Mapping Mobility in Australia:
from the Bush to the Desert and the Ghostly Place

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Key words: bush, mobility, boundaries, white vanishing trope, spectrality

Mots-clés : bush australien, mobilité, frontières, trope de la disparition, spectralité

The question of the representation of place and mobility in Australia is a particularly complex and tangled one. Australians' relation to the land is difficult for three main reasons: the unavowed conflict with the rightful owners of the land (the Aborigines), the convict stain of the first days of settlement, and the aridity of most of its landmass. Thus, right from the start, there was a sense of estrangement from the sense of place which is usually so central in the setting up of the major founding myths of a settler colony trying to define itself in opposition to the mother country.

The most striking paradox in the construction of Australian national identity is a form of relation to the land which is both one of undeniable fetishization on the one hand, and complete denial and erasure on the other. The other main dilemma is that national identity is not associated with mobility as is the case for many settler colonies and the United States in particular, one of its major cultural contestants. The American dream is based on the founding myth of the Frontier, the imaginary line separating wilderness from civilisation, native Americans from settlers and pioneers going west. In the *Australian Legend* as defined by historian Russel Ward, there is no Frontier progressing west, no mobility strictly speaking but a sort of theatrical stage for the Anglo-Celtic Australian to prove his Australianness[1]. This predominant

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[1] Famous Australian historian Russel Ward wrote a very influential work on Australian character called *The Australian Legend* in 1958 which became an instant bestseller and which saw in the bush and life in the outback, a defining element of Australian identity. He even spoke of a "national mystique" deriving from such bush experience (Whitlock, 179). What he emphasizes in this writing though is not so much the idea of mobility or the Frontier as the very nature of bush experience itself: that of the common man sticking to his mates and being able to "endure stoically" rather than "ac[t] busily" (179). His prototypical national representatives are the ex-convict bush-workers, the bushrangers, the "nomadic" pastoral workers ("the outback employees, the semi-nomadic drovers, shepherds, shearers, bullock-drivers, stockmen", 180). He underlines their "extreme mobility" (184) but more as a symptom of their precarious living conditions than as a form of "manifest destiny" of a people with a

impression of immobility has been prevalent in fiction, painting and films until recently.

In Australian national representations and discourses, mapping and mobility are presented as problematic and often superseded by the establishment of imaginary boundaries which are both spectral and gothic, and yet essential in defining Australianness. Such a fraught relation to space and place which tends to replace mapping with myth-making and the setting up of arbitrary frontiers, will have to be fully assessed to try and account for the recurring motifs and tropes of haunting and a sense of loss. Not only does the Australian continent often elude and resist cartography but its bush mythology mostly rests on the idea of an almost immobile or circular journey ending in disaster. In more recent and contemporary works, the question of mobility has been further complexified by the issue of shifting borders and boundaries whose spectrality remains prevalent.

Two major scholarly studies have been dedicated to the issue of cartography: Simon Ryan's *The Cartographic Eye. How Explorers Saw Australia* (1996) and Roslynn Haynes's *Seeking the Centre. The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (1998). In both cases, the critics underline a paradox: cartography is not so much used as a scientific and accurate description of the geographical features of the place but more as an ideological tool in the characterisation of the explorer figure and more generally of the imperial venture and its legitimacy. Later on, mapping out the bush was instrumentalised as a means to define Australianness and the individual's relation to the land. As Simon Ryan puts it, "the map acts as a semiotic space": "[…maps] are ideological tools, rather than simply reflections of a given reality. Examining them as ideological constructs, rather than 'accurate' representations, enables the tracing of their particular geographies of centre and margin, plenitude and emptiness through time, as a way of showing their effectiveness as constructions" (10).

As far as Australia is concerned, one of the most obvious cartographic tropes is to represent the desert as a blank space, a "*terra nullius*" where the very attempt at drawing lines and finding traces of significant features is constantly defeated. Another one, which is closely linked to the first one, is that of the *tabula rasa*. And Simon Ryan draws an interesting parallel between two opposite perceptions of the land: one

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mission and an ultimate destination in view. He contrasts such a figure with the "typical American frontiersman" that is a "small individualist agricultural proprietor or farm labourer, not a cow-boy or ranch-hand" (187).

by an almost complete stranger to the land, famous English novelist D. H. Lawrence, and another by an Aborigine. Here is Lawrence's final verdict about Australia after visiting the country for three months only:

> The soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia, the pale, white unwritten atmosphere of Australia. *Tabula rasa*. The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The wide clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, without a record. (D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*[2])

The ethnocentric perception of Lawrence is almost a caricature that Western readers have been accustomed to since the famous claim by Joseph Conrad and then his favourite character narrator Marlow that the whole of South America, or Africa, or Australia were "blank spaces of the earth":

> 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 glories 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. (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 142)

And yet the Eurocentric trope of the "blank space" or blank page is easy to deconstruct and contrast with the reverse view Aboriginal people unanimously share of the land as three-dimensional contrary to the two-dimensional page or map. This is what the following passage from the essay "Ordering the landscape," written by eminent archaeologist Rhys Jones, makes clear. In this short excerpt he describes the reactions of an Aborigine when he first saw Canberra, the federal capital city:

> The idea of buying and selling land like any other commodity and of attachment to the land only as a matter of transient convenience was totally alien to Gurrmanamana, and he regarded it with a mixture of suspended belief and with some mild revulsion, as if there were something deeply wrong with this state of affairs. Here was a land empty of religious affiliation; there were no wells, no names of the totemic ancestors, no immutable links between land, people and the rest of the natural and supernatural worlds. Here was just a vast *tabula rasa*, cauterized of meaning. (qted in Ryan, *Cartographic Eye*, 127)

The reason why such determining doctrines as *terra nullius* or *tabula rasa* must be fully scrutinised, recontextualised and also questioned is that they have had a major impact on the way the land has been represented from the first days of British settlement up till now, all the more as the *terra nullius* doctrine was only declared invalid legally speaking in 1992 with the Mabo decision.

The second main reason why it is complicated for Australian identity to define itself along the lines of its topography and cartography is that the first settlers were mostly

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[2] Quoted in Ryan, 126.

convicts and there has been an attempt to overlay this first inscription with more heroic ones. The very idea of inscription, what Lawrence calls "mark" or "record" is taboo because it is related to a form of original sin, the settlement of the place as a jail. The first European settlers' footsteps on this unknown continent were those of convicts and thus associated to the moral stain of sin. This is what historian Robert Hughes wrote in his best-selling historical account *The Fatal Shore* (1987):

> Would Australians have done anything differently if the country had not been settled as the jail of infinite space? Certainly they would. They would have remembered more of their own history. The obsessive cultural enterprise of Australians a hundred years ago was to forget it entirely, to sublimate it, to drive it down into unconsulted recesses. This affected all Australian culture, from political rhetoric to the perception of space, of landscape itself. Space, in America, had always been optimistic; the more that you faced, the freer you were – "Go West, young man!" In Australian terms, to go West was to die, and space itself was the jail. (Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 596)

And this is the second point that needs addressing, the absence of any equivalent to the American Frontier, the absence of any mythical boundary that could be used to define Australian identity. Australians defined themselves precisely in their problematic and arduous relation to a hostile land, the bush, a place resisting cartography. The bush had become a measuring stick of the Australianness of its new British inhabitants through self-sacrifice, heroism and endurance.

Contrary to other settler nations such as the United States for example, there was no celebration of an imaginary line progressing in the same direction as civilisation, the Frontier. The trouble was that in Australia, mapping out the unknown central parts of the continent was extremely difficult. Most of the country being made up of hostile arid land, exploring expeditions were often unsuccessful.

If anything, as Roslynn Haynes puts it in her book on the representation of the Australian desert, *Seeking the centre*, maps often only served colonial interests in placing the explorer figure in the centre and glorifying his extraordinary qualities. What interested the general public was not so much any precise cartography of the place or scientific record of discovery but the narrative of an epic journey. What journalists, readers, writers and artists remembered about the famous exploring expeditions of the 19th century was the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the objectives that heroic leaders had set themselves, finding an inland sea, a reliable river system, geographical features that would secure the development of pastoralism, and, on the other hand, the mythical type of land and place they actually

discovered: a hellish, ghostly and haunted place resisting settlement (Haynes, 58-84).

If we take a look at a map of the most significant exploring expeditions that took place between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the century, the overall impression is one of lines stopping short once they reach the interior or only encircling the core of the continent. Most expeditions in the mid-19th century started from the south east in many different directions to the north, to the north-west, to the west and such explorations often ended up in failure and disaster with the death of most of the exploring expedition members.

If there is one major imaginary and ideological line, boundary or frontier, that defines Australian character, it does not correspond to any geographical feature. And such a boundary defines the typical Australian as a resourceful and courageous survivor in a hostile environment, the desert or the bush, a man who also has to count on his mates' support in order to survive. Such a foregrounding of mateship and egalitarianism in the bush legend also has a lot in common with what is known by cultural historians as the digger myth (Denoon, 140-142)[3]. Here is the type of nationalist narrative that the goldfield legend and the emblematic Eureka Rebellion in 1854 gave rise to:

> In this narrative, Eureka stood for democracy, anti-authoritarianism, independence, anti-imperialism, republicanism, protest against economic hardship and inequality, egalitarianism, and anticapitalism. (Denoon, 145)

Similarly the emblematic Anzac soldier features prominently in the pantheon of representative Australian heroes. The Anzac legend helped solidify and further confirm the myth of bush qualities naturally inherited by all Australians.

> The story […] lives in our national histories and collective memories. For Anzac is not merely about loss it is about courage, and endurance, in duty, and love of country, and mateship, and good humour in the survival of a sense of self-worth and decency in the face of dreadful odds. (Deane[4] in Denoon, 267)

The moral attributes they all share is the endurance and courage of a man when placed in a hostile environment and his stoic acceptance of the possibility of failure and self-sacrifice. Whether explorer, drover, or digger, they are all racked by the same anguish about the risk of extinction and the land as possibly cursed and hellish.

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[3] This is a point that Denoon, Mein-Smith and Wyndham have convincingly argued in their *History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* (140-142).
[4] Those are the words of Governor-General Sir William Deane on Anzac Day in 1999. What is striking to note is that such an official celebration of national character should have taken place elsewhere than on Australian soil, in Anzac Cove (Turkey) where so many died for their country.

This is particularly striking in a canonical Australian work, Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. The title of the first volume of this three-volume saga is deliberately programmatic and antiphrastic, *Australia Felix*, and its incipit sets a grim and funeral tone right from the first line:

> In a shaft on the Gravel Pits, a man had been buried alive. At work in a deep wet hole, he had recklessly omitted to slab the walls of a drive; uprights and tailors yielded under the lateral pressure, and the rotten earth collapsed, bringing down the roof in its train. The digger fell forward on his face, his ribs jammed across his pick, his arms pinned to his sides, nose and mouth pressed into the sticky mud as into a mask; and over his defenceless body, with a roar that burst his ear-drums, broke stupendous masses of earth. (Richardson, 1-2)

The first impression the reader gets is that of a hostile land and earth that man cannot subdue or dominate but that will most surely absorb him. There is no progression west or in any horizontal direction but a vertical plunge into the bowels of the earth where the ultimate and swift destination is that of a muddy engulfing hole, gobbling you up in one piece. The narrator contrasts such a fate with the dreams and yarns the diggers had indulged in, of a quick burglary in the colony and then a prompt flight back to the old world:

> And the intention of all alike had been: to snatch a golden fortune from the earth and then, hey, presto! for the old world again. But they were reckoning without their host: only too many of those who entered the country went out no more. They became prisoners to the soil. […]
> Such were the fates of those who succumbed to the "unholy hunger." It was like a form of revenge taken on them, for their loveless schemes of robbing and fleeing; a revenge contrived by the ancient, barbaric country they had so lightly invaded. Now, she held them captive—without chains; ensorcelled—without witchcraft; and, lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these puny mortals to tear their lips away. (Richardson, 7-8)

And as is often the case with the representation of the Australian bush or desert, no boundaries can be either detected or drawn as the place is not one for pastoralism or cultivation, only for ruthless exploitation of the local minerals here:

> Under a sky so pure and luminous that it seemed like a thinly drawn veil of blueness, which ought to have been transparent, stretched what, from a short way off, resembled a desert of pale clay. No patch of green offered rest to the eye; not a tree, hardly a stunted bush had been left standing, either on the bottom of the vast shallow basin itself, or on the several hillocks that dotted it and formed its sides. (Richardson, 5)

Whether "desert of pale clay" for the digger or ominous bush for the drover, Australia's soil is often presented as infertile and inhospitable. A very similar description is offered in Henry Lawson's iconic short story "The Drover's Wife," one of

the most well-known Australian short stories in the nationalist canon. It features a courageous wife trying to protect her children from the snake that has slid under the house and could attack them through cracks in the walls at any time. She is on her own as her husband, a drover, has gone droving for weeks and nobody knows when he will be back. And as in Richardson's *Australia Felix*, the term that characterises the place is the *stunted* state of everything that grows there:

> Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of *stunted*, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization – a shanty on the main road. (Lawson, 238, my emphasis*)*

The bush, like the desert, is a place where no growth is possible. Only survival is an option. As McAuley once said in his poem "Australia," the existential and national challenge is not to *live* but only to *survive*[5]. The bush is thus both a place of national identification and a blank space where no inscription, no horizon, no lines can be drawn.

The recurrent feature concerning such places is absence and one of the most recurrent ones, the absence of children who get lost in them. Peter Pierce wrote a fascinating critical book on such a recurrent motif: *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (1999)[6]. According to him, the reason why such a motif is so obsessively recurrent is that it reflects the adults' own anxieties and repressed guilt about endangering their offspring in bringing them to such hostile territory. They also come to realise, with their disappearance, that this might be seen as a warning the bush will always resist settlement (Pierce, 6). The lost child is just one particularly gruesome and deeply emotional variant of what another scholar, Elspeth Tilley, has identified as the "white vanishing trope"[7]. Australian painting has used this trope

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[5] James McAuley presents a nation where aridity prevails and the only river that flows nurtures stupidity. With such caustic sarcasm he pointedly debunks the Australian legend as incredibly limiting for a country to fully develop as a sane organism:

> Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
> The river of her immense stupidity
> Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
> In them at last the ultimate men arrive
> Whose boast is not "we live" but "we survive,"
> A type who will inhabit the dying earth. ("Australia", 311)

[6] Two of the most famous paintings illustrating the lost child motif would certainly be Frederick McCubbin's two *Lost* paintings, as Peter Pierce indicates (54). The first one painted in 1886 features a lost girl and the second, dating from 1907, a boy. In both cases, what is striking is the sense of mute emotional charge with a child figure looking down, away from the viewer and already partly engulfed by the intricate and entangled undergrowth.

[7] Here is how Elspeth Tilley defines the "white-vanishing trope": "recurrent stories about white Australians who become lost or disappear into the landscape" (Tilley, 1). Among the most well-known variants of the white

extensively, especially Nolan and Drysdale. The disappearing explorer figure is a favorite topic of Sydney Nolan, the most well-known and internationally acclaimed Australian painter. He has repeatedly presented the explorer figure as either dying or on the point of dissolving into the landscape (see for example *Perished*, 1949, *Burke Lay Dying*, 1950, *Burke and Wills Expedition IV*, 1975). Burke and Wills were real explorers and they both died in their last expedition; only one member of the expedition came back alive. As to surrealist Australian painter Drysdale, he gave his own uncanny interpretation of Lawson's iconic short story *The Drover's Wife*[8] in having the drover more or less vanish from our view: once again the wife occupies centre stage but this time she looks clumsy and slightly unreal. The drover himself only appears in the background, a very much reduced figure in a sort of ironic reinterpretation of the pioneer legend. As a drover he should be surrounded by his cattle but there is none to be seen anywhere, only his two horses and his wagon. Both in Drysdale's and Nolan's representation of the land, the non-Indigenous figure either dies, or vanishes or seems on the point of becoming unreal and ghostly and motionlessness prevails.

In most cases the bush or the desert are also unreadable to the newcomers. The land is either portrayed as a dense piece of woodland with no distinctive lines or boundaries that could direct the viewer's gaze or as a monotonous desert with endlessly repeated lines that cannot serve as boundaries. Among the most well-known and revealing examples are Frederick McCubbin's *Bush Study* (1902), Sydney Nolan's *Inland Australia* (1950) and Russell Drysdale's *Desert Landscape* (1952). What is striking in such paintings is not only the absence of man or his complete motionlessness, but their uncanny dimension. Instead of foregrounding mobility, frontiers or boundaries, they elicit a metaphysical reflection on man's helplessness in a hostile place and are infused with eerie and absurdist undertones. The most emblematic one as to a sense of disconnection from the bare features of

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vanishing trope two very representative pieces should be mentioned, one in fiction and one in film: Nobel prize winner Patrick White's *Voss*, featuring a tragic exploring expedition and the disappearance and death of Voss, their leader, who was originally based on a real historic figure, Ludwig Leichhardt, but also Peter Weir's film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* featuring a group of girls going missing with one of their teachers.

[8] The drover is an essential national figure in Australia and he was made famous by Lawson's bestselling short story *The Drover's Wife* (1892). In Australia, a drover is a man who drives cattle from one place to another, the equivalent of the American cowboy. In Lawson's short story though, as in successive rewritings of the original tale, the drover is far from romantic and inspiring. His wife is in the limelight and she is the one portrayed as having all the prerequisite bush qualities to serve as a national icon (see for an enlightening analysis of the successive rewritings of the story John Thieme's "Drovers' Wives" and Christine Vandamme's "'The Drover's Wife': Celebrating or Demystifying Bush Mythology?").

the bush environment is Drysdale's *Grandma's Sunday Walk* (1972) which sold for nearly three million dollars at an auction in Adelaide[9]. The painting can be interpreted as an ironic revision of the pioneering spirit as the move west is almost parodic: the main protagonist is an elderly woman, a grandmother. What is glaringly obvious is the absence of any robust or convincing pioneer or bushman figure. There is movement but of a mechanical and ritual nature: the weekly Sunday walk of the grandmother with her grandchildren with no adult figures around.

As to boundaries, lines or borders, one should note that in more contemporary works, they are often presented as purely arbitrary and verging on nonsense and sheer imposition of one's power. Two major works can be taken to illustrate such a tendency, a short story and a novel which play with postmodern codes: Carey's "Windmill in the West" which is a parodic and absurdist rewriting of the American dream and the Frontier, and *The Lost Dog* which is a variation on Bush stories. In both cases, lines and boundaries are central but they are presented as purely contingent, arbitrary, and exclusionary. And in the two works they are also presented as shifting and even spectral.

One of the most incisive indictments of the imposition of borders and their lack of any social or geopolitical validity is Peter Carey's "Windmill in the West" (1972). Lines are omnipresent and keep proliferating in the story but they do not make any sense. They are not even sufficient for the main protagonist to be able to differentiate East from West. The first few lines tell us of an anonymous American soldier who has been dropped in the Australian desert and was asked to guard a mysterious "electrified fence" dividing Australia from an American-controlled area in which no intruder is allowed to penetrate without permission. The tale is full of irony as the soldier is very rapidly unsure as to which side is supposed to belong to America and which side to Australia.

As is often the case in Australian literature and art, the desert is devoid of any distinctive feature per se. The only element that helps the soldier identify the American part of the desert is an incongruous windmill which is no longer in use and which appears completely grotesque in the middle of nowhere with nothing growing, not even grass: "No matter which way you point that door the view doesn't alter. All

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[9] Such an incredible amount is the fifth-highest price paid for any Australian artwork at an auction (see Lauren Waldhuter, "Russell Drysdale's outback painting *Grandma's Sunday Walk* sells for $3m at auction", https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-25/artist-russell-drysdales-outback-painting-sells-for-3m/8650364, accessed 3 March).

that changes is the amount of fence you see. Because there is nothing else – no mountains, no grass, nothing but a windmill on the western side of the line." (Carey, 51). Such a passage is a deliberate deconstruction of Jefferson's agrarian ideal based on pastoralism and its virtues. In a desert without grass or water, nothing will grow and the windmill thus appears superfluous and almost grotesque. The only lines or boundaries the American soldier traces are little squares in the sand where he systematically exterminates all the scorpions he tricks into getting out: he first attracts them with water down the hole he has just been digging in the middle of the square, then scoops them up and chucks them into a bucket before scorching them alive in pouring down boiling water into it.

> To the north of the road he marked out a rough grid. Each square of this grid (its interstices marked with empty bottles and beer cans) can be calculated to contain approximately one bucket of scorpions. His plan, a new plan, developed only yesterday, is to rid the desert of a bucket full for each day he is here. (Carey, 52)

Such a passage points to the underlying violence that the imposition of arbitrary lines, borders or grids can lead to. It thus castigates American arrogance and imperialist ways but in so doing, it also points to a vexed debate in Australian historiography, a question which is still very much at the core of history wars in Australia, namely the issue of the type of contact between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people[10]. Tasmania could be a perfect example of a systematic eradication of all the natives: the last surviving Aboriginal Tasmanians being lured to accept a transportation to an unknown place where they all died like the scorpions in their bucket. On top of gratuitous violence, what is underlined is the arbitrariness and the nonsense of such fabricated lines: "He had been instructed to keep intruders on the outside but he is no longer clear as to what 'outside' could mean. If they had taken the trouble to inform him of what lay inside he would be able to evaluate the seriousness of his position" (Carey, 55). In the end, and just before the American soldier shoots a passing pilot, just in case he was on the wrong side of the fence, the motif of the line is taken up again by the narrator but from an existential and metaphysical point of view. The reader is given the narrative of a dream the soldier has just had: "A long line of silk thread spun out of his navel, and he, the spinner,

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[10] The "history wars" in Australia is a term referring to a fierce controversy between conservative and progressive historians as to the degree of violence and brutality British colonisation of Australia entailed. It started in the 1970s when Australian historian Henry Reynolds started investigating about frontier conflict between Aborigines and British settlers. In 2003 Stuart Mcintyre and Anna Clark published a book *The History Wars*, presenting the contrasted claims of each side of the heated debate.

could not halt the spinning. He can still taste the emptiness in his stomach. It is not the emptiness of hunger but something more, as if the silk has taken something precious from him" (Carey, 55). The reader is made to read between the lines that the soldier has lost his humanity in contributing to mapping out a place which results in the exclusion and extermination of any intruder, here the scorpions or any man or woman who would try and cross the boundary fence. The image of the umbilical cord spinning out of his navel and his inability to relate to either his mother or any relative, to his hierarchy or any man or woman, is a sign of his dehumanisation.

In the end, in a last parodic twist, the soldier shoots the plane of a passing pilot not even being sure whether the pilot was on the right or wrong side of the fence. Such an absurdist story *emptying* out the very substance and meaning of a line, a dividing-line, a boundary, is here indicting the geopolitical games both Australia and America have been playing on other people's lands in appropriating them with not even the slightest doubt or questioning about the legitimacy of such an appropriation. The scorpions the American soldier kills methodically are quite similar to the Aborigines the Anglo-Celtic settlers themselves systematically exterminated in Tasmania. And the choice of an American soldier is also a veiled allusion to American secret military bases on Australian soil.

But the motif of the line or boundary can be less literal and more figurative as is the case in Michelle de Kretser's *Lost Dog*. The author was born in Sri Lanka and she offers with this novel a reflection on Australianness and the post-modern games performing an identity can lead to. To that extent the line or boundary lies between "ethnicities" or origins which are supposed to be watertight and incompatible categories.

The main protagonist, Tom Loxley, is in love with a young artist, a painter and photographer, Nelly Zhang. Nelly's lineage is mixed: her father is Chinese but her mother is Scottish and yet she feels she has to present herself as mostly Chinese Australian as this is the way she is perceived in Australia. As to Tom Loxley, his father is English but his mother is said to be Asian Australian.

One of the main issues in the novel is spectrality and the uncanny as related to identity and the bush. Tom Loxley is a scholar who has been working on Henry James and the uncanny. In his own family lineage, there is a lot that escapes any type of quick categorisation: the mother who used to live in India and then emigrated to Australia, is actually no Asian Australian even though she was perceived as such.

Her own mother used to be a native American, a Crow, and her father was a Portuguese. But in the eyes of a white Australian she has to be Asian Australian. In the whole novel there are such games on misleading boundaries, false appearances and a general presentation of Australian identity as a fragile and flimsy simulacrum only constructed so as to better exclude the Other.

Another point of interest in the novel is the parodic reinterpretation it gives of the lost child motif identified by Peter Pierce as one of the most recurrent ones in Australian literature (cf supra). But here, the lost child has been superseded by a lost dog, an intertextual reference which is both postmodern and comical. The dog is also presented as a substitute for a child, thus pointing to the underlying anxiety the recurrent lost child motif is symptomatic of, the foreboding that non-Indigenous people might never successfully connect with the land (Pierce, 6). Tom is searching for his identity all along the novel just as he is looking for his dog gone missing in the bush. Similarly he is on a quest for love, for the love of Nelly Zhang, whose own identity keeps eluding everyone. As an artist she loves to play with the myth of origin and systematically questions the concept of purity that is sometimes granted to works of art as both original and unadulterated. She once made a series of paintings representing the Australian landscape, made photographs of them and then pretended they had disappeared and were destroyed. As a result, the series became very famous and gained her a lot of publicity. More importantly, it connects several thematic threads of the novel: origin, identity and sameness. It is in accepting Nelly's difference and otherness from the prototypical white national type that Tom finally accepts his own mixed heritage and the fact that more generally, Australia itself has always been built on imaginary lines and boundaries inherited from what Elspeth Tilley calls "meta-narratives of exclusion and difference" (202).

At the end of the story, Tom Loxley finds his dog and starts a real relationship with Nelly, realising he will never know what happened to the dog and why it went missing for so long. Along the same lines, the reason why Nelly's first husband went missing and was never found again will remain a matter of endless conjectures. It is as if in an ultimate rewriting of yet another bush gothic tale, the spectral mystery of the place as being haunted by the past was put to rest. This is the conclusion Marie Herbillon comes to in a thought-provoking article on *The Lost Dog*. She shows that it is just as important nowadays to reckon with the ghosts of the past as it is to accommodate the spectrality new members of the nation bring with them in being co-present to both

Australia and their place of origin: "Only a recognition of the historical obliterations that the bush […] appears to metaphorize will allow for the development of cultural paradigms that incorporate otherness instead of discarding it" (51).

In conclusion, mapping mobility in Australia has been elusive from the outset as repeated myth-making around the bush and bush values foregrounded images of heroic self-sacrifice and ultimate vanishing into the abstract *terra nullius*, the wild outback, the hostile desert, an empty and desolate core an Australian had to confront and die for as a sort of rite of passage. Even when the *dead heart* of the bush gave way to the *red centre* of the desert, to use Roslynn Haynes's terms (143-160), spectrality remained but of a different nature: spiritual revelation and reconnection with the land replaced self-sacrifice.

In more recent representations of either the desert as in Carey's "The Windmill in the West" or the bush as in De Kretser's *The Lost Dog*, the emphasis is not so much on the near impossibility to inscribe the landscape or push a Frontier even further but on the arbitrary and shifting nature of boundaries. At the core of traditional lost-in-the bush stories, boundaries are dangerous frontier zones demarcating clearly delineated and opposed spaces, domesticated space and wild space. The tragic outcome for lost children was a form of punishment for transgressing such a dividing line. But the obliterated tragic fate of the Indigenous populations having to quit the growing and encroaching white settled space is also what contributes to the partly unconscious guilt dynamics of such texts. The recurrent spectral mode characterising such type of fiction has to do with both settler perspective (his sense of danger and feelings of fear) and settler guilt (mostly unavowed and unconscious). Both Carey's "Windmill in the West" and De Kretser's *Lost Dog* castigate such dynamics of exclusion at the heart of white settlement and lost-in-the bush stories.

The Lost Dog is a particularly interesting case in point as it both belongs to the genre and deconstructs its ideological agenda. It suggests another way of using spectrality: instead of repressing the ghosts of past historic violence and replacing them with the ghosts of white victimhood in a Gothic vein, the author offers an alternative way of relating to one's country and landscapes. Her artist figure Nelly Zhang promotes an acceptance of the present and the past as they come to you. Leaving the lost-in-the-bush paradigm behind, Tom and Nelly are ready for another conception of personal and national identity: one that does not fetishize or fossilize

old dividing lines as the white-vanishing trope did, but one that enables endless inscriptions, reinscriptions and erasures. The narrator mentions one of Tom's favorite toys as a child, a wax slate, and this could be a metaphor of what De Kretser tries to achieve with national representations through the landscape. She seems to imply through her narrator's voice that Australia's national iconic places such as the bush or the desert have to give way to more inclusive spaces. The city is one such place where mobility is rendered possible again and where multicultural spectral selves can both circulate and leave a mark of their own, however ephemeral or non-representative of anyone else than themselves: a "palimpsest," a "ruin," "layered like memory" (221), shimmering spectrally.

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