

Abstracts

Painting a Continent – or Nothing: Personal Glimpses of the Void in Australian Art

Ihab Hassan

[Wanting an abstract:] I want to speak of neither space nor time, neither geography nor history, but of a noetic reality I call the Void, accessible through art. My references will be mainly Australian, with a nod here and there to New Zealand and America.

Australia – the Space that Is Not One: A Literary Approximation

Gerhard Stilz

Abstract: Some dozen years ago, I rented a caravan in Adelaide for our family. It had a solid, glittering roo-bar in front and a prison-like wire-grating on the windscreen, fragmenting our view of the wide landscape into little safe squares. When we picked up that impressive vehicle, the rental manager routinely cautioned us that we should by all means stay on sealed roads, and he asked, just to make sure, "Are you going anywhere north of Port Augusta?" – "Yes," we said, "we would like to travel up to Alice and the Red Centre." – "Stuart Highway," he said, "but watch out, there's everything different there, you can get lost in no time, and you never know ..." – "Know what?" we were about to ask, but that seemed too much of a sophistry in exchange for the goodly advice given by this good man, who did not look like a philosopher. Though a philosopher of sorts he may have been, following the thought-lines laid out through centuries of coping with dark and ill-defined spaces.

The Wide Brown Land: Literary Readings of Space and the Australian Continent

Anthony J. Hassall

Abstract: In his 1987 poem "Louvres" Les Murray speaks of journeys to "the three quarters of our continent/set aside for mystic poetry" (2002, 239), a very different reading of Australia's inner space to A.D. Hope's 1939 vision of it as "[t]he Arabian desert of the human mind" (1966, 13). In this paper I review the opposed, contradictory ways in which the inner space of Australia has been perceived by Australian writers, and note changes in those literary perceptions, especially in the last fifty years. In that time what was routinely categorised, by Patrick White among others, as the "Dead Heart" (1974, 94) – the disappointing desert encountered by nineteenth-century European explorers looking for another America – has been re-mythologised as the "Red Centre," the symbolic, living heart of the continent. What Barcroft Boake's 1897 poem hauntingly portrayed as "out where the dead men lie"

(140-2) is now more commonly imagined as a site of spiritual exploration and psychic renewal, a place where Aboriginal identification with the land is respected and even shared. This change was powerfully symbolised in 1985 by the return to the traditional Anangu owners of the title deeds to the renamed Uluru, the great stone sited at the centre of the continent; but while this re-mythologising has been increasingly influential in literary readings, older, more negative constructions of that space as hostile and sterile have persisted, so that contradictory attitudes towards the inner space of Australia continue to be expressed. In reviewing a selection of those readings, I am conscious that they both distort and influence broader cultural perceptions. I am also aware that literary reconstructions of the past reflect both the attitudes of the time depicted and the current attitudes of the writer, and that separating the two is seldom simple. Finally, I am conscious of the connections between literary readings and those in art and film of the kind documented by Roslynn Haynes in her 1998 study *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, and those in television and advertising. I have, however, with the exception of the *Postscript*, limited my paper to literary readings, with an emphasis on works published since Haynes's study.

Ceating Space in Tim Winton's *Dirt Music*

Britta Kuhlenbeck

Abstract: I am interested in the question of how contemporary artists address concepts of space and whether spatial theories developed in geography provide a useful approach to this question. With this work in progress I am following my ongoing interest in merging the academic fields of geography and literature. And, in my view, a linking occurs in the notion of "space" as space is a core concept in both fields (see Mallory, Simpson-Housely). Firstly, I will try to explain why it is worthwhile to think about space followed by an attempt to define the terms space and place. I will propose a certain understanding of space which is best represented by narrative. As an example for my analysis, I have chosen Tim Winton's novel *Dirt Music*.

The Accommodation of Ada Cambridge

Greg Manning

Abstract: The reading of Ada Cambridge's fiction described in this paper is part of a pursuit of an undercurrent in Australian self-representations of what I can perhaps best describe as a strain of ontological doubt – doubt not about what it means to be Australian so much as about what it might mean, in Australia, to be. As is to be expected, intimations of this uncertainty – not quite an idea, nor yet an emotion, nor a self-consistent state – emerge first in colonial writings, often around the figure of disappearance, or of being invisible. They concern the intersubjective European response to Australian space, the sense that to live in the antipodes was not merely to live, in the world's terms, an eclipsed and therefore insignificant life – that much was

obvious – but was to be silent, invisible, not to signify: semiotically speaking, to cease to be. One associative consequence of this sense is the thought that antipodean space is itself liminal, para-real, otherworldly. Such an imaginary landscape is of course both constructed by and significantly constructive of any sense of being-yet-not-being in the world. The doubt of which I speak is ideological only in the sense that it emerged in the colonies as part of the imaginary relation to the real condition of inhabiting Australian space, as an element in what we might call the colonial imaginary. It was never programmatically imposed to serve hegemonic interests; to the contrary, it served no interest at all. Its emergence can be compared to the formation of a national accent, in that both are more or less apparent but quite unintended and uncontrolled consequences of establishing a new society. Perhaps, in the context of our conference topic, this idea might be imagined as the shadow of the fear of meaninglessness, stretching itself across colonial attempts to make newly claimed spaces, and lives in those spaces, meaningful.

The Environmental Ethics of Australian Nature Poems

Norbert H. Platz

Abstract: The basic contention inspiring this paper is: poets care about Australia's physical environment and human survival in Australia. Australian literature contains a substantial body of knowledge that could be deployed to constitute the imaginative core of an environmental ethic. Thus a great many Australian literary texts could be studied with the purpose of helping to usher in the desirable concept of an environmentally literate community. The essay is divided into two sections. Section one will provide a brief survey of environmental ethics. This survey is followed by the exposition of six deontic or prescriptive outlines, to be supplemented by some eudaemonic considerations. The latter envisage the notion of the 'good life,' in harmony with nature. In section two, important insights furnished by environmental ethics will be used as an orientation towards identifying the environmental concerns shown in a variety of Australian nature poems. Among the authors considered are Bruce Dawe, Dorothy Hewett, John Kinsella, Mark O'Connor, John Shaw Neilson, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), and last but not least Judith Wright. As will be seen, there are many convergences and correspondences between the basic claims made by environmental ethics, and the environmental insights and experiences that have been accumulated in a noteworthy corpus of Australian nature poems. What is enshrined in these poems is the "collective prudence," not only of a cultural elite, but also of the modern Everyman.

The Last Frontier: Land and Landscape

Cassi Plate

Abstract: 'The Last Frontier: Land and Landscape' looks at intersections between three prevailing ideas in relation to land in Australia at the turn of the last century. Through an examination of paintings, photographs and writings of a seaman/artist/publisher, Adolf Gustav Plate, several layers of the land's meanings are exposed: German Romantic notions of land as sacred, British ideas of land as property, and the Aboriginal conception of land as existing in a reciprocal relationship to people and animals. A mingling of these ideas continues to inform our relationship to land in Australia. After twenty years of restless travel throughout colonial territories in the Pacific, Asia and Australia, my grandfather, Adolf Plate, attempted to occupy and cultivate the land in 1907. He arrived in Western Australia, the newest settler society and the 'last frontier', at precisely the moment when new laws ordained the ruthless removal of the Indigenous people from their lands. Aboriginal land was rapidly being turned over to agriculture. Indigenous and non-indigenous attitudes to land and its meanings can be seen in Adolf Plate's role in promoting and portraying the land as romantic bush, and empty potential. On the one hand a preeminent artist and publisher in the city of Perth, and on the other a failed farmer, the cultural producer was defeated in his attempts to 'cultivate' the land. I draw on British ideas from John Locke about ownership of land through physical labour, and German Romantic ideas of transcendence through identification with nature, to link the manifestation of these ideas in Australia in relation to Aboriginal cosmology and systems of meaning. The dialectics between culture and colonialism will be examined through the relationship between land and landscape, cultivation and culture. Of critical importance is the recognition of prior ownership of land, to defeat the view of Australia as 'empty' space. It is instead a place layered with multiple histories.

Representing Australian Space in The Overlanders

Elizabeth Webby

Abstract: The basic contention inspiring this paper is: poets care about Australia's physical environment and human survival in Australia. Australian literature contains a substantial body of knowledge that could be deployed to constitute the imaginative core of an environmental ethic. Thus a great many Australian literary texts could be studied with the purpose of helping to usher in the desirable concept of an environmentally literate community. The essay is divided into two sections. Section one will provide a brief survey of environmental ethics. This survey is followed by the exposition of six deontic or prescriptive outlines, to be supplemented by some eudaemonic considerations. The latter envisage the notion of the 'good life,' in harmony with nature. In section two, important insights furnished by environmental ethics will be used as an orientation towards identifying the environmental concerns shown in a variety of Australian nature poems. Among the authors considered are Bruce Dawe, Dorothy Hewett, John Kinsella, Mark O'Connor, John Shaw Neilson,

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), and last but not least Judith Wright. As will be seen, there are many convergences and correspondences between the basic claims made by environmental ethics, and the environmental insights and experiences that have been accumulated in a noteworthy corpus of Australian nature poems. What is enshrined in these poems is the "collective prudence," not only of a cultural elite, but also of the modern Everyman.

Beached Identities: Inclusion and Exclusion of Histories in the Formation of the Beach as an Australian Spatial Icon

Anja Schwarz

Abstract: One of the predominant icons associated with Australia today is the beach, often considered to be a landscape of vital importance for the nation's identity. Its significance asserts itself not only in material culture but, as Meaghan Morris remarks, a 'vast anthology could be compiled of beach scenes from literature, cinema, photography, painting, theatre, television drama and documentary, newspapers and magazines.' Mirroring Morris' judgement, the Opening Ceremony to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games portrayed a variety of beach scenes and a voice-over told the audience that modern Australia was 'linked inextricably' to the ocean and dreamt 'of wide blue skies, the sand and the sea.' A number of recent academic publications share the ceremony's laudatory dictum in celebrating the beach as 'deeply woven into our nationalistic passion and our public psyche' and central to 'the development of Australian culture and the sense of our national identity.' While it might be tempting to hail the beach as the site of an Australia finally arrived at its 'real' postcolonial identity, Richard White argued already in 1980, that 'images of national identity, rather than describing an especially Australian identity, grow out of assumptions about nature, race, class, democracy, sex and empire, and are "invented" to serve the interests of particular groups.' This essay takes up White's argument in asking who these 'particular groups' are in the context of the beach and investigates those mechanisms of exclusion that keep certain people and their histories from the 'imagined community' linked to this spatial icon. In doing this I conceive of the beach as a 'site of memory' (Pierre Nora) where certain histories are remembered whereas others are excluded from national memory thus facilitating the beach's unifying national appeal. Contrary to these ostracising readings, Mudrooroo's 1991 poem 'Beached Australian Party,' Anne Zahalka's beach photography and Simone Lazaroo's novel *The World Waiting to be Made* will be treated as attempts to recover these excluded histories.

"We Are Newtowners" – Place Matters: Habitus, Creative Business Services and Gentrification in Inner Sydney

Melanie Fasche, Boris Braun

Abstract: The post-industrial city is associated with the shift from Fordist to Post-Fordist economies where design-led, information-rich companies work within a new, 'flexible' mode of production. The sectors engaged in producing symbolic goods constitute some of the most dynamic economic frontiers today as consumption of cultural products of all kinds is evidently expanding. Small enterprises are seen as the major driver for innovation and creativity within the cultural industries sector. These small creative business services tend to locate away from established business centres but close to areas known for their cultural amenities, new middle class lifestyle and artistic scene – areas that are undergoing gentrification. By drawing on case-study evidence from Newtown, one of Sydney's inner suburbs, we aim to conceptualize the complex inter-relations between place, space and the location of small creative business services in terms of Bourdieu's habitus.

Beyond Centre and Margin: Representations of Australia in South Asian Immigrant Writings

Vera Alexander

Abstract: Displacement leads to a high sensitivity to space and its potential to affect constructions of identity. Immigrants are continually confronted with the questions of who belongs to a country and who a country belongs to. In this paper I examine representations of Australia in two novels by writers of South Asian origin resident in Australia, Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* (1991) and Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994). In doing so, I argue for a transcultural reading of Australia's position as an ambivalent diasporic location: white, anglophone, but situated outside the 'western' centre.

Aspects of Identity and Space in Tracey Moffatt's Photographic Art

Uta Daur

Abstract: This article aims to contextualise Tracey Moffatt's practice within contemporary aesthetic debates in photography and then to link her formal approach towards this medium to topics occurring on the content level of her works. The focus here will be on the depiction of identity and space in her photographs. I will argue that there is a logic of in-betweenness at work in Moffatt's depictions of identity and space and that this in-betweenness or hybridity on the level of the subject matter is paralleled by her photographic approach. In both cases the inbetweenness seems to be best grasped in postmodern frameworks.

Prophets of the Imagination

Alex Miller

[no abstract; the author reports on his experience of the outback]