Oedipal structure of desire. The voices marginalised by the pet emporium, which threaten its destruction in the closing image of the novel, represent the heteroglossia of nation otherwise suppressed.

Bhabha argues in the introduction to *The Location to Culture* that the modern nation state is defined more than ever before by its relationship to the international community beyond its borders, and from within by the presence of minority cultures. There are increasing encounters between immigrant and indigenous populations with larger than ever movements of people around the globe. Identities are renegotiated between spaces of minority and mainstream cultures, as the metropolis is redefined by its relationship to the periphery, and the borderline conditions of minority groups become active sites of cultural production. Quoting Renee Green in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha employs the former's architectural metaphor to elaborate on his notion of culturally hybrid identities:

I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as a higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness.¹⁰

The stairwell as liminal space is a place of movement, of travelling between. Bhabha here is suggesting that cultural identity is not bound by the essentialised rooms of Self/Other, but exists in the travelling in-between, a continual arriving at, or movement back and forth. Inspired by Green's work, Bhabha writes:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it

Australian Culture & Critical Theory, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 70–86, pp. 77–78.

¹⁰ Renée Green in Homi Bhabha's 'Introduction: Locations of culture' in *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 1–19, pp. 3–4.

from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.¹¹

James Clifford's notion of travelling culture, in which movement between cultures is emphasised, relocates the static 'native' as the complex, bicultural operator:

In tipping the balance toward traveling as I am doing here, the "chronotope" of culture (a setting or scene organizing time and space in representable whole form) comes to resemble as much a site of travel encounters as of residence, less a tent in a village or a controlled laboratory or a site of initiation and inhabitation, and more like a hotel lobby, ship, or bus. If we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term culture—seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies, etc—is questioned. Constructed and disputed *historicités*, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view.¹²

Clifford argues that by casting the gaze of the Other back onto the anthropologist, and thereby questioning the power relationships between the 'informant' and the scribe of culture, one is posing a set of questions central to postcolonialism. A travelling colonial architecture evokes both the movement of Bhabha's stairwell, and that of Clifford's travelling theory.¹³

I have argued that in the work of White and Herbert identities are fixed in essentialised notions of culture informed by social Darwinism and modernist concerns with the 'primitive imagination'. White's mysticism shares in common with James and Geoff Bardons' conceptualisation of the work of Papunya Tula artists in the terms of the fourth dimension: both tend to deny the political and historical workings of language and culture, as theorised by Bakhtin and Muecke. Michaels' discussion of Aboriginal TV is an insightful one in so far as it acknowledges the movement between cultures, and incorporations of different technologies into cultural practices accounted for by Clifford's travel theory.

¹¹ Bhabha, p.4.

¹² James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' in L. Grossberg et al. (eds) *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp. 96–116, p. 101.

¹³ Simon Ryan employs Bhabha theory of hybridity in his introduction to *The Cartographic Eye* to critic Terry Goldie's analysis of the construction of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literatures 'as a system impervious to outside influence' (Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 11). Goldie's static metaphor of the chessboard is symptomatic of this lack of potential for movement or dialogue between cultures: 'the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker' (Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, McGill-Queen's University Press, London, 1989, p. 10).

While Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* is a fascinating novel in that it represents the many languages of the Northern Territory, Carey's fiction critiques the calcifying tendencies of Australian mythologies, and ironically undercuts Herbert's grandiose claims to the true nature of Australian types or the 'problem' of the Australian Aborigine. As argued in Chapter Three, the pet emporium can be also seen to critique the caging effects of multiculturalism, founded as it is on cultural diversity as opposed to Bhabha's notion of cultural difference. In cultural diversity, one is framed according to a pre-conceived tradition on the basis of race or culture, as belonging to a community as opposed to merely being:

Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.¹⁴

Cultural difference acknowledges the movement between minority culture and mainstream, the possibility that the subject may not wish to be identified with a pre-conceived notion of cultural tradition, the possibility of being the same and different:

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation. And it is the very authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of *enunciation*. The enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance.¹⁵

Parallels can be found with Bhabha's notion of cultural difference and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of encounters and becomings: 'each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two, since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is between the two, which has its own direction, a

¹⁴ Homi Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory' in *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 19–39, p. 34.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 35.

bloc of becoming.¹⁶ The opposite to this notion of becoming and encounters, Deleuze continues, is 'regulating, recognising and judging'.¹⁷ Recognising and judging pertain more to the realm of cultural diversity and multiculturalism, where individuals tend to be defined according to pre-conceived notions of tradition and community, and dialogue is substituted for interrogation; 'Where are you from?'

In her essay 'National Dress or National Trousers?' Susan K. Martin highlights the fact that 'since the 1980s it has been argued that the conception of 1890s culture and nation was grounded in a 'masculinism' requiring analysis.'¹⁸ I am aware that I have focused on male writers at the risk of marginalising women's writing. My approach sets out to reappraise the 'national trousers' of these masculine narratives of nation in the light of contemporary theoretical debate. Meaghan Morris further deconstructs the masculine discourse of the male traveller domesticating space in her essay on contemporary tourism practice: 'At Henry Parkes Hotel.'¹⁹ Muecke describes Morris' essay in *No Road* as 'a feminist argument against the voyage as (masculine) adventure or departure, beginning and ending in the (feminine) home.'²⁰ Muecke similarly reassesses the road trip as a traditionally masculine adventure, and in doing so makes reference to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope:

For me, at any rate, these stories are still to be written, preferably by women in motel rooms, and the chronotope—Bakhtin's term for space-time *figures* in literature (the road for the picaresque novel or road movie, the salon for some eighteenth-century French novels, the room for certain sorts of realms, the zone in some SF)—the chronotope I long to see is the one which will liberate that of women on holiday from the still-at-home-in-the-suburbs picture.²¹

Morris quotes Van den Abbeele on the role of domestication that is central to the masculine concept of the journey:

The tourist theorizes because he is already en route and caught up in a chaotic, fragmented universe that needs to be domesticated. The very concept of 'the

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (trans.), The Athlone Press, London, 1987, p. 7.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Susan K. Martin, 'National Dress or National Trousers?', in Bruce Bennett & Jennifer Strauss (eds), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 89–104, p. 92.

¹⁹ Meaghan Morris, 'At Henry Parkes Motel', in J. Frow and M. Morris (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, pp. 241–275.

²⁰ Muecke, *No Road*, p. 127.

²¹ *ibid.*

voyage' is this domestication in that it demarcates one's traveling like the Aristotelian plot into a beginning, a middle and an end. In the case of the tourist, the beginning and the end are the same place, 'home'. It is in relation to this home or *domus* then that everything which falls into the middle can be 'domesticated'.²²

On the road, Morris looks at how the Henry Parkes Motel functions as a national chronotope, while also reassessing the motel as a transgressive space that breaks down the voyage/*domus* binary. The *domus* travels, Morris argues, and is inevitably altered by the act of travel, as is the subject, on return. Morris suggests that for the migrant, or a migrant country such as Australia, there is no such stable concept as home and away, rather, people learn to voyage with their homes:

And colonisation may be precisely a mode of movement (as occupation) that transgresses limits and borders. In and after colonialism, the voyage/*domus* distinction loses its oppositional structure—and thus its value for announcing the displacement of one by the other in the 'course' of Human History.²³

Morris's recognition that home is transformed by the journeying is a key one in the recognition that both individual and national identities are constantly being renegotiated via the transgressions of travel.

To arrive at where I began. Birch describes the mining towns in Victoria that had a brief existence, a blink of an eye even within Australia's European history, towns that were abandoned following the gold rush. In their absence, *terra nullius* is reinscribed through the erection of colonial monuments:

The vanishing digger and his miner's cottage threatened to provide a history of temporality and uncertainty, with the past, like the travelling colonial architecture, being dispersed with little left to show. In order to avoid becoming a European *terra nullius*, and as an attempt to create certainty within the physical and imaginary landscapes of this less prosperous sector of the western district, the landscape has been retextualised. Where gaps exist within historical narratives, monuments act as filler, attempting to produce an unquestioned and singular view of the past. As with other sites of colonial occupation throughout Australia, the signature of a confident and authoritative colonial history articulated through the monument has been the commonest answer to the absence of continuity. Such projects, not surprisingly, fail to recognise the histories and attachment to land of Indigenous people or the violence of the attempted dispossession of these people, in order to create a reality of *terra nullius*, born out of imperial injustice.²⁴

²² Van den Abbeele in Morris, p. 251.

²³ Morris, p. 272.

²⁴ Tony Birch, 'Come See the Giant Koala', *Meanjin*, Vol 58, No. 3, 1999, pp. 61–72, p. 63.

The travelling colonial architecture identified by Birch is symptomatic of the deterritorialisation and reterritorialization fundamental to capitalism:

... incessant cycles of deterritorialization and reterritorialization through axiomatization constitute one of the fundamental rhythms of capitalist society as a whole—what Marx referred to as “the constant revolutionizing of the means of production ...” capital is extracted from one local ... and reinvested somewhere else.²⁵

Capitalism’s transformative potential is central to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of Schizophrenia in *Anti-Oedipus*. A revolutionary potential exists in the idealised moment of deterritorialization, when the existing order of things is uprooted, as in the case of the miners’ cottages in Birch’s essay. The travelling colonial architecture inspires a moment of hope, perhaps, as a question is left inscribed on the landscape: what shall take its place? Reterritorialisation, however, substitutes a new repressive order for the old, and once again, desire is locked into a system of false representation:

A wave of deterritorialization liberates all kinds of creative energies (in consumption as well as in production) at the same time as it revolutionizes and socializes productive forces; but then reterritorialization supervenes, yoking the relations of production and consumption to the dead-weight of private surplus-appropriation.²⁶

Heritage and tourism discourses see that the miners’ cottages are replaced with monuments that reinstate *terra nullius*, and carry on the work of the colonial project. In Carey’s fiction, the destruction of the glass church and the pet emporium might similarly be interpreted as moments of deterritorialisation. A space is created by the fracturing of the colonial architecture which Carey leaves to the reader to reconstruct and imagine into being: the potential for the rebuilding of a postcolonial Australia.

²⁵ Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 20. Holland goes on to argue that ‘alone among French poststructuralists, Deleuze and Guattari thus provide an historical, materialist ground for the by-now-familiar tenet of the instability of meaning as well as for the preference for difference over identity: both are effects of the decoding process characteristic of capitalism’ (p. 21).

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

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